

## The book that is “... a lock for which the key has been lost ... “



**Acts 8:26-39** tells of the conversion of the Ethiopian eunuch. In the middle of a conversation between Phillip and said eunuch, a question is asked that could also be asked of the book we are about to study. [Phillip asks, “Do you understand what you are reading?” “How can I, unless someone guides me?”] After I began studying this book, I can relate! This book has been called the most obscure book of at least the Old Testament, maybe of the entire Bible. Yet it is a fascinating and deep book –so much so

that Professor Christopher W. Mitchell, a man who earnestly worked on a 1,300 page commentary on this book, concluded, “. . . my desire is to spend another decade to delve more deeply into *this most difficult book* of sacred Scripture . . . “This book is, to say the very least, a CHALLENGING book to read and interpret!

In this first lesson, we seek honest direction for navigating through the often dark but beautiful waters of this, the most unique book in the Bible. With **four guideposts** in place, we can work our way through this potentially embarrassing but also amazingly practical, useful book.

### **Guidepost #1: This is a SONG.**

**1:1a... What we know this is not, what it is, and a profound insight into why it’s written.** // It’s not a letter, gospel, law, prophecy, or like the book of Revelation, an apocalyptic revelation. This is a SONG, and a SONG is written to be sung. (Now aren’t you glad I’m guiding you through this book?)

What we learn from Israelite Wedding Festivals . . . // This song was most likely written to be sung during the 7 day marriage festivals that were the norm the Israelite wedding celebrations of that day (Genesis 29:27). Like the temple hired professional singers and musicians for worship, you could also hire professional singers and musicians for this week long WEDDING FESTIVAL. The day of the wedding, the bride and groom emerge from their wedding chambers, the wine is served, and the singers begin their love song medley [Lettermen’s “Love is a many splendored thing” and “When I fall in love”, Herb Albert’s “this guys in love with you”, Elvis’ “can’t help falling in love,” The Captain and Toenail’s, “love will keep us together,” Diana Ross & Lionel Ritchie’s “Endless Love,” and the Commodores’ “. . . you’re once, twice, three times a lady . . . “ // country flavored Randy Travis’ “I’m gonna love you forever & ever Amen”, George Strait’s “Carrying your love for me,” Charley Pride’s “Kiss an angel good morning,” ] There’s a soprano, an alto joins in, and they call back and forth, sort of like an opera . . . a significant step up in class from “daddy sang bass, momma sang tenor, me and little brother would join right in there . . . “ This wedding singer group, called “the daughters of Jerusalem” provided the musical commentary of what was going on! Day after day, for SEVEN DAYS, a PERFECT CELEBRATION of the CREATION of the NEW CREATION of man and wife as one! IOW, this book is intended PRIMARILY to be SUNG. Hebrew weddings would be weddings with a soundtrack from the seating of the Grandmothers to the couple running out to the car to speed away to their honeymoon destination! THIS BOOK IS A SONG!

**The power and play of words in this book; and what poetry requires us to DO . . .** // This book is a poem, this book is lyrical, listen to the repeated “s’s”! In this book, we must first understand and feel the power and play of the words (like w/ANY good poetry) and their appeal to the imagination! [There’s a difference between saying “She walks in beauty, like the night // of cloudless climes and starry skies // And all that’s best of dark and bright // meet in her aspect and her eyes. Thus mellowed to that tender light // which heaven to gaudy day denies.” AND SAYING . . . “A woman in a black dress with shiny beads looked pretty when she walked by.” POINT BEING, if you turn a poem to a statement, it loses its punch. We need to FEEL the message of this song, to SMELL the Myrrh, frankincense, and aloes, to TOUCH the polished ivory, to TASTE the wine & apples, to HEAR the flowing streams, to SEE the gazelles leaping over the mountains . . . to be WARMED by the fire!

### **Guidepost #2: This is a SONG about human LOVE.**

**The context is significant here. Remember: This book wasn’t written in the 60’s!** The CONTEXT of this song, the SETTING, is MARRIAGE. In the culture the time and place where this song takes place, there were only 2 kinds of love: TRULY FREE LOVE between a man and a woman in marriage; and sexual slavery, which is found in adultery, fornication, and other God-forbidden acts that enslave people rather than give people freedom to really love. The context of the song is found in the language of a permanent pledge (2:16a; 7:5; 8:4). The poetry may be rather explicit, but the ethical limits for what the poetry is describing is within the context or boundaries of MARRIAGE.

**As now, so then, this book celebrates something (that should be) special!** That is, the PHYSICAL EXPRESSION of LOVE within the context of MARRIAGE.

**The problem, however, is that people have down through the ages “spiritualized” and “allegorized” away the meaning of this book. And the Church and Christian Faith have suffered.** // [e.g., “What?? Your religion has nothing to say about sex except that it is BAD?!?” God has created a powerful force that motivates people to take a lot of radical actions they would not have taken were it not for this force! In SOS, this force is compared with fire; and as you know, fire is useful when contained, destructive w/o boundaries [BBQ, fireplace, fire pit . . .]. We have a choice: We can let our fallen culture dictate the boundaries of this force (no boundaries), or we can seek God’s will for how this force can be contained, for God’s glory and for our good. SOMEONE is going to call the shots (and already IS calling the shots, starting @ about 10 years old, if not sooner!) You & your children can learn from God through what the Bible reveals as GOD’s good plan for this force, or you can learn from a fallen culture w/no convictions beyond “If it feels good, DO IT!”

**Actually, this book reveals a beautiful balance!** The lyrics of this love song are candid, but not crude. The lyrics are not prudish, but neither are they immodest. The lyrics of this songs are far removed from the sexual anarchy and idiocy of our top 40 music, as well as the crass love poetry of the ancient Near East. This song has a beautiful balance: The content is adult, but at the same time adolescent appropriate. The lyrics are not X-rated; they are PG = parental guidance recommended! The marriage revealed in SOS is NOT simply a concession to the necessity of procreation but an affirmation of the beauty, chastity, and sacredness of human love. Again, this is a song about HUMAN LOVE between a man and a woman, set in the context of marriage.

**\*\* Marriage is not simply a CONCESSION to the necessity of PROCREATION, but an affirmation of the beauty, CHASTITY, and SACREDNESS of LOVE between a MAN and a WOMAN. \*\***

### **Guidepost #3: This book is found in the BIBLE.**

**This book uses Hebrew words, names, places, poetic devices, AND a Hebrew author!** NOT something scribbled in graffiti on a NYC Subway. The imagery is found in other places in the Bible, from Genesis to Isaiah to Jeremiah; as well as reading this positive marital imagery in contrast to Israel's unfaithfulness. And don't forget, JTB calls Jesus "The Bridegroom" (John 3:29) & our "one husband" (2 Cor 11:2), whose kingdom is like a wedding feast (Matt. 22:2; Rev. 19:7).

**One Big Story opens our eyes to the story of this particular book.** Jesus is the bridegroom, we are the bride, and there is a love that undergirds all reality and in whose presence alone all longing can be satisfied. It is the love of God in Christ.

### **Guidepost #4: This book is written to give us WISDOM.**

**This book was written by SOLOMON not in his YOUTH, but in his old age. In fact, the author sets himself up as a FOIL in this book!** Solomon knows from experience how NOT to be faithful and pure and intimate with one wife (It's hard to be truly intimate with 700 wives), and Solomon is saying, "Listen, on the matter of marriage, do as I SAY and NOT as I DID!" Don't emulate MY love life; emulate this couple's simple, monogamous, faithful, passionate love for each other!

**The primary target audience of this book is:** Unmarried, single young women, "the daughters of Jerusalem". It addresses women of marriageable age, their maturing bodies desire marital intimacy but are still unmarried. These young women are being admonished to WAIT for physical intimacy. Their bodies are saying "yes," their God-given instincts for intimacy are saying "Yes", the young men in their lives are saying "Yes!" or maybe "PLEEEEEEZE?"

**And the wisdom of this book can be summarized in these words:** Wait for marriage! The protagonist in this song is a married woman, who tells the young unmarried women, the "daughters of Jerusalem", "WAIT FOR THIS!" Cool your jets! Don't revv the engines just now. Disregard what your peers are telling you. Disregard what the music & the movies are telling you [Love, then sex . . . not sex, then love, maybe . . .] Wait for marriage. It WILL be WORTH it!

**The difference between this book and Proverbs can be stated in this way:** PROVERBS is a book for boys, for young men. The word "son" is used @ least 40 times; the word "daughter" is NEVER used! "My son, stay away from that kind of girl, and don't marry this kind of girl; but save yourself for THAT Girl (*Proverbs 31*). The SONG OF SONGS is a book for girls, for young ladies, and the message is "PATIENCE, UNCOMPROMISED PURITY, And THEN PASSION". In both books, the message is, "Take a cold shower".

**What this book asks all married people is:** HOW'S YOUR LOVE LIFE? It's not standing still, for sure. It's either moving TOWARDS God's goal for marriage or AWAY FROM God's goal. Sad fact is, some marriage "gardens" are being sadly neglected – and your family, neighborhood, and world needs to see what a good and godly marriage full of love and passion looks like. When marriage is referred to as "unholy acrimony" and the wife is referred to as "the ole ball and chain," Houston, we've got a problem! This

Song is designed by God to SUSTAIN loving marriages and RENEW loveless marriages. Perhaps it will be even better than listening to “your favorite song” on the radio or watching “You’ve Got Mail” or “The Princes Bride” on Netflix or HBO!

Fact is, the Bible says Christ the Bridegroom is PASSIONATE about His bride, the church (Christians)! And CHRISTIAN COUPLES who display a deep, deep intimate love for each other . . . Christian Couples who live out a GOSPEL-SHAPED LOVE -- THOSE CHRISTIAN COUPLES are giving a good witness to the world of the kind of love that can only be found by people who are passionate about both the LORD and PASSIONATE about each other! We LOVE, and we love WELL, ONLY b/c Christ first loved US!

If you’re unmarried, *wait!* If you’re married, *warm up!* Now, THAT’S wisdom!

**HERE’S A PROMISE TO YOU:** This is a *beautiful* book, a book that ultimately provides a window through which we see the love of our bridegroom, Christ, for us, His bride. Lord willing, I will NOT make this book into an *awkward* book for us to study together, much less an OFFENSIVE book for us to cringe-read! I will encourage YOU to read parts of the book, even the whole book, but I will not personally read aloud certain parts of the book [like my friend Rocky had to in a small country church in MS]! I simply want us to better understand this VERY PRACTICAL book and pray that our relationships will be *transformed by* this book! You’ve never read or heard anything like this before in a Bible study, but I hope and pray you will be drawn TO, and not in ANY way be repulsed BY, this book! **THIS is God’s wisdom for both singles and married, and that would include ALL of us!**