

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

The title “Song of Songs” means “the finest of all songs,” similar to “holy of holies” as the highest expression of holiness. Solomon composed more than a thousand songs (1 Kings 4:32), yet he regarded this one as his masterpiece. How tragic that of all his writings, the song he considered his finest does not celebrate his love for the God who had blessed him beyond measure, but instead focuses on physical love.

There are four primary methods used to interpret the *Song of Solomon*: the historical, typical, practical, and literal approaches. Of these, three rely heavily on allegory. Yet unless Scripture itself clearly indicates that it is using allegory to convey a spiritual truth, our starting point should always be the literal interpretation. For that reason, our focus will be on understanding the *Song of Solomon* through the literal method of interpretation.

I. The Literal Interpretation

At its heart, this is a love story involving three characters:

- A maiden forced into hard labor by her family (1:5–6; 2:15).
- Her beloved, a humble shepherd who has won her heart (1:7).
- King Solomon, who tries to woo her with wealth, luxury, and flattery.

Solomon brings the maiden to his palace, but her heart remains with her true love. She warns the “*daughters of Jerusalem*” (the women of Solomon’s court) not to pressure her to abandon her beloved (2:7; 3:5; 8:4). Solomon pursues her with wealth and splendor (3:6–7:9), but she resists. Finally, true love triumphs—she escapes the king’s grasp, returns to her beloved, and finds restoration (8:4–14).

This interpretation does not flatter Solomon, but it reflects truth: he was not faithful in marriage (1 Kings 11:3) or to God. Initially when he becomes the king of Israel, as the book of Proverb reflects, his life is submitted to serving God. But as he became increasingly successful, he yielded to temptation and disobeyed the Scripture.

For example, in Deuteronomy 17:14–20, the LORD gives specific guidelines for Israel’s future kings. In verse 17, the command is clear:

“Neither shall he multiply wives for himself, lest his heart turn away; nor shall he greatly multiply silver and gold for himself.” (Deuteronomy 17:17, NKJV)

This instruction is included in the broader section on the responsibilities and limitations of a king (Deuteronomy 17:14–20). The king was to be chosen by God, not accumulate excessive horses, wealth, or wives, and he was to keep a copy of the Law with him so that he would rule in humility and obedience.

God commanded that the king of Israel was not to have multiple wives as the kings of heathen kingdoms. The king of Israel was to have one wife. According to 1 Kings 11:3:

“And he [i.e., Solomon] had seven hundred wives, princesses, and three hundred concubines; and his wives turned away his heart.” (NKJV)

Breakdown:

- 700 wives — many of them “princesses,” which suggests political marriages to seal alliances with foreign nations.
- 300 concubines — secondary wives or partners, recognized but without the full legal standing of wives.

The Problem:

God blessed Solomon, not because Solomon was flawless, but because of the covenant promises He had made to David, Solomon’s father. Yet Solomon made a critical mistake: he confused God’s blessings with God’s approval. Instead of seeing blessing as a call to deeper obedience, he treated it as confirmation that his compromises were acceptable.

God had clearly warned that the king of Israel must not *“multiply wives for himself, lest his heart turn away”* (Deuteronomy 17:17). But Solomon ignored this command. He pursued alliances and pleasures through marriages, gathering wives by the hundreds. In time, exactly as God had warned, those very relationships turned his heart away from the Lord and led him into idolatry (1 Kings 11:1–4).

“For it was so, when Solomon was old, that his wives turned his heart after other gods; and his heart was not loyal to the LORD his God, as was the heart of his father David.” (1 Kings 11:4, NKJV)

Application:

This account reminds us that God’s blessings are not a license to sin. We may enjoy His provision, health, or success, but those are not signs that He approves of every choice we make. Blessings flow from God’s faithfulness to His Word, yet disobedience still brings consequences.

Like Solomon, we can be tempted to believe that because life is comfortable or fruitful, our spiritual compromises don’t matter. But the truth is, obedience matters deeply. What God forbids, He forbids for our good. Divided loyalties—whether through relationships, ambitions, or desires—can draw our hearts away from the Lord if we are not careful.

The challenge for us is this: will we treat God’s blessings as an excuse to relax spiritually, or as motivation to walk more faithfully with Him? The right response to blessing is gratitude that leads to obedience, not presumption that excuses sin.

Solomon’s downfall shows that no amount of wisdom, wealth, or blessing can protect a person whose heart drifts from obedience to God. His marriages—meant to strengthen his kingdom—ultimately weakened it, because they introduced idolatry into Israel.

For us, the lesson is clear: divided loyalties, whether through relationships, possessions, or ambitions, can pull us away from wholehearted devotion to Christ.

Key Points:

- The concern wasn't just numbers, but the danger that multiple wives would turn the king's heart away from God, especially through foreign alliances and idolatry (which sadly happened to Solomon, 1 Kings 11:1–4).
- This command emphasized that God's king was to lead differently than the kings of surrounding nations—with faithfulness, humility, and dependence on God's Word.

Personal Application:

Even though this was written to Israel's kings, the principle applies broadly: divided affections can draw our hearts away from God. Just as Solomon's wives led him into idolatry, Christians today must guard against relationships, habits, or possessions that compete with wholehearted devotion to Christ (Matthew 6:24).

We can trace the tragedy of Solomon's life through the three Old Testament books attributed to him.

- **Proverbs** reflects the wisdom of a young king who, in his early years, walked in obedience to the Lord and sought to live faithfully.
- **Ecclesiastes** shows us the bitter reflections of an old king who had squandered much of his life in sinful compromise and disobedience, chasing after the empty promises of this world.
- **The Song of Solomon** reveals the very temptation that entangled him—an obsession with physical desire. Solomon gave himself to sensual pleasure, but the flesh is never satisfied. Sin may bring momentary enjoyment, but it always demands more, and its end is destruction.

At first, immorality offered Solomon pleasure, but like an addictive drug, it consumed him more and more. The result was not fulfillment, but emptiness. Spiritually, emotionally, and even physically, Solomon was left unsatisfied. His own conclusion was stark: "*Vanity of vanities, all is vanity.*" The Hebrew word for "vanity" carries the sense of a vapor or breath—something fleeting, without lasting substance. That is what life becomes when lived apart from God's will.

Yet God designed humanity for something better. His plan has always been for us to experience the abundant life—marked by love, peace, and joy in Him. Sin promises those very things, but it never delivers. Instead, it leaves us grasping at air, holding nothing of real value.

Solomon's story is a warning for us: wisdom does not guarantee faithfulness, and blessings do not excuse disobedience. The same temptations that pulled Solomon away—ungodly pleasure, possessions, pride—still lure believers today. If we yield, sin will leave us empty and ashamed, no matter how promising it looks in the moment.

But here is the hope: where sin drains life, Christ restores it. Jesus said, "*I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly*" (John 10:10, NKJV). Unlike the fleeting thrills of sin, the life Christ offers is full, lasting, and satisfying. The challenge for us is to resist the lie that sin can give what only God provides. Real joy, peace, and meaning are found in walking faithfully with Him.

There are two thoughts that we need to be mindful of:

1. Sinful desire never fully satisfies. It may provide satisfaction and pleasure for a season but in the end is destruction. Solomon pursues a sinful relationship with the Shulamite woman, only to experience the emptiness caused by losing her at the end.
2. The Shulamite woman and her true love have thoughts of holy marital love for each other and are united in the end.

It is important to understand that the act of marriage is not sinful. God Himself designed it—not as a temptation to fall, but as a gift through which we might share in the joy and satisfaction that reflect His own delight in creating. The outcome of God’s creative work was love expressed in deep commitment. How great is His commitment? So great that He gave His Son to die for us, rescuing us from the consequences of sin.

In the same way, when a man and woman enter into a lifelong, legal, covenant relationship, the physical union of marriage becomes a beautiful expression of God’s faithful love toward us. But when the act of marriage is taken outside of this covenant, it loses its sacred meaning and is sin. Apart from committed, biblical marriage¹, it becomes an act of the flesh—empty of the beauty and depth that God intended as a reflection of His love and faithfulness.

With this perspective in place, we are now prepared to move into the book of *Song of Solomon* and examine it chapter by chapter.

¹ Refer to addendum entitle: “What Is Biblical Marriage?”