

Introduction to the Song of Solomon

I. Categorized as wisdom literature

- A love song about courtship, marriage and passionate love (not considered suitable for children by rabbis)
- An “idyl”: A short song in a pastoral setting taking commonplace and giving it a romantic cast.

II. Is it a “type”?

- Jewish tradition: a type of God and Israel
- Christian tradition: a type of Christ and the Church
- Modern view: a celebration of romantic love and sexual union

III. What is the back-story?

The girl is called a “*Shulamite*” (6:13), and is thought by some to have been Abishag the “*Shunammite*” (1 Kings 1:3).

View 1 — Rival suitors: A young shepherd girl courted by two men who loved her—her humble shepherd boyfriend and the wealthy king of Israel. Some see this as representing the Church wooed by Christ and by the world.

View 2 — Solomon in disguise: A beautiful, young peasant woman is overwhelmed and frightened off by Solomon’s initial overtures, until he, disguised as a shepherd himself, woos and wins her love, but then mysteriously disappears (back to Jerusalem). Later, he returns in his royal attire and proposes to her. In the last idyl, she expresses her jealousy and insecurity, so they return to the place of their meeting and renew their vows. On this view, Solomon is like God who veils Himself in humble flesh in order to win the bride, but later returns in splendor to claim her.

IV. Composition of the book:

The book is composed of seven idyls.

- 1:1—2:7 Bride and groom on wedding day (Ending as do two other idylls in the set)
- 2:8—3:5 Bride reminiscing about the courtship (same ending as the first idyl)
- 3:6—5:1 Recollection of the proposal, upon his return
- 5:2—6:3 Bride relates a troubled dream after the shepherd disappeared
- 6:4—7:10 The king’s meditation on his bride
- 7:11—8:4 Bride longing for her home in Lebanon
- 8:5-14 Renewal of the vows at her birthplace in Lebanon

(Though the change of speakers is not printed in the Hebrew text, as in the English translations, the change is noted by gender and (singular or plural) of the pronouns.)