

BACKGROUND ON THE SONG OF SONGS

Structure:

- The Song of Songs contains 8 chapters with a total of 117 verses.
- It is written in chiastic structure or *chiasm*. **This is a literary method that introduces a series of topics then reintroduces them in reverse order.** Borrowing from the appendix notes from Dr. Craig Glickman (Solomon's Song of Love, 2004), the briefest outline of the entire song (1:2-8:14) is as follows:

A: Beginning of story (1:2-2:7)

B: Solomon's invitation for Shulamith to enjoy a spring *day*, framed by refrains (2:5-17)

C: Shulamith's search in the night and reunion with Solomon (3:1-5)

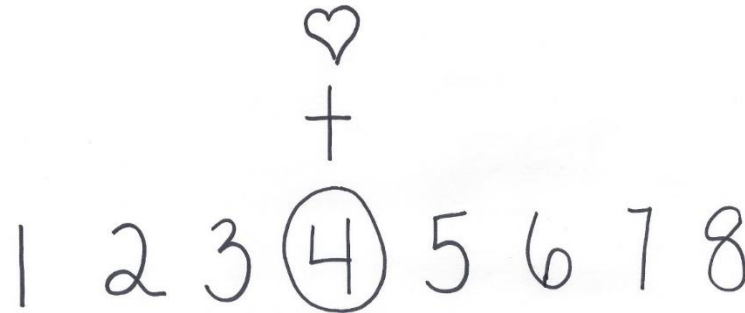
D: Wedding day and night (3:6-5:1)

C': Shulamith's reluctance in the *night* but reunion with Solomon (5:2-7:9)

B': Shulamith's invitation for Solomon to enjoy a spring *day*, framed by refrains (7:10-8:4)

A': Completion of story (8:5-14)

- I have put together this basic diagram of the Song as another way to understand its structure, where each number represents a chapter of the book. As you can see, **chapter 4 is the central chapter of the book.**



It is both the beginning and the end of God's plan of redemption for the world, discussing both the cross of Jesus Christ and the consummation of His marriage. We will discuss this in detail when we cover chapter 4 in our lessons. **For now, understand that the total story line of the Song of Songs centers around chapter 4.**

Historical:

- Written approximately 970 BC by King Solomon, son of David and Bathsheba

2 Samuel 12:24-25—

Then David comforted Bathsheba his wife, and went in to her and lay with her. So she bore a son, and he called his name Solomon. Now the LORD loved him, and He sent *word* by the hand of Nathan the prophet: So he called his name Jedidiah [lit. *Beloved of the LORD*], because of the LORD.

- Primarily set in Jerusalem, most likely during the building and completion of the 1st Temple

1 Kings 6:1, 37-38—

And it came to pass in the four hundred and eightieth year after the children of Israel had come out of the land of Egypt, in the fourth year of Solomon's reign over Israel, in the month of Ziv, which is the second month, that he began to build the house of the LORD.

In the fourth year the foundation of the house of the LORD was laid, in the month of Ziv. And in the eleventh year, in the month of Bul, which is the eighth month, the house was finished in all its details and according to all its plans. **So he was seven years in building it.**

- And during Solomon's marriage to Pharaoh's daughter, his first and only wife for over 20 years of his 40-year reign*

1 Kings 3:1, 7:8; 2 Chronicles 8:11—

Now Solomon made a treaty with Pharaoh king of Egypt, and married Pharaoh's daughter; then he brought her to the City of David until he had finished building his own house, and the house of the LORD, and the wall all around Jerusalem.

And the house where he dwelt *had* another court inside the hall, of like workmanship. Solomon also made a house like this hall for Pharaoh's daughter, whom he had taken *as wife*.

Now Solomon brought the daughter of Pharaoh up from the City of David to the house he had built for her, for he said, "My wife shall not dwell in the house of David king of Israel, because *the places* to which the ark of the LORD has come are holy."

*It wasn't until later in Solomon's reign when he took other wives who turned his heart after other gods (1 Kings 11:1-4).

People in the Song of Songs

- **King Solomon** is both the author of the Song of Songs and the leading “Beloved.” Solomon received the gift of song writing as did his father, King David, who wrote many of the Psalms.

The Song of Songs was his most important composition during his lifetime, which is why he titled it “*The song of songs, which is Solomon’s*” (Song of Songs 1:1). Isn’t it amazing to think that the writer of the book of Proverbs and Ecclesiastes, the so-called wisest man who ever lived, believed the Song of Songs was his highest work? Let’s look at this incredible description of God’s gifting of him from 1 Kings:

1 Kings 4:29-34—

And God gave Solomon wisdom and exceedingly great understanding, and largeness of heart like the sand on the seashore. Thus Solomon’s wisdom excelled the wisdom of all the men of the East and all the wisdom of Egypt. For he was wiser than all men—than Ethan the Ezrahite, and Heman, Chalcol, and Darda, the sons of Mahol; and his fame was in all the surrounding nations. He spoke three thousand proverbs, and his songs were one thousand and five. Also he spoke of trees, from the cedar tree of Lebanon even to the hyssop that springs out of the wall; he spoke also of animals, of birds, of creeping things, and of fish. And men of all nations, from all the kings of the earth who had heard of his wisdom, came to hear the wisdom of Solomon.

- The Song of Songs was written in the Hebrew language originally. Using the original language of the song, the identity of the speaker or speakers has been added by Bible publishers to show who may be singing each lyric. We have clues because the Hebrew language contains masculine and feminine pronouns. I like the way the New King James version of the Bible denotes when each person may be speaking:

| | |
|----------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| The Beloved | The Shepherd-King of Israel and Bridegroom/Husband of the woman |
| The Shulamith* | the vineyard keeper/shepherdess and Gentile princess-bride and wife of the Shepherd-King of Israel |
| The Daughters of Jerusalem | Companions of the Shulamith |
| The Brothers | The Shulamith's brothers ("my mother's sons" (1:6)) |
| Companions | Friends of the Bridegroom |
| The Watchmen | Keepers of the city (possibly angelic) |

*The NKJV calls her "The Shulamite" but in the original language her name is literally "The Shulamith." This subtle distinction is important to note when we get to the end of chapter 6, when she receives this name formally and what it means in relation to Solomon's name.

- There are several other women alluded to in the Song of Songs, namely
 - Tamar (Genesis 38)
 - Rahab (Joshua 2, 6)
 - Ruth (Book of Ruth)
 - Bathsheba (2 Samuel 11, 12:1-25; 1 Kings 1, 2:13-25)
 - and prophetically, Mary, the mother of Jesus (Luke 1:26-56, 2:1-20) and Israel as a nation (Revelation 12)

Amazingly, each of these women are listed as the only women in the genealogy of Jesus Christ! (see Matthew 1:1-17)

- The story of Joseph (Genesis 37, 39-50), son of Jacob, is also alluded to and woven into many parts of the Song of Songs.
