



PRACTICAL STUDY OF THE SONG OF SOLOMON AND ITS IMPLICATIONS FOR MODERN LIFE

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Abstract: This study was conducted using library research with the aim of understanding how to comprehend and apply the Book of Song of Songs, with the hope that love for God will grow stronger. If believers can understand and apply the Book of Song of Songs, it is expected that their love for God and others will increase. The title 'Song of Songs' implies that this book is the best of all songs, just as the term 'Holy of Holies' implies the most sacred place. In the discussion of the practical exposition of this book, an approach based on the literal and spiritual messages of the text is considered the best way to find practical reflections for our lives as believers today. From the literal message, we will discover noble values of love for personal life, family, community, and the things that can undermine these values. From the spiritual message, we will find the depth of God's love, which will guide us to understand the extent of our love for Him, the purity of our faith, our faithfulness in fulfilling spiritual responsibilities, and the spiritual values we have instilled in our lives and those of our loved ones. The findings from this practical study encompass aspects such as Love, Sacrifice, Desire, Beauty that Enhances Harmony, a Life Blessed by Love, the Strength and Bond of Love, Values of Love, Shared Purpose in Love, Emotionality, Mutual Desire, True Love, and the Purity of Love.

Keywords: song of solomon, modern life, love.

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Introduction

In the realm of theology, the Book of Song of Songs often becomes a subject of debate regarding its usefulness and true function because its content intensely relates to the nature and characteristics of human relationships filled with romantic nuances, sometimes even reflecting strong desires. In the Scriptures of the Israelites, which we accept as part of the Old Testament, the Book of Song of Songs is referred to as "shir hashshirim" (Song of Songs 1:1). Literally, this name means "the song that surpasses all songs" or "the best song among all songs." In the LXX (Septuagint), the Greek translation of the Old Testament, this book is called "*Asma Asmaton*," whereas in Latin translations, such as the Vulgate, the term "*Canticum Canticorum*" is used. Therefore, in Hebrew, Greek, and Latin, this name is used to indicate the highest level of perfection (Moritz, 2017).

The term "*shir*," which means song, essentially refers to a song filled with joy and often accompanied by musical instruments. Such songs are typically sung during celebratory ceremonies or in worship. This term is frequently used in the Book of Psalms with meanings such as a song of pilgrimage (Psalms 120-121), a song about Zion (Psalms 137:3), a song for the Sabbath Day (Psalms 92), and so on (Hess, 2005).

The Book of Song of Songs explicitly addresses the topics of sex and marriage more deeply than other books in the Bible. Although there are many interpretations of this story, most view it as an allegory depicting God's love for Israel and/or Christ's love for His church. This love song was written during a time when the practice of polygamy was widespread in various parts of the world (Simorangkir, 2021). Some biblical scholars suggest that the Song of Songs serves as a protest against polygamy, telling the story of a rural girl, *Shulammite*, from the vineyards in the north. She was taken from her family by her suitor, Solomon, and made one of his many wives in Jerusalem. Despite being presented with various temptations, she remains steadfast in rejecting Solomon's attempts to win her love away from the man she had promised herself to. That man continues to be her beloved and appears in her dreams every night.

Although the Song of Songs is highly revered in Jewish synagogues and Christian churches, it is rarely read or discussed in formal religious gatherings such as Sunday services or Bible fellowships. The origins of the book are unclear, but it is believed to have emerged in the early Hellenistic period due to the presence of Aramaic language (e.g., 1:12; 2:7) and Greek stylistic influences (3:9). However, it cannot be ruled out that parts of it are much older. It must be recognized that the Song of Songs is not a text

that is easily understood directly. Various interpretations have been attempted by scholars, both Jewish and Christian (including Catholic and Protestant), but the book remains challenging to comprehend. Consequently, medieval Jewish scholars referred to it as "a lock whose key has been lost."

Secondly, there is the Natural approach, where the entire meaning and purpose of the text are in accordance with the literal sentences within it. This approach is generally used by most Christians but is often debated by Jews. In this method, the Song of Songs is interpreted as the marriage story of King Solomon, where the vineyard keeper's daughter is the daughter of Pharaoh, the king of Egypt (cf. Song of Songs 1:5-6). Solomon (shalom meaning peace) as the king of Israel takes a bride from a non-Israelite nation, portraying the event as part of God's plan for His people (Israel). However, from a theological perspective, many scholars believe that this literal interpretation is a foreshadowing of the coming story of another King, the King of Peace, who will take His bride from the nations outside Israel, which is the church.

Literally, the Book of Song of Songs is a praise and admiration of the mystery of human love, while spiritually it symbolizes Yahweh's love for His people, reflected in Christ's love for His Church. The usage of the Book of Song of Songs is often misunderstood and rarely discussed in church services. Practical discussions of the meaning of the Song of Songs are very minimal in spiritual worship gatherings.

Method

The type of research utilized is a literature review. The literature review method involves a series of activities related to the collection of data from various library sources, reading, note-taking, and managing research materials. A literature review is a crucial step in research, especially in the context of academic research aimed at developing theoretical and practical aspects. Every researcher conducts a literature review with the primary purpose of seeking a foundational understanding and building a theoretical framework, a conceptual framework, and establishing preliminary assumptions or research hypotheses. By conducting a literature review, researchers can identify, classify, allocate, and use various library references in their field. This process enables researchers to gain a deeper and broader understanding of the issues being studied. The literature review is carried out by the researcher after determining the research topic and formulating the problem but before collecting field data.

Result and Discussion

The title "Song of Songs" signifies the preeminent song, just as "the Most Holy" refers to the most sacred place or space. In the practical exposition of the Book of Song of Songs, the approach that draws on both the literal and spiritual messages of the text proves to be the most effective in finding practical reflections for our lives as believers today. From the literal message, we can identify noble values of love for personal life, family, and community, as well as recognize the factors that can undermine these values. From the spiritual message, we uncover the depth of God's love that guides us to understand the extent of our love for Him, the brilliance of our faith, our diligence in fulfilling spiritual responsibilities, and the spiritual values we have instilled in our lives and the lives of our loved ones (Potgieter, 2013).

Human Love

Purity signifies the absence of admixture with other elements, indicating authenticity and sanctity. In Hebrew, the word "tsaraph," meaning pure, is often used in the context of refining metals (Job 11:4). In ancient times, mined metals were melted to separate impurities, then poured into molds to form various items such as tools, weapons, or statues. This process occurred in clay crucibles in the forge. God, like a master refiner, seeks a pure heart in humans, sometimes using the term "testing." However, what is meant here is that purity is produced through a process of testing; similarly, human love can be considered pure after undergoing trials. The materials found in the Song of Songs are regarded as a collection of love songs. According to scholars, love is an immensely powerful vital force. How this is expressed in the Song of Songs is evident through creative yet gentle repetition. Love in Hebrew, "*dod*" and "*ra'ya*," denotes affection and desire for the object of love, often a woman (Botha, 2013). In the Old Testament, love is considered the deepest expression of personality and the most intimate and close personal relationship. Essentially, it is an internal drive that motivates actions bringing happiness, fulfilling desires towards the beloved object, or even involving self-sacrifice for the good of the loved one (Leviticus 19:18, 34), and sincere obedience (1 Samuel 20:17-42).

Love

Love is a feeling of joy or affection that one person feels towards another. In Song of Songs 1:2, it is expressed: "Let him kiss me with the kisses of his mouth— for your love is more delightful than wine." Here, the bride eloquently expresses her deep love and longing for her beloved. This expression is not merely a matter of instinctual drive. The Bible often depicts a kiss as a deep and pure expression of love (Romans 16:16; 1 Thessalonians 5:26; 1 Peter 5:14). The use of the pronoun "him" indicates that her declaration of love comes spontaneously from her heart. Wine is often associated with joy and gladness and can express spiritual joy arising from the reception of God's grace. However, greater than the joy-inducing wine is the love bestowed by the bridegroom upon the bride. Wine symbolizes joy, and in this comparison, it illustrates the tenderness of love that the bride receives in her joy. The bride's love is described in this verse as sweeter than wine.

Love is depicted as the "*flame of Yah*" (Song of Songs 8:6). Why? Because true love originates from God. The primary attribute of God is love, and He created us with the capacity to emulate His love (Genesis 1:26, 27). After creating the first human, Adam, God gave him a beautiful wife. Upon seeing Eve for the first time, Adam was so joyful that he expressed his feelings about Eve in poetic words. Eve also felt very close to her husband because God created her from Adam (Genesis 2:21-23). From the beginning, God endowed man and woman with the ability to have true love and to love each other forever (Hess, 2005).

Sacrifice

Sacrifice is the act of giving something of significant value (objects, etc.) that holds great importance to the giver, which may cause a sense of loss, as a sign of respect or loyalty to someone. Therefore, it can be understood that all acts of giving are acts of giving, but not all acts of giving can be called a sacrifice. Sacrifice occurs when we give something that still holds great meaning for us to someone else, and that is what can be categorized as a sacrifice.

In the Old Testament, we can observe various examples of sacrifices offered by the Israelites, such as burnt offerings (Leviticus 6:9, etc.), peace offerings (Leviticus 3:1, etc.), sin offerings (Leviticus 4:3-20), and sacrificial offerings (Exodus 34:15). Not all types of livestock were suitable for sacrifice; the livestock had to be healthy, fat, unblemished, and young (never having been worked). It is understandable that the owner would feel a sense of loss or deprivation if such high-quality livestock were given away, and that is what constitutes a sacrifice. However, if I give a piece of clothing to someone simply because I do not like it or do not use it, that is not a sacrifice. Similarly, love is demonstrated through sacrifice. Pure love will sacrifice all aspects of one's life, including time, thoughts, and oneself.

Desire

Desire is a strong longing to unite. Formed from yearning, longing is a profound and deep desire to meet or unite with something. It reflects the feelings of someone who longs for togetherness. As expressed in Song of Solomon 3:1, "By night on my bed I sought the one I love," the Hebrew phrase *'al-mishkabi baleylot biqashti 'et she'abah napshi* reflects deep yearning when someone is not with their beloved.

This search occurs on the bed, a place for complete rest, not merely relaxation. The search begins by the maiden while she is on her bed at night. She contemplates, thinks, imagines, and longs for her lover. Therefore, she is driven to seek the one she loves. The use of the bed and the night here indicates a time of rest, and this can be understood in the context of the maiden's hope to see her lover's arrival in the evening (Song of Solomon 2:17). She waits with full hope until night, but her lover has not yet arrived. She is anxious because her lover might have been attacked by wild animals in the field (compare with Psalm 104:20-21). Thus, that night was not an ordinary night for the maiden; it was a night full of questions and anxiety, a night without the light of hope shining, a night without the warmth of love (Chase, 2014).

The word "*biqashti*" signifies a search undertaken with all one's ability and persistence. It indicates that what is being sought will fulfill a certain emptiness or need. Since this young man is her soul mate, this search effort illustrates the depth of loss and emptiness felt by the maiden. The phrase "the one I love" refers to someone she deeply loves, depicting the deepest emotional bond that unites two people in a love relationship. The use of the word "*nepesh*" in the phrase "the one my soul loves" not only highlights the love relationship but also emphasizes that the person himself loves someone (compare with Song of Solomon 1:7). This is the drive that motivates and moves the maiden to seek her lover, despite facing great challenges and dangers. It drives her to make a firm and sincere decision: "I will rise now." This drive is not merely due to sensual desire, but because of a deep longing for her lover. This is tangible evidence of the burning power of love (Gericke, 2013).

Beauty that Enhances Desire for Harmony

In this poem, the groom praises the physical beauty of the bride. Some of this praise is repeated in Song of Solomon 6:5-7; 7:1-9, illustrating admiration for the bride. Chapter 4 is a song that extols the extraordinary beauty of the bride using metaphors that can be understood and appreciated by the Eastern mind.

1. When it is mentioned "eyes like doves," (see Song of Solomon 1:15), it refers to the beauty of gentle and alluring eyes. The mountains of Gilead, located to the

east of the Jordan River, were often used for livestock farming (see Numbers 32:1). The image of flocks descending the mountain slopes describes the bride's beautiful wavy black hair.

2. Understanding the custom of washing sheep before shearing them leads some interpreters to translate this verse as "your teeth are like a flock of sheep ready to be sheared." However, a better translation is "your teeth are like a flock of sheep that have just been shorn, which have come up from the washing," as this metaphor is intended to depict the whiteness of the bride's teeth. It emphasizes that not a single tooth is missing from the bride, as explained in the following metaphor.
3. Crimson, a deep red color, was discovered by the Arabs from an insect called kirmiz (Westminster Dictionary of the Bible). The bride's temples are said to be like a split pomegranate, because inside this fruit are the red seeds of the pomegranate.
4. Like the tower of David. Although this tower is no longer known today, it was evidently very famous in its time. The precise translation of the words in the AV "built for an armory" remains uncertain. The Vulgate translation: built with tiers, seems more plausible. The armory (AV), or tiers, where a thousand shields hang (see Ezekiel 27:11), could well describe the jewels worn by the bride, which enhance the beauty of her neck.
5. Like two fawns. The shape of the bride's breasts is smooth and youthful like fawns. Feeding among the lilies describes the bride's well-proportioned body, with prominent breasts.

All these adornments of beauty and loveliness of the bride become an attraction that triggers the desire of the groom to possess the bride.

Life Made Pleasant by Love

The delight in love referred to here is a state of immense joy and the beauty of affection felt by an individual. In this context, it pertains to a man's experience with his beloved. The poem expresses admiration for the beauty of the bride. Beauty (in Hebrew, called "*Yapah*") is inseparable from attractiveness, which largely depends on the perspective and judgment of the individual. However, in the context of these verses, the eyes, neck, lips, and other ornaments (verse 8) are also components of evaluation that contribute to the conclusion that this girl is indeed beautiful. All these elements only enhance the attraction and deepen the young man's love for the bride in this poem.

"Beloved bride" is a term frequently used in ancient love poetry, particularly in Egypt. These words convey an intensifying feeling. The excellence of the bride's love is expressed in comparison to wine, oil, and spices. These substances represent various aspects. Wine is a symbol of joy, and the comparison indicates that the bride's love is sweeter than wine, reflecting the quality of love that produces joy (as mentioned in verse 1). Oil is used for cosmetics, and spices are used for cooking. The type of oil mentioned here is the most fragrant and considered the best among other perfumes. However, in this context, all these are placed in relation to love to demonstrate the depth and greatness of the love being conveyed, which surpasses the significance of wine and oil themselves.

The praise in verse 11 reaches its climax when King Solomon praises the bride with the phrase, "Your lips drip honey." Pure honey is natural, unadulterated honey, directly derived from flower nectar or the nectar collected by bees. Its nutritional content remains intact. Solomon describes the bride's lips as pure honey. Human lips are used for speaking and producing sounds. However, in this context, Solomon depicts the lips as a symbol of the beauty he perceives in his bride, not just as a tool for speaking.

"The fragrance of your garments is like the fragrance of Lebanon" is an expression used in the Song of Solomon, where King Solomon often refers to Mount Lebanon. The name Lebanon comes from the Hebrew root "*lbn*," which means 'white.' Mount Lebanon is named for two main reasons. First, its ridges are composed of white limestone. Second, the white snow that covers its peaks for six months of the year. Lebanon is famous for its dense forests and abundant water sources, stemming from sufficient rainfall and limestone layers. The history of Lebanon involves Phoenician cities on the coastal regions and the exploitation of its renowned timber. On Mount Lebanon grows the cedar tree, known as a majestic and valuable tree. In Hebrew, the cedar tree is called "*erez*," reaching heights of 21-24 meters with branches extending sideways. The trunk diameter can reach 9-12 meters. This tree symbolizes strength, durability, and renowned steadfastness (see Psalm 92:13; Jeremiah 31:3). The cedar produces elongated cones about 20 cm in length, taking three years to mature. Its wood is red and knot-free. Aromatic resin also exudes from its trunk and cones (see Psalm 104:16; Song of Solomon 4:11). Cedar wood is resistant to insects and decay. However, more importantly, cedar and mixed coniferous trees from Lebanon (including various types of fir) were the superior building materials of the ancient Middle East. This wood was highly sought after by the rulers of Egypt, Mesopotamia, and Assyro-Palestine. One famous shipment of wood was sent to King Solomon by Hiram I of Tyre for the construction of the Temple in Jerusalem. The aromatic resin of the cedar wood was well-known. The strong fragrance emitted by the cedar trees in Lebanon was so potent that it could be smelled throughout Mount Lebanon. This is why Solomon describes the scent of his bride's garments as like the fragrance of Mount Lebanon, famous for its fragrant cedar trees.

Strength & Bond of Love

Strength symbolizes steadfastness and solidity. Love aims to unite someone with another, not only physically but also emotionally and mentally (see Genesis 2:23-24). Love is a sacred and pure feeling that cannot be forced (see Song of Solomon 2:7; 3:5; 8:4), and should not be regarded as a commodity that can be bought with material possessions, positions, or social status (see Song of Solomon 8:7b).

Hebrew uses the words "*khibbelatka*" and "*khibbelah yeladatka*," which literally mean "you will conceive" and "you will give birth." This refers to the process of pregnancy and childbirth closely associated with the concept of a mother conceiving and delivering a child from her womb. However, in the context of this poem, the question may be more about how this process could happen in an open place. Therefore, it is important to consider the deeper meanings of these words to fully understand the poem's message (Lombaard, 2015).

The birthing process not only refers to the physical act of delivering a child but also involves deep pain. It depicts how a

mother experiences immense pain during the process of giving birth to her child. The struggle experienced by a mother highlights the strong bond between a mother and her child, particularly in the context of the relationship between a woman and a man. It illustrates the value held by a mother, who literally conceives and gives birth to the boy. In this approach, the girl seeks to make her lover aware that he was born from a woman. By expressing this openly, the girl attempts to make her lover realize the love they have received and the lessons taught by his mother. The aim is for her lover to recognize that as a young man born and raised by a mother who has struggled hard, he should respect women (Ballock, 2018).

The girl's request in verse 8:6, "Set me as a seal upon your heart... on your arm...", Heb. *Simeni kakhitam al-libbeka....'al zero'eka* carries deep meaning. In this context, the seal is depicted as a sign of ownership or authority indicating that someone or something has become exclusively someone's and protected from interference by others. This request is not an ordinary one but a fundamental request, calling on the young man to cherish and elevate his beloved to a special place in his heart. This aligns with the message in verse 5 affirming the girl's effort to build a future together, which must be understood, respected, and remembered by the young man. This is one of the unique aspects of love, which although hidden in the heart, is reflected in one's attitude and behavior. The strength of love is described with the Hebrew word "*Azzah*," indicating that love is so strong that nothing can oppose it. Therefore, love is often compared to death, which is inevitable for everyone (Lam, 2015).

Value of Love

Value is the measure or estimation that humans give to important things in life. In this context, value relates to the high appreciation that humans give to love. This refers to the respect or appreciation given to love. As stated in verse 8, "Many waters cannot quench love," indicating that love has immeasurable value, which cannot even be extinguished by something as abundant as water. The term "many waters" (in Hebrew: *mayim rabbim*) carries symbolic meaning often used in the Old Testament. In the context of the Old Testament, water often symbolizes God's blessings and spiritual refreshment, as seen in verses like Psalm 23:2, Isaiah 32:2; 35:6,7, which depict the longing for water as a spiritual need (Psalm 42:1; 63:2). However, in this poem, the term "many waters" is connoted by many scholars as a hostile power against YHWH and His people (compare with Habakkuk 3:13-15 and Psalm 89:11). In this context, "many waters" become a symbol of an overwhelming and uncontrollable threat.

No matter how great the power of water, it cannot extinguish this girl's love. All obstacles can be overcome and conquered. Even though water flows swiftly, it is unable to extinguish the burning fire of love that radiates its warmth like fire. Love cannot be measured, traded, or compared to material objects or wealth.

Purpose of Love

The purpose of true love in human life is to build sacred bonds in holy matrimony. Love aims to unite someone with another, not only physically but also emotionally and mentally (see Genesis 2:23-24, 1 Samuel 18:1). Love is a sacred and pure feeling that cannot be forced (stated in Song of Solomon 2:7; 3:5; 8:4), and cannot be traded with anything, whether it be material possessions, positions, or social status (asserted in Song of Solomon 8:7b). True

love is not just a promise to love until death do us part, but like a seal that validates an official document. More than just a marital bond, strong love like death (stated in verse 6) becomes the glue that unites the two spouses, like death that inevitably comes at some point in human life (Muis, 2014).

First, true love is the love bestowed by God Himself to the blessed husband and wife. Such love will endure because God Himself accompanies the union they have forged. Second, the jealousy accompanying that love is a holy jealousy, the awareness that the partner is a choice and gift from God to them (compare Exodus 20:5; John 2:17). True love leaves no room for the interference of others. True love also cannot be traded with wealth because love is related to personality. Third, that's why true love will continue to burn, impossible to extinguish by the currents of life's problems (see Song of Solomon 8:7a). Marriage vows should only be uttered by those who have matured in all things and are capable of making wise decisions.

When still young, the bride is protected by her brothers like a strong wall, topped with tight protection, and locked with a safety bolt. After that time has passed, that protection itself becomes a sign of maturity and readiness to enter the stage of holy matrimony. This maturity is also reflected in the willingness to seek happiness in commitment together with a partner, not in the glittering grandeur ala King Solomon, but in mutual love, as Christ loves His church (Hess, 2005).

Emotional

Emotions are expressions of feelings that fluctuate over a certain period of time; it is a psychological state involving various reactions such as joy, sadness, awe, and affection. The Song of Solomon is known as a work highly connected emotionally. In this book, we witness how the feelings of the bride and groom are reflected in sacred love. In Hebrew, this book is called "*Shir-HaShirim*" or "The Song of Songs", which depicts the love between a man and a woman. It is a portrayal of marital love based on genuine love, which can withstand trials, as strong as death, as strong as worldly desires, and cannot be extinguished by anything, not even by abundant water or rushing rivers (Song of Solomon 8:6-7).

Love is the main theme highlighted in the Song of Solomon. This expression of love is reflected in the intimate relationship between husband and wife.

Conclusion

The Song of Solomon not only depicts the purity of human love that should be nurtured and offered to God, but also reminds humans of the existence of a more sacred love, which is the love of God. The Song of Solomon tells many stories of love between a man and a woman, reflecting God's love for His people. Although sin has tainted human experience, God desires humans to know that marriage can be pure, wholesome, and beautiful. The Song of Solomon portrays harmonious relationships within families when partners passionately and spiritedly care for each other, complementing one another. Although husbands and wives have different responsibilities, these differences should be united by a strong bond of love, so that no apparent differences exist because their close cooperation binds them inseparably. The Song of Solomon demonstrates the power humans possess through the ability to love. Every human has been endowed with love since

conception, originating from God's gift and passed down through parental genetics.

The church needs to carefully understand the message contained in each book of the Bible, understanding the context and purpose of each book. This is important so that teaching applications can align with the message contained within. Congregants must demonstrate genuine love for the Lord as their Savior by dedicating their lives and livelihoods through various forms of social service. Church leaders, as servants of the congregation, must make significant contributions to social service as an expression of love for the Lord. This aligns with the principle of the Word of God stating that believers are representatives of Christ in the world. A living church must be able to make sacrifices in accordance with biblical teachings to fellow human beings, as evidence that the Lord has dominion over all things, so that the church can be salt and light to the world.

The Song of Solomon is one of the books in the Bible that depicts the relationship between humans with God and with each other, especially in the context of the family. This book emphasizes the importance of loyalty between husband and wife, as exemplified in Genesis 2:23 and 2:25. Ancient Hebrew thought does not separate human sexuality from its relationship with God; instead, humans are viewed as creatures closely connected to God. In modern times, this view is often overlooked, indicating spiritual poverty in humans. The church must have a good understanding of the purpose and meaning of love, especially in the relationship between humans and God. Any degradation in the understanding of love and its purposes must be overcome according to biblical principles. People without love cannot be considered to live spiritually, as love is the essence of the existence of a true church.

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