

The Book of the Bible Nobody Talks About

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I'll going to be honest with you; I hate February. I dread it every year because February revolves around Valentine's Day. I am a guy, and a scientist - which means that I am not only genetically predisposed, but also professionally trained, to be uncomfortable with emotions. But every February I am supposed to concentrate on romantic feelings and overtures of affection. Well OK, fine. Everybody wants to talk about romance, so let's talk about romance.

Believe it or not, there is an entire book of the Bible devoted to the subject: Song of Songs. I've noticed that churches (at least those I've happened to attend) tend to conspicuously avoid teaching any Scripture lessons from this book. It's a shame really; I think there is much to be learned, but I can understand why it might make some people uncomfortable. There is talk of kissing, several rather explicit descriptions of a man's admiration for his lover's feminine physique, and much more. Didn't expect that in the Bible, did you? Song of Songs appears to tell the story of King Solomon and his bride. This book is often thought to have been authored by Solomon himself, although its title "Solomon's Song of Songs" may simply indicate it was written for or about him. In any event, it tells the story of Solomon and his lover by offering snapshots of their relationship at various stages.

Chapter 1 describes their relationship early on. We are not told how the two met, but they are already enamored with each other at this point. We first hear the female "Beloved" speak of her desire to kiss her lover and to be alone with him. As the dialog continues, there are several aspects of the text that are interesting. We hear her initial insecurity about her

appearance (sun-darkened skin was an indication of manual labor outdoors, so a more aristocratic light-skinned complexion was considered attractive at that time). We also see the joyful approval of friends, and the repeated exchange of compliments between the two lovers. The woman's final words in Chapter 1 are noteworthy. She says how handsome and charming her lover is, and says that their bed is verdant (meaning like green and flourishing, but still unripe, plants). I just don't think I can elaborate on that kind of extraordinary eloquence.

But their relationship matures and grows in subsequent chapters. In Chapter 2 we find a much more confident young lady. Solomon has made her feel special, and vice-versa. We also find that the two young lovers are beginning to feel that they belong to one another. In Chapter 3, she takes him home to meet her mother. A little later she describes the wedding day and King Solomon's wedding procession. Chapter 4 is often regarded as a description of their wedding night, and you can read it for yourself. Chapter 5 seems to refer to some time later in their relationship. Solomon has tried to meet her and but then left suddenly. We are not told exactly why he had to leave, but she goes looking for him and is accosted during her search. It is not entirely clear whether this passage is a dream she has or a literal occurrence. since it begins with her asleep. Regardless, the latter portion of this chapter makes it clear that she is still deeply in love with her husband.

Chapter 6 describes a point yet later in their marriage. The prose here reinforces the idea that they feel that they belong to one another, and that she is still unique in his eyes. A quick comparison of his admiration for her femininity in verses 6:5-7 with the earlier one from their wedding night in 4:1-5, suggests that his thoughts about her are somewhat less sexually-focused than before, but no less adoring. We also notice her now being referred to as "Shulammit," the feminine form of Solomon (analogous to Robert and Roberta nowadays, for example), not only

by friends but also by her husband. Since this has not occurred before, it likely suggests something about her suitability as his Queen and her increasingly public role at his side. Later in Chapter 7, we see them rejoicing in their love. Solomon gives his most erotic description yet of his wife, and she delights in his attention, proposing a little getaway for the two of them. Finally, Chapter 8 features the Queen espousing the strength and passion of love, its enduring and priceless nature, and her own joyful recognition that she makes him happy.

My brief synopsis of Song of Songs only covers some of the highlights; I recommend studying it yourself to get a more thorough exposure. I think that Song of Songs provides a useful example of a healthy romantic relationship, even for modern-day Christians. Certainly, there are some cultural differences between now and then: unease about public displays of affection mentioned in Chapter 8 is less of an issue now, for example. But a number of aspects of the story are timeless. We note that the relationship is a positive influence in both their lives. Secure in her husband's love, she becomes a more confident person. Throughout the narrative, we find that the two lovers feel that they belong to one another. Not just with each other, but *to* each other. Also, each sees the other as unique, as someone really special. They miss one another when they are apart and try to spend time together. Most couples spend some time apart by necessity of course, and I will note that their are personality types for whom relaxation is easiest in solitude, but the important point is that they make time to see each other. They seem to prefer one another to all others. And we get the sense that they genuinely enjoy making each other happy.

One particularly striking aspect of the story is that there is a strong physical attraction between the pair. Early on they (wisely) exercise restraint, waiting until marriage to consummate their love, but they make no secret about their desires for physical intimacy - and

they express no guilt over those desires. I think this is why lessons from this book are rarely taught; it's difficult to miss the more suggestive passages, and this is ground that many people fear to tread. Ignoring this book, though, can leave the mistaken impression that the urges that so often accompany romantic attachments are something other than entirely natural and normal – part of God's design, even.

If you have never studied this book of the Bible previously, I encourage you to read it and to use it to reflect upon your own relationships, whatever stage they may currently be in. And, if you are anything like me, I hope that these Scriptures help you to become more comfortable with one of the most important emotions of all: love.