

The Context Bible

Life Group Lesson 4

John 1:29-2:12

Introduction to the Context Bible

Have you ever wished the Bible was easier to read through like an ordinary book – cover to cover? Because the Bible is a collection of 66 books, it makes reading like an ordinary book quite difficult. Compounding this difficulty is the fact that the later writers of the New Testament, were often quoting or referencing passages in the Old Testament. In fact, much of the New Testament makes better sense only if one also considers the Old Testament passages that place the text into its scriptural context.

You are reading a running commentary to The Context Bible. This arrangement of Scripture seeks to overcome some of these difficulties. Using a core reading of John's gospel, the book of Acts, and the Revelation of John, the Context Bible arranges all the rest of Scripture into a contextual framework that supports the core reading. It is broken out into daily readings so that this program allows one to read the entire Bible in a year, but in a contextual format.

Here is the running commentary for week four, along with the readings for week five appended. Join in. It's never too late to read the Bible in context!

Week Four Readings

1/20 John the Baptist & the Lamb of God Jn 1:29-34

Context: Focus on the different types of sacrifice. Jesus is called the "lamb," not a bull, a dove, or a goat (all of which were used for various sacrifices).

Ex 12:1-28
Lev 4-5
Mt 3

1/21 Jesus Begins His Ministry Jn 1:35-39

Context: As Jesus began his ministry, the other gospels inserted several key events following Jesus' baptism. Several gospels reference Old Testament passages that should be considered in context.

Mk 1:9-13
Isa 64
Lk 5:1-11
Mt 4:12-25
Isa 9:1-5
Lk 3:18-22
Mk 1:14-20
Isa 42:18-25

1/22 Jesus - Messiah Jn 1:40-42

Context: "Messiah" means "anointed." Historically the kings of Israel were "anointed," and the Old Testament gives us examples of the special place for divinely appointed, anointed royalty.

1 Sam 8:1-10:16
2 Sam 5:1-5
Ps 21
Ps 72

1/23 Nathaniel's Call Jn 1:43-51

Context: The calling of Nathaniel echoes heavily the Genesis story of Isaac. Reading these Genesis chapters should help everyone try to find the echos.

Gen 27-30

1/24 Nathaniel's Call Jn 1:43-51

Gen 31-33

1/25 A Celebration of Marriage Jn 2:1-12

Context: The Song of Solomon is a celebration of marriage and marital love. Consider the wedding at Cana in that light.

Song of Sol 1-4

1/26 Off

JOHN THE BAPTIST AND THE LAMB OF GOD (John 1:29-34)

In this interesting passage, John points to Jesus and proclaims him the “Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world.” Many who read this immediately turn to the Old Testament idea of the sacrifice for the Day of Atonement.

Yet on the Day of Atonement, while there are lambs offered for sacrifice, it is the male goat that is the “sin offering” (Num. 29:7-11). In the more detailed instructions of Lev. 16, the Israelites were told to offer a bull for the sins of the priests followed by two goats for the sin offering of the people.

Lev 4-5

If we consider the general sin offerings instructed under the Law (Set out in Leviticus 4), we again have a bull for the sin offering of the priests, a bull for the sin of the “whole Israelite community,” a male goat for unintentional sins of a community “leader,” a female goat for unintentional sins of an ordinary Israelite, and a *female* lamb as the ordinary sin offering.

To us, the differences may seem either irrelevant or indistinguishable, but to a people who have had various sacrifices for various reasons since birth, it was as normal and understood as road signs are to a driver today. No experienced driver confuses a stop sign with a speed limit sign.

Even in Leviticus 9, where a male lamb is offered as a “burnt offering,” it is not the sin offering. The sin offering is a goat.

There are male lambs offered as general burnt offerings, as offerings for “guilt” for ceremonial cleansing for one defiled by a skin disease (Lev. 14). One under a Nazarite vow sacrifices a male lamb if that person is defiled by coming into contact with a dead person or at the conclusion of the vow as a burnt offering (Num. 6). When the tabernacle was dedicated, male lambs were offered as “peace offerings, but again the sin offerings were male goats (Num. 7). This pattern is repeated in the other “sacrifice instruction” passages in the Old Testament.

Ex 12:1-28

The Passover is a big exception to this pattern. In the Passover, for all Israel, the lamb sacrificed was a male, without blemish. It was the blood of this lamb that was painted on the lintels and over the doorways. The blood of the male lambs caused the angel of death to Passover the houses with those under the blood of the lamb. Those without the male lamb’s blood faced the “judgments” of the Lord.

Mt 3

Matthew 3 presents Matthew's synopsis of John the Baptist's ministry. Matthew points out that the work of Jesus was of Supreme importance and holiness. It was a work of and with the Holy Spirit. It was a work of repentance. Even the best most perfect sacrifice, without the right heart of the penitent, is no real sacrifice. It's just a killing.

JESUS BEGINS HIS MINISTRY (John 1:35-39)

In John, after Jesus' baptism at the hands of John the Baptist, Jesus begins his ministry by calling to him "disciples." The Greek for "disciples" is *mathetes* (μαθητής), and it means a "student," "pupil," or "apprentice." They were people who were considered "attached" to a certain teacher for instruction.

The first two disciples were originally disciples of John the Baptist. On again hearing John describe Jesus as "the Lamb of God," these two leave John and being following Jesus. Turning and seeing them, Jesus asks, in essence, "what are you doing?" The two called Jesus "rabbi," which John correctly translates as "teacher," but we can add a translation for the specific suffix (the "-i" at the end) and note they called Jesus *my* teacher. They were attaching themselves to Jesus, and immediately set themselves to seeing both to his needs and their direction. They asked, "Where are you staying for the night." Jesus recognized their new role as his students in his reply, "Come and see."

It should not go unnoticed that John the Baptist was quick to release his own disciples to follow another, for Jesus was no simple "other." John was called to point people to Jesus. It could be no clearer than him pointing his own disciples to leave him and follow Jesus.

Mark 1:9-13

Unlike John, Mark transitions his narrative into Jesus' ministry by first inserting the temptation of Jesus in the wilderness between the baptism by John and the calling of disciples.

Before he does so, Mark uses key language in describing the baptism of Jesus. Mark says,

And when he came up out of the water, immediately he saw the heavens being torn open and the Spirit descending on him like a dove.

Note the ESV usage of “torn open.” From the Greek word *schizo* (σχίζω), from which we get “schizophrenia,” this word means “split.” Mark says the heavens “split apart.” It is a picture like that painted by Isaiah in Isaiah 64:1

Isaiah 64

Isaiah 64 is a passage where the people of Judah are praying for God’s direct intervention into their crisis. They fail to see God as moving in the ordinary events of the day, and long for him to split the heavens and come down. In another metaphor, they ask him to be the fire that catches wood ablaze and brings water to boil.

The people know that God is unlike all other gods. He is interested in their lives and acts for his people. But the sins of the people have driven a wedge between them and God. No one is righteous, and the very best deeds they have are still a polluted garment compared to God.

The prayer of the people, however, is that as a potter molds clay, they wish God would fashion his people, forgiving their sins and intervening into the misery they brought upon themselves by their sin.

This needed intervention is echoed as Jesus starts his ministry baptized by John. The heavens were torn apart, God the Holy Spirit descended and the rift between people and God was mended.

Luke 5:1-11

Luke sculpts his portrait of Jesus’ work and ministry by placing not only the temptations between the baptism and the call of disciples, but also a rejection of Jesus in Nazareth. Then in Luke 5, we read of Jesus calling his disciples with a teaching story.

By the Sea of Galilee, the fishermen had finished a night of unsuccessful fishing and were washing their nets. Jesus got into one of the two boats and asked Simon (Peter) to row out from shore a bit. Jesus then sat and taught the crowd before having Peter cast his nets out.

Peter was a pro. He knew this was neither the time nor place. Peter did not embarrass Jesus by saying as much. Instead, he simply said, “Master, we



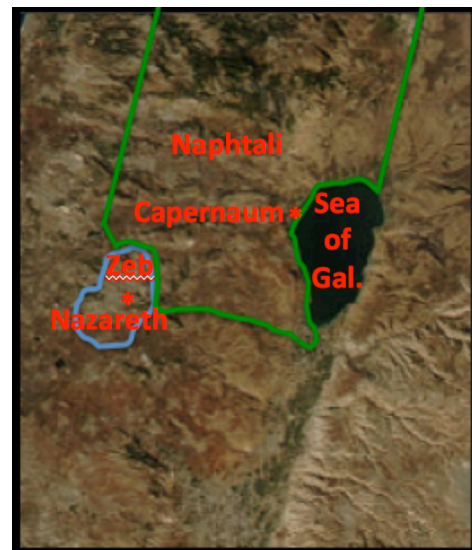
This is a replica of a 1st century Galilean fishing boat uncovered in the Sea of Galilee in 1986. It is 27 feet long and is likely very much like the boat used by the apostles.

fished all night and caught nothing.” Even with that, however, Peter noted he was glad to do as the “Master” told him. Peter did so, and never caught so many fish. The other boat had to come help haul them, even as the heavy load was breaking their nets.

Peter knew the import more than most. He was also acutely aware of the Isaiah 64 problem. Peter was a sinful man who had *no business* being around Jesus. Jesus brushed aside Peter’s humble effort at withdrawing, and told Peter to follow him and become a fisher of men. Peter and did so, along with his two fishing partners, James and John, the sons of Zebedee.

Matthew 4:12-25 and Isaiah 9:1-5

Matthew notes in his portrait that Jesus began his ministry from Capernaum. Jesus had moved there, Matthew noted, in fulfillment of the Isaiah 9 prophecy about the Messiah coming from the land of Zebulun, which included Nazareth, and Naphtali, which included the Sea of Galilee. Isaiah used language in his prophecy that echoed that of the Gospel of John earlier – Jesus as the light of the world.



And leaving Nazareth he went and lived in Capernaum by the sea, in the territory of Zebulun and Naphtali, the land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali, the way of the sea, beyond the Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles— the people dwelling in darkness have seen a great light, and for those dwelling in the region and shadow of death, on them a light has dawned.

Matthew then moves his narrative into the ministry of Jesus going throughout Galilee healing disease and proclaiming the gospel, gaining fame and being followed even by those of the Gentile lands, as proclaimed by Isaiah.

Luke 3:18-22

Luke includes the ministry beginning in much the same fashion, but puts it into the time period when John the Baptist was arrested.

Mark 1:14-20

In that same time frame, as we rejoin Mark's narrative, we read Jesus calling Simon and Andrew as well as James and John, all of whom left their fishing gear behind to follow the Lord. Mark emphasizes the thrust of Jesus' message, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel" (Mk 1:15).

Isaiah 42:18-25

In contrast to the reactions of Jesus' first disciples, the selection from Isaiah 42, sets out the failure of Israel to hear and see the teaching of the Lord. This is a passage that will echo throughout the ministry of Jesus as there are those who see, but are blind to his message. Those who can hear but are deaf to his message. The reading sets up the contrast for those of us reading the word and hearing the Word. Do we listen with ears to hear and eyes to see?

JESUS - MESSIAH (John 1:40-42)

John gives a bit more detail on how Jesus came to the fishermen in Capernaum. Simon Peter's brother Andrew was one of the disciples of John the Baptist who heard of Jesus and began following him. Andrew brought Jesus to Peter and told him they had found the "Messiah" ("Christ" in Greek, "Anointed One" in English). When Jesus met Peter, Jesus pronounced that "Peter" would henceforth be called "Cephas."

"Cephas" is a Greek transliteration¹ from the Aramaic word for "rock," (in a masculine form). Literally, Jesus is calling Peter "Rock Man." Or perhaps, "Rocky." "Peter" comes from the Greek word meaning much the same things.

For Jesus to change Peter's name carries dual significance. First, since someone's name was to incorporate the whole persona of the person (much like today when we speak of someone having a "good name" meaning a reputation as a good person), Jesus was speaking into Peter's character. Moreover, to change someone's name was an action signifying a level of authority over that person. We read, for example, of Pharaoh Neco changing Eliakim's name to Jehoiakim in 2 Kings 23:34.

¹ A "translation" means to put one work into the language of another. A "transliteration," which is what we have here, means to put the letters of one language into the letters of another. The Greek letters for Cephas (κηφᾱς) are transliterations of the Aramaic letters כִּפָּא.

Jesus as Messiah had both the insight into Peter's character, as well as the authority to change his name.

1 Samuel 8:1-10:16

In this reading, we have the Israelites asking Samuel to transition them into a monarchy, where an earthly king ruled over them. This was not best case scenario for the people, or it would have been God's plan. Samuel, however, after giving due warning, did so, upon God's instructions.

Israel's first king was Saul, from the tribe of Benjamin. Saul became king after being "anointed." Samuel took a flask of oil, and poured it over Saul's head in an act that recognized Saul as king and ruler, saying,

Has not the LORD anointed you to be prince over his people Israel?
(1 Sam. 10:1).

The Hebrew word "anointed" is *mashach* (משח), from which we get the Anglicized word "Messiah." In the Old Testament, we read of God anointing the priests (Lev. 7:35-36) as well as kings. Jesus, as Messiah was both Priest and King. Jesus also filled the role of "prophet," but that will come in a later lesson!

2 Samuel 5:1-5

After Saul lost his right to rule in the eyes of God, Samuel was sent to anoint a second king of Israel. The second king was David, a man after God's own heart (1 Sam 13:14; Acts 13:22). David was also "anointed," and he becomes the reference point for many "anointing" or Messianic Psalms that speak to the coming "anointed" King of kings.

Psalms 21 and 72

Psalms 21 and 72 are two of many "royal psalms" written about the king. Psalm 21's overtones of immortality ("He asked life of you; you gave it to him, length of days forever and ever") caused many Jews to see this as a Messianic Psalm, referring to the final King of kings, the coming Messiah, whose reign would not end.

We find in Psalm 21 many verses that reflect upon the Lord Jesus as king. Consider verses 5-7:

- His glory is great through your salvation;
- splendor and majesty you bestow on him.

- For you make him most blessed forever;
- you make him glad with the joy of your presence.
- For the king trusts in the LORD,
- and through the steadfast love of the Most High he shall not be moved.

In Psalm 72, we read other verses that call upon God and his relation to the anointed king. There is the prayer that the king will “judge your people with righteousness, and your poor with justice” (Ps. 72:2).

The coming Messiah is to,

defend the cause of the poor of the people, give deliverance to the children of the needy, and crush the oppressor! (Ps 72:4).

His dominion is not limited to Israel’s borders, but is to be from “sea to sea, and from the River to the ends of the earth” (Ps 72:8). Not only will he be worshipped and served by Israel, but “all nations” shall serve him (Ps. 72:11).

All of the blessings in this king are blessings that reflect to the glorious name of God (Ps 72:18-19).

NATHANIEL’S CALL (John 1:43-51)

In this passage we read of Jesus calling Philip, a neighbor of Andrew and Peter in Bethsaida, a town on the northern shore of the Sea of Galilee, a little over 3 miles east of Capernaum.

Philip goes to find Nathanael, and tells Nathanael,

We have found him of whom Moses in the Law and also the prophets wrote, Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph.”

Nathanael is notably skeptical, responding a bit derisively, “Can anything *good* come out of Nazareth?” Philip talked Nathanael into going with him to find out for himself.

As Nathanael approached Jesus, Jesus called out, “Behold, an Israelite indeed, in whom there is no deceit!” Nathanael saw this as a particular insight on Jesus’ part. Nathanael replied, “How do you know me?” Jesus answered,

Before Philip called you, when you were under the fig tree, I saw you.

At this, Nathanael was convinced. He proclaimed Jesus not only his teacher (rabbi), but also the Son of God and King of Israel.

Jesus replied that if Nathanael was ready for that based simply on what Jesus disclosed in his limited conversation, Nathanael would really be moved when he saw,

heaven opened, and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man.

Many are a bit stunned by this story, because it doesn't quite make full sense. Why was Nathanael so moved? Was it simply because Jesus saw him as one with no deceit? Perhaps we are not considering all that is at play here. The Genesis story below plays a part in a likely scenario.

Genesis 27-33

This Genesis section tells the story of Jacob, twin to his brother Esau. Jacob was the younger twin. He was born second, holding onto the ankle of his brother. "Jacob" is from the Hebrew verb that means "to clutch" and "to cheat" (*'aqeb* – עִקֵּב). Jacob was a deceiver. He deceived his deceived his father into receiving a blessing meant for his brother, and he maneuvered his brother out of his birthright for a bowl of stew!

A time came, however, where Jacob became the deceived. His own father-in-law tricked Jacob into marrying Leah, when Jacob had planned on marrying the younger daughter Rachel. In one of many ironic twists in the storyline, Jacob is told that Leah must be married first, as the older sister. In essence, Jacob who tricked himself into a getting the things of the older brother, also got tricked into taking the older sister.

After a time of penance, Jacob returns to his sense, and through struggles and wrestling, becomes a repentant man of God. God renames Jacob, removing the taint of being a "deceit" and instead naming him "Israel." "Israel" means "he strives with God," and became the name for all of his descendants – the nation of Israel.

We read Jacob transforming in character in Genesis 28, where he dreams of the heavens opening and the angels ascending and descending on a flight of stairs reaching from heaven to earth.

This saga is the backdrop to the Nathanael story. Consider the ideas of a number of scholars, that Nathanael was under a fig tree, thinking (or dreaming) about the deceitful one, Jacob, his dream of the staircase, and how God transformed him into Israel, one without deceit. Then as Nathanael approached Jesus, he was called out for his thoughts, as “an Israelite indeed, in whom there is no deceit!” Nathanael wanted to know how Jesus knew his thoughts, and Jesus pointed out that Nathanael had been thinking thusly from under the fig tree.

While that was enough to move Nathanael from skepticism to belief, Jesus did not leave it there. He told Nathanael that Nathanael would see the heavens open, but instead of the bridge between heaven and earth being a simple staircase, it would be Jesus himself – a prophetic word about the coming experience at Calvary.

A CELEBRATION OF MARRIAGE (John 2:1-12)

John 2:1-12 has the passage of Jesus’ first miracle in John, the wedding at Cana. In this story, the party had run out of wine, and once Jesus’ mother sought his help, Jesus turned vats of water into first class wine.

Jesus, the Son of God, celebrated marriage. Marriage was no mere contract between two folks who desired to be together. It was a holy event where God joined man and woman into one. It is a mystical union worthy of an expression of Christ and the church – his bride.

Many readings could supplement this, but we have chosen the Song of Solomon, an Old Testament poem in honor and appreciation of marriage. The readings split with half of the Song in this week’s readings and half in next week’s readings. We include the exposition for both readings in this lesson.

Song of Solomon 1-8

The Song is actually a poetic set of love songs, which may or may not have been spoken by one, two, or more characters. Other cultures contemporary to ancient Israel had love songs and love poems, many of which we still have available for study. Michael V. Fox (not to be confused with actor Michael J. Fox!) has written a thorough comparison of the Song to ancient Egyptian love songs. His efforts have worked toward increasing our understanding of the ancients’ views of life and love.² In a manner akin to the Song, the ancient Egyptian love songs compared love to many of the more precious items of the day:

² Fox, Michael V., *The Song of Songs and the Ancient Egyptian Love Songs* (U. of Wisc. Press 1985).

Your love is as desirable...as oil with honey.³

If the Song is inspected simply on its own terms, without any editorial insertions, in addition to the difficulty of figuring who is speaking where, there are a number of other unusual features of this book, compared to others in the Bible. The content of the book makes it stand out. This is not a book that clearly teaches theology nor does it have any clear religious themes. It is not a history book. It is not a prophetic book, nor even a book that teaches life principles. It has no discernable plot. It is not a collection of worship Psalms, or a book of lamenting. This book, in its most literal reading, is a proclamation of love between a man and a woman.

The Song of Songs is unique in the Bible, for nowhere else within it can be found such a sustained paean to the warmth of love between man and woman. It is completely occupied with that one theme. No morals are drawn; no prophetic preachments are made.⁴

Over the last two thousand plus years, faced with this unique book and the difficulties of interpretation, scholars have suggested a number of different approaches to appreciate and explain the book. Those approaches are often categorized into two separate groups: those with a “literal” reading and those with an “allegorical” reading. Hand in hand with these two groups of interpretations have come assortments of ideas over the type of literature expressed by the Song.

Literal

Some Jewish scholars considered the literal approach as early as the first century; however, it was certainly the minority view among Christians and Jews, at least until the last two hundred years. This literal view sees the Song as a collection of love songs, a collection of songs used in weddings, or even one long expression of love in verse. In part responding to this view, Rabbi Akiva uttered a curse upon anyone who would read or sing the Song of Songs as a mere secular love song.⁵ A literal view of the Song as erotic poetry was even rejected as heresy at the Second Council of Constantinople in 553 AD.

³ *Cairo Love Songs*, Group A:20B(A). See Fox at 31.

⁴ *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, Vol. 19, at 15.

⁵ The *Tosefta* (Sanh. 12:10) records Rabbi Akiva as saying; “He who trills his voice in the chanting of the Song of Songs in the banquet-halls and makes it a secular song has no share in the world to come.”

The cause for concern over a literal interpretation has frequently been both the absence of any direct religious themes, as well as the clearly erotic nature of many poetic verses. The Song does contain verses that are clearly devoted to the physical nature of love as well as a number that are euphemistically phrased, but still discernable after a brief thought. Passages like 1:2, 12-13, 4:1-5 are readily apparent in their statements and references. The metaphors found in 2:5; 2:16; 4:6, 12; 6:2, etc. are not as obvious to 21st century readers, but they make sense upon reflection. The N.I.V. Study Bible does an especially good job at pointing out some of these metaphors in appropriately tactful language. As one begins to follow through these metaphors, the literal approach to the Song becomes more readily understood.

Allegorical

The allegorical ideas behind the Song take on a number of different approaches. Some see in the Song a reflection of God's love for his people. This approach often seeks to impart some "mystical message of comfort and hope...from the text."⁶ With this approach, the shepherd in the Song is seen as representing God, while the Beloved is God's people. The Song then is no longer an a-religious love expression, but is suddenly a great religious expression of an incredibly intense and personal love from God toward his people. This allegorical view is seen as widespread among the rabbis in the time of the New Testament, and is considered by many as the likely prevailing view among the general populace as well.⁷

Some ancient Jewish rabbis saw an allegorical proclamation of God's history with Israel. The *Targum*, an Aramaic translation/commentary on the Jewish Scriptures that dates in the first millennium AD, speaks of the Song as an allegory of Israel's history from the Exodus, through the time of the Targums, and extending further to the time of the Messiah and a third temple.⁸ Some of the more mystical Jewish sages in the Middle Ages saw in the Song an allegory of the union between the active and passive parts of the intellect.

Christian scholars for millennia have seen in the Song the allegorical interpretation of Christ and his love for his bride, the Church. This Christian allegory is further understood and explained by the Ephesians passage where Paul instructed husbands:

⁶ *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, Vol. 19, at 16.

⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸ See, Pope at 95ff for a good exploration of the Targum and its five periods of history supposedly set out in the Song.

Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, so that he might present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish. In the same way husbands should love their wives as their own bodies (Eph. 5:25-28).

The Church Father Origen managed to combine the literal and allegorical ideas. He accepted that the original Song was by Solomon as a celebration of Solomon's marriage with Pharaoh's daughter. Yet Origen then explained that the higher meaning was one that applied the love verses to Christ and his bride, and ultimately Christ and the individual believer. This was but one of many interpretations provided in allegory. Over the millennia, these interpretations have ranged from the Virgin Mary as the beloved, seen then to support her veneration, to "wisdom" being the beloved, indicating the importance God places on wisdom. Because of this wide range of allegorical interpretations, with no real foundation for setting one over an other, scholars have moved from this approach in the last century or so.

The flexibility and adaptability of the allegorical method, the ingenuity and the imagination with which it could be, and was, applied, the difficulty and impossibility of imposing objective controls, the astounding and bewildering results of almost two millennia of application to the Cantic, have all contributed to its progressive discredit and almost complete desertion.⁹

This has brought about the renewed reading of the Song in a literal sense, as lyrics of physical, emotional, and sexual love.

In the midst of these interpretations, there is also a discussion over the form of the Song. Some see the song as a drama; others as a poem(s), still others (few in number) see the Song as an Israelite cultic conversion of a pagan liturgy. These form discussions have taken center stage as the allegorical approach has subsided.

The "form" discussions center on the issue:

If we are to take the Song as a literal proclamation of love, then how is it structured?

This takes head-on the idea of how the passages fit together and whether they are simply read straight away.

⁹ Pope, at 90.

Dramatic Form

Chief among the form ideas in the last two centuries has been that of an early Israelite drama. This theory supposes that the verses consist of speaking roles by different characters in the early Hebrew equivalent of a play. The famous 19th century German scholar Franz Delitzsch readily admitted that,

The *Song* is the most obscure book of the Old Testament.¹⁰

He then proposed that, “The Song is a dramatic pastoral.” As he reconstructed the Song, it had two central characters, the shepherdess named Shulamith and Solomon. He did not consider the piece one for a theatrical performance, but he still divided it into six acts:

1. The lovers hold each other in mutual affection (1:2-2:7).
2. The lovers seek and finally find each other (2:8-3:5).
3. The fetching of the bride followed by the wedding (3:6-5:1).
4. The lovers finding love scorned, but then re-won (5:2-6:9).
5. A description of Shulamith as an attractive yet humble princess (6:10-8:4).
6. The ratification of the love covenant in Shulamith’s home (8:5-14).¹¹

Delitzsch then divided each Act into two scenes.

This all seems nice, tidy, and almost a great explanation, but as one reads through the history of scholars writing on this, it suddenly becomes apparent this approach is less than clear. A number of other scholars using the dramatic approach suggest that there are not two characters, but three! The story is no longer the touching love drama of Delitzsch, but suddenly is a love triangle trying to sort out which love reigns supreme! Still others see the main characters of the drama, but add a chorus and even a narrator!

There is much, much more to be written about the many different views of the Song. Luther rejected the idea of the Song as straight allegory of God and his people, instead opting for the semi-allegorical approach of the Song as describing the peace of Solomon’s empire and the appreciation of Solomon for that peace. In light of all these and so many other views, what are we to do with these eight chapters?

¹⁰ Delitzsch, Franz, *Commentary on the Song of Songs*, (translated by M. G. Easton) (T & T Clark 1885), (republished by Wipf & Stock 2009), at 1.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, at 9-10.

There are several points that can be made in reference to the Song, that, while not giving a full and complete resolution to all the questions posed, certainly can aid us in our lives before the Lord. We will deal with these below in the Points for Home. But first we should consider a few ideas, starting with Bob Dylan.

“The Bob”, as Dylan is affectionately known in our home, has an incredible knack to take lyrics in song and write them in such a way that they promulgate an idea—they make his point—but do so in a generic way that lets the listener personalize the song and relate it to one’s own life. Consider the anti-war anthem “A Hard Rain’s a Gonna Fall.” Dylan has lines like, “I saw a newborn baby with wild wolves all around it.” Or later in that song “I heard one person starve, I heard many people laughin’.” Throughout the song, he makes it clear that there are tragedies and dangers. He does it in metaphor and picture. Is the song an allegory? Is it literal? It is both and neither. It is a poetic representation of his ideas that convey a message that most anyone with much thought can personalize.

I suspect the same is likely true of the Song. We have here in Scripture a Song that is the highest song. This is a song that reaches into the heart in allegory and literal truth. It is a song that expresses the heights of love and devotion. It is a song that can be expanded to any time, any era, and any people, in a way that communicates multiple eternal truths of God.

Week Five Readings

1/27 A Celebration of Marriage Jn 2:1-12

Context: The Song of Solomon is a celebration of marriage and marital love. Consider the wedding at Cana in that light.
Song of Sol 5-8

1/28 John’s 1st Passover Jn 2:13-22

Context: The Song of Solomon is a celebration of marriage and marital love. Consider the wedding at Cana in that light.
Ex 4:21-8:32
Lev 23:4-8

1/29 John’s 1st Passover Jn 2:13-22

Context: John frequently sets Jesus’ life and ministry in events and language of Moses. We see the context here for the Passover.
Ex 9:1-11:10
Ex 12:29-13:4
Ps 69
Mal 2

1/30 John’s 1st Passover - Rebuild the Temple Jn 2:13-22

Solomon built the first temple at great expense and effort over decades. The temple was rebuilt after the Babylonian destruction again at great expense. These readings provide that history the Jews knew well.
2 Chr 2-5
2 Kg 25
Num 18

1/31 John’s 1st Passover - Rebuild the Temple Jn 2:13-22

Ezra 3-7

2/1 Jesus Knows Better than to Trust People Jn 2:23-25

There is something innately untrustworthy about fallen people. These Old Testament selections give a taste of that.
Gen 6-8
Ps 58

2/2 Off
