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The Song of Songs! Let's get right into it!

Depending on your Bible, this book may be called the “Song of Solomon” or the “Song of Songs.” This collection of explicit, erotic poetry has been a controversial book over the centuries. You might assume that the Bible you have has just always been the way it is, but that's not quite the case.

In the early centuries of the church, there was a lot of debate over the Song of Songs. For a while it would be included in the Bible, and then it wouldn't be. The debate kept going back and forth. The book is only eight chapters long, but it's so sexually explicit that Christians really struggled with the idea that it is meant to be part of the Bible.

The Jews formed what we call the Old Testament. They believed the books in the Old Testament have authority, that they were inspired and given by God. This is important, because the Song of Songs was included in that.

What we call the New Testament was formed and made official centuries after Christ's death and resurrection. It took a significant process for the early church to prayerfully recognize and make official the collection of books that form the New Testament.

I mention this because of what we read in 2 Timothy:

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2 Timothy 3:16–17 (NLT)

All Scripture is inspired by God and is useful to teach us what is true and to make us realize what is wrong in our lives. It corrects us when we are wrong and teaches us to do what is right. God uses it to prepare and equip his people to do every good work.

When Paul wrote that, he was writing about the Old Testament—including Song of Songs. It is “useful to teach us,” God has a purpose for it, it's important for us to study it! Even so, the early church really struggled over the Song of Songs's inclusion in the Bible. Their concerns boiled down to two fundamental issues:

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Controversy:

- **It never directly talks about God.** Nowhere in the eight chapters of Song of Songs is there a direct reference to God. For the critics, they argued it may be a good book, but it doesn't teach about God. On the other side of the debate, which eventually won, it was pointed out that Song of Songs celebrates the way God created love and what He intends between a husband and wife in marriage. While God may not be specifically addressed, the book very much teaches God's truth.
- **It is so sexually explicit.** There's just no other way to put it; the poetry in this book is graphic, and for many people, that seemed too shocking to be something meant for the Bible. Even the Jews recognized it was intense content. Song of Songs was read annually out loud on the eighth day of Passover. They would all gather together EXCEPT the boys 12 years old and under. It was literally the world's first PG-13 event. It was considered too adult for the kids.

Over these next few weeks, we're going to really get at the heart God has for the love relationship between a husband and a wife, the love that He intends for them to have — not just a physical one, but also friendship and commitment.

Marriage is a big deal to God. He created it with Adam and Eve, and the Bible is full of verses that affirm the sanctity of marriage. In Ephesians 5:21–23, God reveals through Paul that the ultimate purpose of marriage is to paint a picture of Christ's love for the church!

We are wired to want a relationship. We are not meant to be alone. God designed us in such a way that we long for a marriage love, and that longing is celebrated in Song of Songs. One commentator said that the question should not be why Song of Songs is *IN* the Bible — the question instead should be, “What would the Bible would be like *WITHOUT* Song of Songs?”

Sex is one of the topics that comes up the most in Scripture—and yes, there are passages that make it clear that God created it to build intimacy in a marriage, for a husband and wife to enjoy, and God said that sex was good.

But there is also a lot in Scripture that deals with people abusing sex. The book of Leviticus basically has a list of every possible wrong thing you could do sexually and how it displeases God.

Without Song of Songs, it would be easy to miss that when God says, “Sex is good,” that this passionate description of sexual intimacy, this graphic erotic poetry, is a picture of what God intends sex to be within the context He created it for!¹

Here’s some background on the Song of Songs:

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Background:

- **It was written during time of Solomon; 971 to 931 BC²** (approximately 3,000 years ago). Solomon was king for 40 years.
- **Solomon was King David’s son and built the temple of Jerusalem.** You may know that God told David he had too much blood on his hands, so he could not build the temple. Instead, David provided the materials and wealth so that his son, Solomon, could do so.
- **Solomon was known for being the wisest king of all time.** He began his reign committed to God. When God asked him what he wanted, Solomon told God he wanted wisdom. The Bible says not only did God grant him wisdom, he gave him wealth and incredible success. He was known throughout the world at the time as the wisest King.

1 Kings records:

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1 Kings 4:32 (NLT)

He composed some 3,000 proverbs and wrote 1,005 songs.

Unfortunately, Solomon’s reign did not end on the high note it started on.

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He ended his life distant from God, leaving the nation in chaos. In fact, the nation ended up splitting apart.

¹ Richard S. Hess, *Song of Songs (Baker Commentary On the Old Testament Wisdom and Psalms)* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2017), Kindle location 584.

² Ibid, Kindle location 255.

In 1 Kings 11, God reminds Solomon that he is to follow only God and that he should not marry foreign women. We see the same principle in the New Testament when it tells us to not be unequally yoked (2 Corinthians 6:14).

Here’s the thing — this isn’t a case of God being mean or creating rules just to create rules. The word “yoke” had a double meaning; it’s that thing you might have seen on the shoulders of oxen that were plowing a field. It also referred to a set of beliefs someone would have.

When God calls us to not be unequally yoked, He’s telling us to not marry someone who has a different set of beliefs. I’ve seen this conflict play out over the years.

I’ll meet a couple, they’re in love. One is a Christian, the other is not, but they’ll tell me it doesn’t cause any problems. And it might not — at first. It usually doesn’t erupt until children enter the picture. Suddenly, each parent is concerned about the influence of the other parent; they worry what the other parent is teaching their children. Suddenly, this thing that didn’t matter, matters because of the influence it has. When God tells us to marry other believers, He’s not being mean — He’s helping protect our marriages. He’s setting us up for the best.

God told Solomon the same thing. God warned him that foreign women had foreign gods and beliefs, and that they would pull Solomon away from God.

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1 Kings 11:1–3 (NLT)

Now King Solomon loved many foreign women. Besides Pharaoh’s daughter, he married women from Moab, Ammon, Edom, Sidon, and from among the Hittites. ²The Lord had clearly instructed the people of Israel, “You must not marry them, because they will turn your hearts to their gods.” Yet Solomon insisted on loving them anyway.

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³He had 700 wives of royal birth and 300 concubines. And in fact, they did turn his heart away from the Lord.

Solomon had a lady problem. Even in a time when polygamy — multiple wives — was culturally normal, this was a LOT. The wives of royal birth