

Song of Solomon – its setting and background

There are five poetical books in the Bible, and both the number and setting of them are significant. As regards the number, five represents grace in Bible numerology, and these five poetical books sing the story of Divine grace; as regards the setting, these books are so placed in the Bible as to set forth five progressive stages of true happiness. This sequence is recognised when the fundamental message of each of the books is set down in order, thus:

Job	— Blessing through suffering;
Psalms	— Rejoicing in hope;
Proverbs	— Practical wisdom for life at present;
Ecclesiastes	— Seeking the highest good;
Song of Solomon	— Sweet intimacy of communion with Christ.

These five principles are as steps in a ladder leading to the highest good. Paul taught that entrance into the Kingdom is only through much tribulation, and that is the basic thought of Job, providing the foundation for the other principles set forth in the poetical books.

Concerning background, **the Song is a blend of type and allegory**. The type is based upon the brief allusions that are made to Solomon's chief bride: the daughter of Pharaoh. In the song, the Groom likened his Bride to a mare that had been "in Pharaoh's chariot" (Song 1:9). This suggests that she had first been seen in Pharaoh's household in Egypt, and had there been selected by the Groom as his Bride.

Solomon brought his Bride out of Egypt into the Promised Land. She first dwelt in the city of David where the ark rested (1 Kings 9:24; 2 Chron. 8:11), but afterwards the king built a special palace for her exclusive use, in which she dwelt in regal splendour. Its "beams were of cedar and rafters of fir" (Song 1:17), and in design it was similar to the royal palace where Solomon sat to judge the people. The record states:

"Solomon made also an house for Pharaoh's daughter, whom he had taken to wife . . . all were of costly stones . . . and the foundation was of costly stones" (1 Kings 7:8-10).

There is a remarkable similarity between this description, and that of the New Jerusalem, likened to the Lamb's bride.

John wrote:

out of heaven . . . and the foundations of the wall of the city were garnished with all manner of precious stones" (Rev. 21:2,19).

The multitudinous Bride of Christ, like Solomon's chief wife, is taken out of spiritual Egypt, and is invited to inhabit the "house" that the Bridegroom is preparing. He declared:

"In my Father's house are many abiding places; if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you" (John 14:2).

Unlike Solomon's other wives (1 Kings 11:1 — mg), nothing derogatory is recorded of this Bride out of Egypt. He married her whilst he was still in favor with Yahweh, and evidently she accepted the hope of Israel, for there is no reference to him ever building a shrine to any Egyptian gods. Some have thought that 2 Chronicles 8:11 reflects adversely upon her, but a closer consideration of it reveals that this is not so. The passage states: "Solomon brought up the daughter of Pharaoh out of the city of David unto the house that he had built for her: for he said, My wife shall not dwell in the house of David king of Israel, because the places are holy, whereunto the ark of Yahweh hath come."

Apparently she was permitted to dwell in the city of David whilst her own house was being built in the western portion of the city of Jerusalem. Afterwards, however, she removed to her own palace adjacent to that of Solomon. Probably, her original place of abode in the city of David was later required for the Temple worship. Hence the words of Solomon above. They are not directed against Pharaoh's daughter specifically, but against any wife of Solomon, and can be rendered: "No wife of mine shall dwell in the house of David" (see Cambridge Bible, Rotherham, etc.).

It was inappropriate for any wife of Solomon to dwell permanently in the house of David for two reasons: (1) — she should be in Solomon's establishment: (2) — the site of David's house was holy (a) because it was the area to where the ark had been taken; and (b) it was required for the Temple worship.

The sojourn of Pharaoh's daughter in the house of David adjacent to where the ark rested, was but a temporary arrangement, until her own house was built. In a figure it was comparable to the Ecclesia awaiting the establishment of the Kingdom in glory.

Another passage of Scripture, having bearing upon the Song of Solomon, is Proverbs 31. It records instruction that King Lemuel received from his mother concerning the choice of a bride. Lemuel, whose name means "Devoted to El", is identified with Solomon, whose second name means "Beloved of Yah" (2 Sam. 12:25). He was recommended to seek for "a virtuous woman", as a bride, whose qualities would measure up to those listed in the closing verses of the chapter.

Earlier in the Book, warnings are issued against the seductive influence of "strange women" who would draw their dupes away from the Truth (Prov. 6:24; 20:16; 23:27; 27:13). The same word is used in 1 Kings 11:1 to describe Solomon's other wives. Evidently he spake from personal experience. The Hebrew word used to describe these "strange women" is nokkee, signifying "foreign." The word relates to foreign women who would introduce their foreign ideas into the Truth, as did Solomon's wives.

Proverbs also refers to another "strange woman" (see Prov. 2:16; 5:3, 20; 7:5; 22:14; 23:33) who would incite to adultery. The context of these chapters reveals that the adultery is religious more than moral. The Hebrew word is zuwr and signifies "to turn aside." It therefore relates to an apostate Israelitish woman "who forsaketh the guide of her youth, and forgetteth the covenant of her God" (Prov. 2:17). These "strange women" type apostates within the Ecclesia who turn aside from the things of God.

Proverbs urges us to be on guard against both:

(1) Outside friendships which lure us away from the Truth.

(2) Apostate brethren within the Ecclesia who would turn us aside from the Truth.

Both must be avoided.

Among the characteristics admired in the virtuous woman of Proverbs 31 are her integrity (vv. 11-12), industry (vv. 13-15), prudence (vv. 16-18), skill (v. 19), charity (v. 20), wisdom (v. 21), clothing (v. 22), repute (v. 23), self-reliance (v. 24), and kindness (v. 26).

These are qualities that should be developed by both male and female members of Christ's bride.

The Bride of the Song of Solomon has the qualities of that virtuous woman. Her whole character is summed up in the statement: "Favor (Heb. *chen*, grace of manner, or deportment, which can be assumed in order to hide real feelings) is deceitful, and beauty is vain: but a woman that feareth Yahweh, she shall be praised" (Prov. 31:30).

Assuming that Proverbs 31 comprises advice originally given to Solomon regarding the selection of a bride, and that Pharaoh's daughter became his choice, surely we can conclude that Psalm 45 comprises the hymn composed to celebrate the marriage.

It is, of course, a prophetic Psalm pointing forward to the union of Christ and his Bride in the Age to come: but as with so many similar Psalms, it has a historical background, which appears to be the marriage of Solomon.

The superscription describes it as "A Song of loves." The word "loves" is from the Hebrew *yedyd*, Beloved, which is portion of Solomon's second name as given in 2 Samuel 12:25: Yedidiah.

The Psalm describes the glory and beauty of the King and his Consort, and addressing the latter, exhorts her in the following words:

"Hearken, O daughter, and consider, and incline thine ear; forget also thine own people, and thy father's house; so shall the king greatly desire thy beauty; for he is thy Lord; and worship thou him!"

These words well fit into the idea of the Queen having come out of Egypt. Moreover, she is also described as a "daughter of a king" (Psa. 45:13 — see Moffatt), which, likewise, agrees with the status of Pharaoh's daughter in the land of her nativity, whilst in the land of her adoption, she was the wife of a king.

The expressions of this Psalm are remarkably related to those of the Song of Solomon, and suggest that it is virtually an epitome of the larger book.

The characters described therein are also alike, for besides the King and his Bride, there are the onlookers who praise the glory of the King and the beauty of his Consort (see also Song 3:11), there are virgin companions of the Bride who comprise part of the multitudinous Bridal train (cp. Song 1:3), and there are the nations who submit to the authority and military prowess of the king (cp. Song 3:8).

But, of greatest significance is the fact that the Psalm is undeniably prophetic of Christ. This is established in the statement addressed to the King: 'Thy throne, O God (Elohim) is for ever and ever; the sceptre of thy kingdom is a right sceptre' (Psa. 45:6), which is said by Paul to be addressed to the Son (Heb. 1:8-9): "Unto the Son He saith . . . "

The King is praised for his regal glory (v. 2), speech (v. 2), valour (v. 3), prosperity of his reign (v. 4), conquests (v. 5), stability of his rule (v. 6), moral attributes (v. 7), splendor (v. 7), universal approbation (v. 8).

The Bride is praised for her inward virtues (v. 13), outward beauty (v. 13), attire and retinue (v. 14), position and status (vv. 9, 15), her fruitfulness in posterity (v. 16). The powerful exhortation delivered to her (v. 10, quoted above), epitomises that which the King Messiah desires to see in all of us.

Note the gradation:

"Hearken" — attend to the Word;
"Consider" — apply its principles;
"Incline" — render obedience;
"Forget" — separate yourself;

It is obvious, therefore, that the theme of Christ as the Bridegroom, and the Ecclesia as the Bride, is not unique to the Song of Solomon, but is frequently used throughout Scripture. It is reflected in the advice of Bathsheba to Solomon her son (Prov. 31); it is revealed in the type of Solomon's marriage to his Egyptian Bride (1 Kings 3:1); and it is predicted in the Psalm composed for the occasion of the king's marriage (Psalm 45).

Other Scriptures, dealing with the same theme, are Isaiah 54:5-8; Hosea 2:2; Matt. 9:15, etc. Some have endeavoured to build up a love story around the allusions found in the Song of Solomon. They represent Solomon as competing with a shepherd for the love of the Shulamite, or else as testing the genuineness of her love by disguising himself as one. But such stories lack a sense of reality, and detract from the beauty of the Song. It is true that the Bride is described as a shepherdess, and keeper of a vine- yard, and some have questioned how such expressions can fit the daughter of Pharaoh. But, in fact, these are terms that are applied by Scripture to those high in authority. The kings of Israel were considered as shepherds guiding the flock, or as keepers of Yahweh's vine- yard. Thus, of David, it is written: "He chose David also His servant, and took him from the sheepfold: from following the ewes great with young he brought him to feed Jacob his people, and Israel his inheritance. So he fed them according to the integrity of his heart; and guided them by the skilfulness of his hands" (Psalm 78:70-72).

David's skill in shepherding the flock developed into ability for leading the people placed in his care.

The Bride is given the name of "the Shulamite" (Ch. 6:13), and from this it is claimed that she came from Shunem, and not from Egypt. The word Shulamite, however, is the feminine form of Solomon, and shows that the Bride, having separated herself from Egypt, the land of her nativity, was granted the name of Solomon, thus being completely identified with him. After all, it is normal for a Bride to bear the name of the Groom. Thus every true son and daughter of Yahweh embraces the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, in anticipation of a complete identification with him in the Kingdom to come.

Romance for Eternity

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