

POETICAL BOOKS

Explain OT Wisdom Literature

- Job, Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Solomon

Explain LIFE GRID

- EXTERNAL PHYSICAL LIFE – Proverbs, Job
- INTERNAL SPIRITUAL LIFE – Song of Solomon, Ecclesiastes
- CENTER (prayer, worship) – Psalms

PROVERBS

The book of Proverbs collects the most important 513 of the 3000 wise sayings that King Solomon wrote or collected (1 Kings 4:32). The subject of Proverbs is WISDOM, which in Scripture is a matter of the HEART more than of the MIND – real wisdom is, at its most basic level, simply OBEDIENCE TO GOD.

Proverbs 9:10 The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom: and the knowledge of the holy is understanding.

Purpose of Proverbs – to **PERCEIVE** and **RECEIVE** God's wisdom

Proverbs 1:2-3 To know wisdom and instruction; to **perceive** the words of understanding; To **receive** the instruction of wisdom, justice, and judgment, and equity;

Proverbs mentions three kinds of people who desperately need wisdom, who desperately need to move from their chair to the chair of wisdom:

Proverbs 1:22 How long, ye simple ones, will ye love simplicity? and the scorners delight in their scorning, and fools hate knowledge?

SIMPLE (NAÏVE)

If you are simple, you won't admit it (or even know it!). By the time you figure out that you are simple, you won't be anymore. And if you're in middle school, high school, or college – you're automatically in this chair! That is not an insult, because everyone comes into the world simple.

THE SIMPLE PERSON LACKS EXPERIENCE. But no one is willing to admit that they are simple and they need to face the world accordingly.

THE SIMPLE PERSON THINKS THEY CAN FIGURE LIFE OUT BECAUSE THEY'VE NEVER SEEN THE LONGTERM EVIDENCE OF SIN'S DESTRUCTION. (i.e. lung cancer, credit debt, sexual sin)

THE SIMPLE PERSON REPEATEDLY WALKS INTO TROUBLE.

Proverbs 22:3 A prudent man foreseeeth the evil, and hideth himself: but the simple pass on, and are punished.

THE SIMPLE ALMOST ALWAYS HAVE TO LEARN THE HARD WAY.

Proverbs 21:11 When the scorner is punished, the simple is made wise: and when the wise is instructed, he receiveth knowledge.

WHEN SOMEONE WHO IS WISE SPEAKS INTO A SIMPLE PERSON'S LIFE, THEY JUST THINK THEY ARE OVER-REACTING. But in any area of life where you lack experience, you are simple!

Proverbs 7:6-7 For at the window of my house I looked through my casement, And beheld among the simple ones, I discerned among the youths, a young man void of understanding,

Proverbs 7:21-23 With her much fair speech she caused him to yield, with the flattering of her lips she forced him. He goeth after her straightway, as an ox goeth to the slaughter, or as a fool to the correction of the stocks; Till a dart strike through his liver; as a bird hasteth to the snare, and knoweth not that it is for his life.

BUT IF YOU'LL LISTEN, YOU CAN GET IT RIGHT THE FIRST TIME! ("God, I don't understand this principle, but I'm going to trust You!")

AN OBEDIENT HEART PRESERVES YOUR FUTURE, BUT A DISOBEDIENT HEART WILL KILL YOU.

FOOL

THE FOOL KNOWS THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN RIGHT AND WRONG, BUT THEY JUST DON'T CARE.

Don't you understand the consequences? Yes. Aren't you concerned? No. Why? I just don't care – I'll just deal with it when it happens, You're probably right, but I'm having too much fun with my sin right now.

A FOOL THINKS THEIR SIN IS "NO BIG DEAL."

Proverbs 10:23 It is as sport to a fool to do mischief: but a man of understanding hath wisdom.

A FOOL FLAUNTS THEIR SIN TO EVERYONE WHO WILL LISTEN.

Proverbs 15:2 The tongue of the wise useth knowledge aright: but the mouth of fools poureth out foolishness.

A FOOL REPEATS THE SAME MISTAKES OVER AND OVER.

Proverbs 26:11 As a dog returneth to his vomit, so a fool returneth to his folly.

THE ONLY WAY FOR A FOOL TO CHANGE IS TO FACE THE FULL CONSEQUENCES OF THEIR DECISIONS. (i.e. “I finally got right with God when my life hit bottom, when I was reaping the harvest of sin.”)

BUT THE COMPANION OF A FOOL ALSO SUFFERS GREAT HARM. (It’s not just you facing the consequences of your foolishness!)

Proverbs 13:20 He that walketh with wise men shall be wise: but a companion of fools shall be destroyed.

You don’t have to be a fool in every area of life to be a fool!

SCORNER (SCOFFER, MOCKER)

THE SCORNER IS JUST LIKE THE FOOL, EXCEPT THAT THEY HAVE CHOSEN TO BE CRITICAL OF THOSE DOING THE RIGHT THING.

The **SIMPLE** person is **CLUELESS**, the **FOOL** is **CARELESS**, and the **SCORNER** is **CRITICAL**.

IF YOU TRY TO DISCIPLINE A FOOL THEY WILL IGNORE YOU, BUT IF YOU TRY TO DISCIPLINE A SCORNER THEY WILL HATE YOU.

Proverbs 9:8 Reprove not a scorner, lest he hate thee: rebuke a wise man, and he will love thee.

SCORNERS DRAG EVERYONE AROUND THEM DOWN WITH THEM.

Proverbs 24:9 The thought of foolishness is sin: and the scorner is an abomination to men.

SCORNERS FEEL LIKE THEY ARE THE JUDGE OF EVERYONE ELSE IN THEIR LIFE –THEY CONTROL WITH CRITICISM.

THE BIBLE SAYS THE ONLY THING YOU CAN DO WITH SCORNERS IS DRIVE THEM OUT OF YOUR MIDST – YOU CANNOT APPROACH THEM WITH CORRECTION, ONLY A MIRACLE CAN CHANGE THEM.

Proverbs 22:10 Cast out the scorner, and contention shall go out; yea, strife and reproach shall cease.

It is not that none of these people can repent, but if you sit in one of these three chairs (simple, fool, scorner) you will have a tendency to ignore wise counsel and continue doing your own thing.

It’s not that grace and forgiveness isn’t available, it’s that you don’t want to receive it while you are sitting in one of these three chairs.

IT IS VERY DIFFICULT TO GET UP FROM ANY OF THESE SEATS! BUT YOU CAN BE THE EXCEPTION TO THE RULE!

The book of Proverbs exists to teach us a QUESTION:

- It is a question that I cannot answer for you.
- It is a question that applies to every decision you ever make in life.
- It is a question that in many cases would be very difficult for me to answer, but will be fairly easy for you to answer – in fact, in most cases you will know the answer immediately.
- While it is easy to answer, it can be a bit threatening to ask.
- It is a question that pierces the fog of self-deception that many people allow themselves to live in – it exposes our motives.
- It is a question that sheds light on issues the Bible doesn’t specifically address.
- Most important, if you had asked this one question and acted on your conclusion, you could have avoided your greatest regret in life. (For some of you, it might have changed the direction of your life!)
- You will really like this question if you really want to do what’s right.
- You will really dislike this question if you secretly want to do wrong.
- Pay very close attention to your emotional response to this question today – it will either illuminate or irritate.
- If your reaction is defensive, that alone will tell you a great deal about yourself and the decision you are making.

WHAT IS THE WISE THING TO DO?

Usually when we are making our choices we run our options and opportunities through a different filter – IS THERE ANYTHING WRONG WITH IT? The assumption is that if there is nothing wrong, illegal, unethical or immoral about it, then it qualifies as an option for us. If there is no “THOU SHALT NOT,” we assume that God is saying “THOU SHALT IF THOU PLEASE.” But that is not so!

Don’t ask “is it RIGHT or WRONG?” Ask “is it WISE?”

WISE

WISDOM BLESSES YOUR LIFE LIKE NOTHING ELSE CAN!

Proverbs 8:11 For wisdom is better than rubies; and all the things that may be desired are not to be compared to it.

THE WISE WILLINGLY RECEIVE GOD'S COMMANDMENTS.
(“God, I don't understand this principle, but I'm going to trust You!”)

Proverbs 10:8 The wise in heart will receive commandments: but a prating fool shall fall.

THE WISE THINK ETERNALLY – THEY ARE SOUL WINNERS!

Proverbs 11:30 The fruit of the righteous is a tree of life; and he that winneth souls is wise.

With all of this understood, ask yourself this honest question: Have you ever known a wise person who did what was right and still had problems? Have you ever known a fool who did what was wrong and still prospered? What about verses like this one?

Proverbs 22:6 Train up a child in the way he should go: and when he is old, he will not depart from it.

There is a principle in Proverbs that we must understand ...

PROVERBS are PROBABILITIES, not PROMISES.

PROVERBS TELLS US THAT GOOD THINGS ARE LIKELY TO HAPPEN IF WE DO RIGHT

JOB TELLS US THAT SOMETIMES BAD THINGS HAPPEN EVEN WHEN WE DO RIGHT!

JOB

The book of Job is not religious fiction – he was a real person, with real problems. The Bible tells us he was “perfect and upright” and that he “shunned evil” and had “integrity” – in other words, he was not a hypocrite in the sight of God. What Job was on the outside, he was on the inside – he was REAL. Job was a prosperous man with a large family and an abundance of land, animals and servants. But being rich did not turn Job away from God, for he acknowledged that the Lord gave this wealth to him, and he used it generously for the good of others. But in one fateful 24-hour period, Job was stripped of his wealth and his family. One after another, four frightened messengers reported that 500 yoke of oxen, 500 donkeys, and 3,000 camels were stolen in enemy raids; 7,000 sheep were struck by lightning and killed; and all 10 of his children were killed as a windstorm collapsed the house they were in. Shortly after, Job lost his health and his wife angrily turned against him.

Job knew WHAT happened, but he did not know WHY it had happened; and that is the crux of the matter. Because this book allows us to visit the

throne room of heaven and hear God and Satan speak, WE know who caused the destruction. BUT JOB DID NOT HAVE THE BENEFIT OF THIS KNOWLEDGE! And if we did not have this insight, we would probably take the same approach as Job's friends and blame Job himself for the tragedy (even if we did not SAY it we would probably THINK it).

Job 1:8 And the LORD said unto Satan, Hast thou considered my servant Job, that there is none like him in the earth, a perfect and an upright man, one that feareth God, and escheweth evil?

This verse states clearly that God had no reason to punish Job! However, He allowed Job's trials for a higher purpose ...

James 5:11 Behold, we count them happy which endure. Ye have heard of the patience of Job, and have seen the end of the Lord; that the Lord is very pitiful, and of tender mercy.

“Patience” – “consistent, cheerful, hopeful endurance”

Most people say that the theme of Job is the age-old question, “WHY does a loving and righteous God permit the godly to suffer?” But if that is the theme of this book, the question is never answered! Instead, this book answers the question, “HOW do the righteous endure suffering?”

WE DON'T LIVE BY GOD'S EXPLANATIONS, BUT BY HIS PROMISES!

Hebrews 13:5-6 Let your conversation be without covetousness; and be content with such things as ye have: for he hath said, I will never (*GREEK: three negatives precede the verb - “I will never, I will never, I will never”*) leave thee, nor forsake thee. So that we may boldly say, The Lord is my helper, and I will not fear what man shall do unto me.

The most common Bible command is some variation of “Fear not!”
The most common Bible promise is some variation of “I will be with you!”

Matthew 1:23 Behold, a virgin shall be with child, and shall bring forth a son, and they shall call his name Emmanuel, which being interpreted is, God with us.

God is sovereign, and even Satan can do nothing to God's people without permission. HE IS LIKE A MEAN DOG ON A STRONG LEASH.

The opening chapters of Job are a courtroom scene, but God and Satan deliver very different verdicts about Job! Satan said “**Guilty!**” because he is the accuser of the brethren (Revelation 12:10), but God said “**Not guilty!**” and in the end that is all that matters!

Satan's accusation against Job was really an attack on God. We might paraphrase it like this: “The only reason Job fears You is because You pay him to do it. You two have made a contract: You protect him and

prosper him as long as he obeys You and worships You. You are not a God worthy of worship! You have to pay people to honor You."

Can you imagine it? The fundamental reason for Job's suffering was to silence the blasphemous accusations of Satan and prove that a man would honor God even though he had lost everything. It was actually a war in the heavenlies, but Job did not know it! Job's life was a battlefield where the forces of God and Satan were engaged in a spiritual struggle to decide the question, "Is Jehovah God worthy of man's worship?"

Ephesians 6:12 For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places.

Some of the so-called tragedies and trials in the lives of God's people have really been weapons of God to "still the enemy and the avenger."

Psalm 8:2 Out of the mouth of babes and sucklings hast thou ordained strength because of thine enemies, that thou mightest still the enemy and the avenger.

Matthew 21:16 And said unto him, Hearest thou what these say? And Jesus saith unto them, Yea; have ye never read, Out of the mouth of babes and sucklings thou hast perfected praise?

Notice that DAVID said "out of the mouth of babes and sucklings hast thou ordained strength" while JESUS said "out of the mouth of babes and sucklings thou hast perfected praise." Jesus did not misquote David; rather He interpreted the Scripture and explained the truth David had discovered. When we praise God – even though we do not understand situations (we are "children") – we win the battle in the heavenlies.

The book of Job appears at first to be a collection of long speeches from Job and his friends, and the conversation never seems to make much progress. But there are incredible lessons for those who are suffering!

The term "Job's comforters" is a familiar phrase for describing people whose help only makes you feel worse. But these three men had some admirable qualities – for one thing, they cared enough for Job to travel a long distance to visit him. And when they sympathized with him, they didn't sit in a comfortable place; they sat with him on the ash heap, surrounded by refuse. Because their grief was so great for him, they couldn't even speak for seven days.

However, Job's friends eventually did begin to speak, and regrettably chose to become prosecuting attorneys instead of supportive witnesses. In the end, the Lord even rebuked them, and they had to ask Job for forgiveness.

Job's friends heard his words but did not feel the anguish of his heart, so they took the wrong approach in trying to help him handle his trials. They argued with his expressions instead of ministering to his feelings. They tried to give explanations when there weren't any to give!

(HAVE YOU EVER BEEN IN A SIMILAR SITUATION?)

ELIPHAZ

- **Job 4:13-17** In thoughts from the visions of the night, when deep sleep falleth on men, Fear came upon me, and trembling, which made all my bones to shake. Then a spirit passed before my face; the hair of my flesh stood up: It stood still, but I could not discern the form thereof: an image was before mine eyes, there was silence, and I heard a voice, saying, Shall mortal man be more just than God? shall a man be more pure than his maker?
- **Based his opinion on a spiritual experience he had ("the Lord gave me a word for you that will fix everything")**

BILDAD

- **Job 8:8-10** For enquire, I pray thee, of the former age, and prepare thyself to the search of their fathers: (For we are but of yesterday, and know nothing, because our days upon earth are a shadow:) Shall not they teach thee, and tell thee, and utter words out of their heart?
- **Based his opinion on traditional wisdom from the past ("if you just do what they did it will fix everything")**

ZOPHAR

- **Job 11:2-6** Should not the multitude of words be answered? and should a man full of talk be justified? Should thy lies make men hold their peace? and when thou mockest, shall no man make thee ashamed? For thou hast said, My doctrine is pure, and I am clean in thine eyes. But oh that God would speak, and open his lips against thee; And that he would shew thee the secrets of wisdom, that they are double to that which is! Know therefore that God exacteth of thee less than thine iniquity deserveth.
- **Based his opinion on hard-line legalism ("it doesn't matter what you do anyway because it can't be fixed")**

ELIHU

- **Job 32:7-10** I said, Days should speak, and multitude of years should teach wisdom. But there is a spirit in man: and the inspiration of the Almighty giveth them understanding. Great men are not always wise: neither do the aged understand judgment. Therefore I said, Hearken to me; I also will shew mine opinion.

- **Based his opinion merely on the fact that no one else's ideas had worked ("let's just try anything to try and fix it")**

BUT AFTER ALL THIS THERE WAS STILL NO ANSWER TO "WHY?"

Job 1:10 Hast not thou made an hedge about him, and about his house, and about all that he hath on every side? thou hast blessed the work of his hands, and his substance is increased in the land.

The devil accused God of putting a hedge of blessing around Job, so God allowed the devil to tear that hedge down. But once he did, he found another hedge that JOB built – his unshakable faith!

Job 13:15 Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him: but I will maintain mine own ways before him.

Job 19:25-27 For I know that my redeemer liveth, and that he shall stand at the latter day upon the earth: And though after my skin worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh shall I see God: Whom I shall see for myself, and mine eyes shall behold, and not another; though my reins be consumed within me.

JOB SAID, "THE WORST THAT CAN HAPPEN TO ME IS DEATH!"

Daniel 3:17-18 If it be so, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and he will deliver us out of thine hand, O king. But if not, be it known unto thee, O king, that we will not serve thy gods, nor worship the golden image which thou hast set up.

Philippians 1:21 For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain.

WHAT CAN YOU DO TO A MAN THAT WILL WORSHIP IN SPITE OF THE "WHYS" OF LIFE? ABSOLUTELY NOTHING!

"I CAN'T TELL YOU WHY I AM SUFFERING, BUT I CAN SHOW YOU HOW I'M GOING TO SUFFER! I'M GOING TO PRAISE GOD IN IT!"

Romans 8:28 And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose.

ALL THINGS IN LIFE ARE NOT GOOD! BUT GOD PROMISES THAT ALL THINGS WILL "WORK TOGETHER" FOR OUR GOOD!

2 Corinthians 4:16-18 For which cause we faint not; but though our outward man perish, yet the inward man is renewed day by day. For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory; While we look not at the things

which are seen, but at the things which are not seen: for the things which are seen are temporal; but the things which are not seen are eternal.

JOB DID NOT KNOW HE HAD BEEN THE SUBJECT OF A CONVERSATION IN HEAVEN – THE SAME AS SOME OF YOU!

PROVERBS TELLS US THAT GOOD THINGS ARE LIKELY TO HAPPEN IF WE DO RIGHT

JOB TELLS US THAT SOMETIMES BAD THINGS HAPPEN EVEN WHEN WE DO RIGHT!

BUT LET'S MAKE THE RIGHT CHOICES REGARDLESS!

ECCLESIASTES

You probably shouldn't even read this book until you are over fifty, or you'll get depressed! But if you're over fifty, you'll be saying "that's right!" If you start reading it, you better finish it or you will miss the message.

Ecclesiastes was written by Solomon, the third king of Israel and the builder of Solomon's Temple, which was the most magnificent building in the ancient world. He lived 3000 years ago and was the wisest and richest man who ever lived according to the Scripture. People came from everywhere to ask him questions and just see his kingdom.

Solomon writes this book near the end of his life, after he has used his wisdom and wealth to explore life fully and experiment with everything, asking "What is the purpose of life?" This is his conclusion ...

Ecclesiastes 1:1-2 The words of the Preacher, the son of David, king in Jerusalem. Vanity of vanities, saith the Preacher, vanity of vanities; all is vanity.

Young people read that and say "that's depressing!" But older people read that and say "I knew it!" ☺

1:3 What profit hath a man of all his labour which he taketh under the sun?

You can labor for possessions, but you will leave them all behind!

1:4 One generation passeth away, and another generation cometh: but the earth abideth for ever.

The world will carry on after you're gone, and forget you!

1:9 The thing that hath been, it is that which shall be; and that which is done is that which shall be done: and there is no new thing under the sun.

Someone else will come along and do a more modern version of what you did – and they'll think it was their idea!

IF THIS IS ALL THERE IS TO LIFE, THEN LIFE IS EMPTY!

Solomon is partial to the word “vanity,” using it 38 times in this book. It means “emptiness, futility, vapor, that which vanishes quickly and leaves nothing behind.”

Ecclesiastes 1:12-18 (NLT) I, the Teacher, was king of Israel, and I lived in Jerusalem. I devoted myself to search for understanding and to explore by wisdom everything being done in the world. I soon discovered that God has dealt a tragic existence to the human race. Everything under the sun is meaningless, like chasing the wind. What is wrong cannot be righted. What is missing cannot be recovered. I said to myself, "Look, I am wiser than any of the kings who ruled in Jerusalem before me. I have greater wisdom and knowledge than any of them." So I worked hard to distinguish wisdom from foolishness. But now I realize that even this was like chasing the wind. For the greater my wisdom, the greater my grief. To increase knowledge only increases sorrow.

THAT IS DEPRESSING! But there is a secret key to the book of Ecclesiastes, found in the phrase “UNDER THE SUN” which is used 29 times. If THIS is all there is to life, then life is EMPTY ... but there is more to life than THIS ... there is something beyond the sun!

Ecclesiastes 9:11 I returned, and saw under the sun, that the race [is] not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong, neither yet bread to the wise, nor yet riches to men of understanding, nor yet favour to men of skill; but time and chance happeneth to them all.

The most frustrating thing about life on earth is that it is so RANDOM. Under the sun things happen that we don't understand, we get results that we didn't expect, and we are left feeling EMPTY. But the very futility of life forces us to look beyond the sun!

Ecclesiastes 3:11 (NIV) He has made everything beautiful in its time. He has also set eternity in the hearts of men; yet they cannot fathom what God has done from beginning to end.

Every so often, we experience a moment of BEAUTY that lets us know there is definitely something MORE. That is a God-given quality of the human heart – He put a sense of ETERNITY inside us!

If you only live for things that are UNDER THE SUN, you will never be able to fathom what God is doing – life just goes around and around like an endless circle. But if you give your life to an eternal God, then you will begin to see where your story fits into His story of the ages! BEYOND THE SUN, God is accomplishing His purpose!

Ecclesiastes 3:14 I know that, whatsoever God doeth, it shall be for ever: nothing can be put to it, nor any thing taken from it: and God doeth it, that men should fear before him.

Ecclesiastes 12:13 Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God, and keep his commandments: for this is the whole duty of man.

KEEP SERVING GOD REGARDLESS OF HOW YOU FEEL! That “emptiness” is just a temporary human feeling. Feelings are not logical, and feelings are not facts! Let your “emptiness” push you to Jesus!

Every year at the Feast of Tabernacles, the Jewish people read the book of Ecclesiastes. Why? Because Tabernacles is their great time of thanksgiving and rejoicing for God's abundant provision of their needs **while they were wandering in the wilderness!**

Philippians 4:11-13 Not that I speak in respect of want: for I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content. I know both how to be abased, and I know how to abound: every where and in all things I am instructed both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need. I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me.

If you're experiencing an Ecclesiastes moment right now, where no matter what you do your heart feels EMPTY ... hold on, because a Song of Solomon moment is coming, when you can bask in the presence of the One who FILLS the human heart to overflowing!

EMOTIONS ARE GOOD, BUT DON'T EVER LET YOUR EMOTIONS MAKE A SPIRITUAL DECISION FOR YOU! MAKE YOUR SPIRITUAL DECISIONS TO PLEASE YOUR BELOVED!

SONG OF SOLOMON

The Song of Solomon is regarded today as probably one of the most obscure and difficult books in the Bible. At one point, it looked like it might even be excluded from the canon of Scripture because of its frank references to sexual love. But the Jews revered this book, and always sang these words at Passover in the spring.

It is called the “Song of Songs” – a Hebrew idiom like “Holy of Holies” (King of Kings, Lord of Lords, etc.) meaning “chiefest, greatest, most superlative.”

1 Kings 4:32 And he spake three thousand proverbs: and his songs were a thousand and five.

Song 1:1 The song of songs, which is Solomon's.

First and foremost, this is a love song describing with frankness and yet with purity the physical attraction of a man and a woman to each other. It shows human sexual desire as God intended it to be expressed – not pornographically or prudishly (both harmful extremes), but in purity.

The ancient Hebrew mind (because of its foundation in the Word of God) could not isolate and alienate the sexuality of man from God. The modern capacity of man to think of himself as a purely biological creature in a purely physical world is not evidence of his sophistication but of his spiritual poverty. God is the originator of man's sexuality.

Of course, we have not discovered the deepest message of this song until we pass behind the description of human love to read it as an expression of communion between man and God. The Jews took it to be an allegory of the love between Jehovah and Israel; we understand it on a deeper level as a type of the love between Christ and His Church. The condescension of God to dwell among men as the Shekinah in the tabernacle pales in comparison to the incredible condescension we see in the New Testament, when God took on a body of flesh to walk among men as a man to “woo us” to Himself as His Bride.

In his younger days, before he became entangled with the gods of his many pagan wives, Solomon wrote this book on the joys of courtship and married love. He ultimately had 700 wives and 300 concubines.

1 Kings 11:3 And he had seven hundred wives, princesses, and three hundred concubines: and his wives turned away his heart.

He married many of his wives mainly to establish peaceful and profitable relations with their countries, but in so doing violated the law of the Lord.

Deuteronomy 17:17 Neither shall he multiply wives to himself, that his heart turn not away: neither shall he greatly multiply to himself silver and gold.

But the Song of Solomon predates all of this, and we find here a story of King Solomon and his first, true love.

Ancient eastern courtship differs in many ways from what we are familiar with, especially in the imagery of their expressions of love. For example:

- You have dove's eyes
- Your hair is like a flock of goats
- Your teeth are like a flock of sheep
- Your navel is like a round goblet

- Your belly is like an heap of wheat
- Your nose is like a tower

Song 1:9 (NIV) I liken you, my darling, to a mare harnessed to one of the chariots of Pharaoh.

If today a man compared his wife or girlfriend to a mare pulling a chariot, he would probably be in trouble, but in their day that simply meant “you are unique” – because a mare would not be harnessed among stallions.

Unlike modern novels, this book doesn't present an obvious story line, but it has a definite plot which is "discovered" as you read the book carefully. The cast of characters is small:

- King Solomon
- the "Shulamite" girl who becomes his wife
- the Shulamite's brothers
- the daughters of Jerusalem, who function as a “background chorus”

It is not always clear from the English who is speaking, but in most cases this can be determined by looking at the Hebrew pronouns (i.e. masculine, feminine, singular, plural). Most modern translations of Scripture attempt in some way to indicate who is speaking, but they can't be definite in every case. The KJV translators did not even attempt this.

Song 2:1-3 (KJV) I am the rose of Sharon, and the lily of the valleys. As the lily among thorns, so is my love among the daughters. As the apple tree among the trees of the wood, so is my beloved among the sons. I sat down under his shadow with great delight, and his fruit was sweet to my taste.

Song 2:1-2 (NIV) [Beloved] I am a rose of Sharon, a lily of the valleys. **[Lover]** Like a lily among thorns is my darling among the maidens. **[Beloved]** Like an apple tree among the trees of the forest is my lover among the young men. I delight to sit in his shade, and his fruit is sweet to my taste.

In spite of what a familiar gospel song says, in this passage it is the SHULAMITE (THE BRIDE) who compares herself to a rose of Sharon and a lily of the valleys, not SOLOMON (THE GROOM). She is actually putting herself down, for she compares herself to a common crocus (rose) from Sharon and an ordinary hyacinth (lily) of the fields. But Solomon will have none of it, because that is not the way he looks at her – he compares her to a single beautiful lily among a bunch of thorns! (GOD DOESN'T SEE YOU THE WAY YOU SEE YOURSELF!)

The Shulamite responds by comparing Solomon to a beautiful apple tree in a forest, under which she could sit down and find protection from the sun and food to eat. It would be unusual to find an apple tree in a

common forest, so she is actually saying that he is "one in a million." In another place, she describes him as "altogether lovely."

Song 5:16 His mouth is most sweet: yea, he is altogether lovely. This is my beloved, and this is my friend, O daughters of Jerusalem.

Song 6:3 I am my beloved's, and my beloved is mine: he feedeth among the lilies.

THERE IS EVEN MORE BEAUTY TO THIS STORY HOWEVER ...

King Solomon owned a vineyard in the hill country of Ephraim, about 50 miles north of Jerusalem. It was here the Shulamite and her family worked as keepers.

Song 8:11 Solomon had a vineyard at Baalhamon; he let out the vineyard unto keepers; every one for the fruit thereof was to bring a thousand pieces of silver.

The Shulamite girl was the "Cinderella" of the family, with a natural beauty that went unnoticed. Her step-brothers (and sisters) treated her harshly and made her work outside so much that she became dark from the sun, and had no time to care for her personal appearance.

Song 1:6 Look not upon me, because I am black, because the sun hath looked upon me: my mother's children were angry with me; they made me the keeper of the vineyards; but mine own vineyard have I not kept.

Remember that in the book of Ecclesiastes, Solomon tells us he often undertook expeditions to discover what life was like in various levels of society, or to check on his vast land holdings. One day he disguised himself as a shepherd and went to check on this vineyard; he met the Shulamite and they fell in love, but she still did not know His true identity.

Song 1:7 Tell me, O thou whom my soul loveth, where thou feedest, where thou makest thy flock to rest at noon: for why should I be as one that turneth aside by the flocks of thy companions?

The beauty of the story is that the majestic King Solomon makes a long journey from the beautiful city of Jerusalem to the rough and dangerous mountain country CLOTHED LIKE A PEASANT, falls in love with a poor peasant girl who has absolutely nothing to offer him in return, and promises to take her away with him! His invitation is to a place that the Shulamite has never seen (and has to wait for) – so she must accept his marriage proposal BY FAITH.

Song 2:10 My beloved spake, and said unto me, Rise up, my love, my fair one, and come away.

The world just doesn't "get it" because they only see Jesus as a "humble shepherd" and not as the "king of kings." We have never seen Him in His ultimate glory either, but we love Him above all others anyway!

Song 5:9-10 What is thy beloved more than another beloved, O thou fairest among women? what is thy beloved more than another beloved, that thou dost so charge us? My beloved is white and ruddy, the chiefest among ten thousand.

The day finally comes when the Groom returns as promised for his Bride. But, to her amazement, the Shulamite looks up from the field to see King Solomon returning for her in all his kingly splendor. She can hardly believe that this is her beloved "shepherd boy."

Song 3:6 Who is this that cometh out of the wilderness like pillars of smoke, perfumed with myrrh and frankincense, with all powders of the merchant?

Later, the women of Jerusalem will see the happy couple in their royal honeymoon procession and will also ask "who is this?" They can hardly believe that "Cinderella" has become Solomon's beloved queen!

Song 8:5a Who is this that cometh up from the wilderness, leaning upon her beloved?

The Shulamite girl lived for many months in love with Solomon, waiting faithfully for him, even though all she had was a promise.

2 Corinthians 5:7 For we walk by faith, not by sight.

1 Peter 1:8 Whom having not seen, ye love; in whom, though now ye see him not, yet believing, ye rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory:

1 John 3:1-3 Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God: therefore the world knoweth us not, because it knew him not. Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is. And every man that hath this hope in him purifieth himself, even as he is pure.

IT WILL BE DIFFERENT THE NEXT TIME JESUS COMES! THE WORLD WILL SEE HIM – AND THE CHURCH – LIKE THEY HAVE NEVER SEEN US BEFORE!

In Israel in the first century, generally a young woman would be married in her early teens, often at thirteen or fourteen. It would become known that she was now "of age," and her father would entertain offers from the

fathers of young men who were interested in marrying her. If the fathers agreed on the terms of the marriage, there would be a celebration to honor the couple and announce their engagement. At this celebration, the groom would offer the young girl a cup of wine to drink.

But she doesn't have to drink it. She can reject the cup. She can say no to his offer of marriage. Even though everything has already been arranged, she can still say no. It's up to her. Can you imagine the pressure on the young man? Here is everybody you love the most, friends and parents and relatives, gathered in a room, watching to see if she will accept the cup.

If she says yes, the groom gives a sort of prepared speech about their future together. Because if she takes the cup and drinks from it, that only means that they are engaged. They aren't married yet. Something still has to happen. Or to be more precise, something has to be built. If she says yes, then the groom goes home and begins building an addition onto his family's home. This is where he and his bride will start their new family together.

And so he works and works and works, building a place that they can call home. And here's the interesting part: he doesn't know when he's going to finish. Because he doesn't have the final say on whether it's ready. That's his father's decision. And so his father periodically inspects his work, looking to see if the quality of what the son is building properly honors his future bride. The father has considerations as well. If he has many sons, and they've all built additions, then his house is getting quite large. There are many rooms in it. This was called an "insula," a large multi-family dwelling. If the father had built his addition onto his father's house, then by now - several generations later - this is a large dwelling with rooms for a lot of people.

The future bride is at home, learning how to run a household. She also doesn't know when the work will be done, so she's preparing herself for a date that's coming, she just doesn't know when. And then the day comes. The father inspects and tells the son that it's time. So the son gets his friends, and they set out for her house to get her. But how will he know what room is hers? He'll know because she has filled her lamp with oil each night and set it in the window, so that when he comes he'll know which room is hers (Matthew 25:1-13). And so he goes to get her, and they gather their friends and family, and there's a giant procession back to his house where the party starts.

And so, when she takes the glass of wine at their engagement party and drinks from it, the groom says to her: **"In my father's house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am there ye may be also. And whither I go ye know, and the way ye know."**

Does his speech sound familiar? This is what Jesus says to his disciples in **John 14:2-4**. When Jesus wants to assure his followers that they're going to be okay, that their future is secure, that they shouldn't let their hearts be troubled, he uses the wedding metaphor. They would have known exactly what he was talking about. They would have heard the groom's speech growing up, the ones who were married would have given it to their brides, and they all would have taken part in numerous wedding celebrations. To describe heaven, Jesus uses an event they had all experienced and basically says, "IT'S LIKE THAT!"

1 Thessalonians 4:16-18 For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first: Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord. Wherefore comfort one another with these words.