

Reading Song of Songs...

At the end of last week, we began the Song of Songs in our reading challenge. For a number of reasons, this is an often a neglected book today (though this has not always been the case in the history of the Church). Though difficult, its canonicity has never really been the focus of debate. In other words, it has not been a question of ‘should it be part of the Canon?’ but rather, ‘*why* is it there?’ Let’s briefly address some of the more prominent challenges to reading and applying this unique book.

First, we are dealing with love poetry. My guess is that most of us do not read such poetry on a regular basis. This type of genre communicates meaning differently than an historical narrative or one of Paul’s letters. For instance, we should expect more imagery and symbolism. Poetry has a more universal appeal, rather than tied to a specific time or place. That said, the Song of Songs does seem to represent different voices (e.g., female and male figures, along with a chorus of ‘others’—identified by the different pronouns used in the Hebrew text). Also, there is clear movement from longing to consummation of the relationship (e.g., the repeated refrain, ‘*don’t awaken love until it pleases*’ finally gives way to an ‘awakening’ in 8:5).

Second, we must interpret the book in light of the larger story of Scripture, not in isolation. One of the central questions people ask is if the Song is about human marriage or about the relationship between Christ and His Church. The answer is *both*. According to the rest of the Bible, the two are inherently connected (e.g., Ephesians 5). However, the relationship between Christ and His bride is the ultimate focus of Scripture. In his book, *Dominion and Dynasty*, Stephen Dempster puts it like this, “*The little text of the Song of Songs looks to the end of the larger Text, of which it is a part, when ‘Yahweh and His people are together and are one flesh.’*”¹ This is what the whole OT looks forward to in terms of hope and salvation, which is fulfilled in Christ.

So, what does this book mean for us today? There are many applications regarding human marriage, but perhaps even more importantly, our relationship with our Bridegroom, Jesus Christ. We are awaiting the consummation of our relationship—the future wedding supper of the Lamb. What about in the meantime? According to Jewish tradition the Song of Songs is read during Passover, which is appropriate to the content of the book. If we think of Christ’s fulfillment of Passover, we are reminded in the Song of Songs that *to be redeemed is to be loved, and we are called to reciprocate that love as the bride of Christ*. Meditate on this, be encouraged, and keep reading!

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¹ Dempster, *Dominion and Dynasty*, 208.