

An Overview Of The Song Of Solomon

by BS Poh

We have completed our studies of the Song of Solomon. It is such a rich book, revealing precious nuggets of gold and providing refreshing banquets to our souls. While we have benefited from studying the details, we do not want to lose sight of the wood for the trees. It is good, therefore, to stand back and consider the book as a whole. We shall remind ourselves of the nature of the book, make a review of the chapters, and consider the chief characters of the book.

I. The Nature Of The Book

The Song of Solomon is a love poem describing the relationship between the Shulamite woman and the groom, who is Solomon himself. Is this a literal story, or is it a spiritual allegory? In Chapter 1, we have the INTRODUCTION to this series of studies in which was argued that the book must be treated as a spiritual allegory. That has determined our approach towards the study of the book. As with other books of the Bible, it is important to begin by determining the type of literature we are dealing with - whether it is historical, prophetic, poetic, or didactic. Once that is determined, the normal historical-grammatical-theological method of interpretation must be applied to it just as with other books of the Bible. We would still need to take the texts plainly, to take the texts in context, and to compare Scripture with Scripture. To look upon the book as a spiritual allegory does not mean that we interpret it by the so-called allegorical method popularly used by the Roman Catholics, in which multiple layers of meaning are found in each passage. The allegorical method of interpretation leads to bizarre ideas which we would reject. Instead, we consider this book to be part of Scripture which reveals to us spiritual truths that centre around the Lord Jesus Christ and the salvation found in Him. Did not the Lord say, "all things must be fulfilled which were written in the Law of Moses and *the* Prophets and *the* Psalms concerning Me" (Luke 24:44)? To the Jews, "the Law of Moses, the Prophets and the Psalms" were the three main divisions of the Old Testament. The Lord was saying that the whole of the Old Testament spoke concerning Himself. The Song of Solomon is also part of the Old Testament. Solomon was inspired by the Holy Spirit to write concerning the love relationship between the Saviour and His church.

II. Review Of The Chapters

We shall now make a review of the various chapters of the book. There are eight chapters all together. Each chapter has been expounded in two parts, except for the last, which has been expounded under four parts due to the richness of its substance. We shall extract the conclusions to each part of our studies to have an overview of them here.

Chapter 1

Chapter 1, concerning "Communion With Christ", is divided into "Desiring Christ" and "Longing for Christ". Under "Desiring Christ", covering Chapter 1:1-7, we learn that our desire for Christ should arise from His love for us, be focussed on His person, and be based on His redemptive work. We learn that Christians should desire Christ because He has made

us righteous, redeemed us from our sins, and transformed us into new people. As the years pass, our zeal may appear to be less, but it is compensated by the greater depth and appreciation of spiritual experience. We want to know the Lord better, and we desire Him above all else. We must, therefore, resolve to want Christ above all else, and we must remember with gratitude what we are now, compared to what we were when unconverted. We must reach out to Him in faith, in prayer, and in His word.

Under “Longing for Christ”, covering Chapter 1:7-17, we learn that we must seek communion with the Lord in His word, and in the company of His people. As we do so, we expect the Lord to respond by giving us instructions, and by encouraging us to draw near to Him. We learn also of what it is like to enter into communion with Christ. The Lord will draw near to us to assure us of His presence and of His love for us. We will be induced to engage in personal devotions - by prayer and praise, by meditation upon Him and His word, and by acts of worship and service. We will then be caught up in the love of Christ, exchanging praises and assurances with Him. There may be much trials and sorrow in the world, but what does it matter if the Lord loves us and is with us?

Chapter 2

In Chapter 2, we have “Prophecy Of The Gospel Age”. In the first part, which is about “The Church At Peace”, covering Chapter 2:1-7, we learn that the Lord has made the church beautiful, providing for her needs, and blessing her abundantly. When faithful believers feel weak in their service to Him, He will draw near to comfort and strengthen them. Individuals in the church are warned against disturbing the peace of the church. We come to realize that the church is well-loved by the Lord. We realize that we have not fully fathomed the love of the Lord. We need to delve deeper, and appreciate more, the love of the Lord for His people.

In the second part, we have “The Church Militant”, covering Chapter 2:8-17. We learn that what is prophesied in this portion of Scripture is already fulfilled, is being fulfilled, and will be fulfilled. The Lord has already come to redeem His people. The gospel is going out to all nations, calling out God’s chosen people. The church is responding in worship and in sanctification. The Lord will one day return for His people. We know that eternal blessedness awaits God’s people. We know also that when the Lord returns, He will judge the unbelieving people of the world.

Chapter 3

In Chapter 3, we have “The Precious Gift Of Assurance”. The first part is “Assurance Lost And Regained”, covering Chapter 3:1-5. We learn of the danger of losing the assurance of our salvation. Assurance of salvation is a gift from God that must be treasured and sought after. Many factors may lead to a weakening and loss of assurance. The chief cause is indolence on the part of the believer. To find and keep assurance of salvation, we must seek the Lord in His word, renew our commitment to Him, and maintain peace and communion with the Lord. The assurance of salvation is a precious gift from God. We must seek and pray for it. It is to our comfort and good that we have a strong sense of assurance. Sadly, there are Christians who do not seek for it due to ignorance of this teaching. On the other hand, there are those who claim to have assurance of salvation when they have no reason to be sure.

In the second part, “God’s Seal Of Assurance”, covering Chapter 3:6-11, we learn of the promise of salvation by God to His people. Christ’s people are being called out of the wilderness of the world by the gospel. God has provided salvation for His church by the sufficiency and efficacy of Christ’s atoning death for His people. We must trust the preaching of the gospel to save souls. We must ponder the excellence of Christ more and more. We must also seek assurance of salvation in Christ, who is revealed in the word of God.

Chapter 4

In Chapter 4, we have “Christ’s Love For The Church”. In the first part, we have “Christ’s Estimate Of The Church”, covering Chapter 4:1-6. The Lord looks upon His church as beautiful, and He continues to sanctify her by the power of His Spirit, in accordance to His word. The church has so many qualities that make her beautiful in the Lord’s sight. That the world should miss seeing those qualities is understandable. That believers should fail to see those qualities is such a pity, for they miss the inner comfort of knowing the love of Christ for His people. The Lord loves us and sees so many things beautiful about us. The right response is for us to thank Him and attempt to be even more pleasing to our Lord by improving on our spiritual qualities.

In the second part, we have “Christ’s Delight In His Church”, covering Chapter 4:7-16. Christ takes delight in His church because of her active characteristics. These may be summarized under four key words - vision, devotion, consecration, and proclamation. Christ invites the church to have a lofty vision of the task set before her in the world. He takes delight in her devotion to Him. He takes delight also in her consecration to Him. The church responds with the deep desire to proclaim His name to the world. How we are overwhelmed by His love for us! We owe to the Lord a debt of love which we are unable to repay.

Chapter 5

In Chapter 5, we have “Backsliding And Restoration”. In the first part, we have “Beware Of Backsliding!”, covering Chapter 5:1-8. There are three consequences of backsliding, including becoming spiritually barren, having the conscience seared, and losing one’s spiritual sharpness. These consequences are never pleasant. Any right-thinking believer would not want to experience them. Such consequences come from indolence, self-centredness, and procrastination in our walk with God. They come to us when we are complacent with regard to the blessing of God upon us. How good it will be to have sustained blessing from the Lord, to know His presence, to be filled continually by His Spirit. The children of God need not have to backslide. The tendency to backslide is always there. We must take stock of ourselves, and not allow that to happen.

In the second part, we have “Reaching Out For Restoration”, covering Chapter 5:9-16. When our hearts grow cold toward spiritual things, when we backslide in our Christian life, there is only one recourse for us - that is, to look for Jesus Christ again. We seek Him in the company of God’s people, and we seek Him in His word. We come to hear His word proclaimed, regardless of whether it is a “teaching service” or a “gospel service”. It might seem that the preacher is attacking you through his preaching. He might come across as harsh and lacking in compassion when, in fact, he is being faithful to the Lord, and to His word. Preachers who say nice things to please their hearers are not faithful watchmen of the Lord. You must listen to faithful preaching, and continue to come to hear God’s word preached. Soon, the beneficial effects of God’s word will be experienced by you. You will find God’s word soothing. It will be balm to your bruised soul. Faithful preaching will show you much of Jesus Christ. The Lord, in all His beauty and strength, will be revealed. As you ponder on the person and work of Christ, you will be revived in your soul. Soon, you will be reveling in His love. Spiritual strength will be channelled to you. The Spirit of God will fill you. In no time, you will be declaring to many the unsurpassed beauty of your Lord.

Chapter 6

In Chapter 6, we have “Christ’s Love For The Militant Church”. In the first part, we have “The Beauty Of The Church Militant”, covering Chapter 6:1-10. The church militant must be militant. The church on earth must be actively serving the Lord. There is no such thing as the

church militant that is passive. The healthy church is one that is infused with the power of the Holy Spirit to serve the Lord. For the power of the Spirit to be experienced, the church must seek a close walk with the Lord. Since the church is made up of individual members, they must draw near to the Lord and be willing to obey Him. This is especially directed to the backslidden Christian, who must seek the Lord, in the word of God, and in the company of God's people.

We place the primary importance on coming to hear God's word, rather than your service to the Lord. It is as we hear God's word that we are built up in our understanding and in our faith. It is in the pages of Scripture that we meet with the Lord. It is then that we would respond in thanksgiving and praise. It is then that we would give of ourselves willingly to Him in service. You cannot remain long in the church, merely growing in head knowledge of the truth. The truth will strengthen and comfort those who are submitted to the Lord. It will trouble those who resist God's will and refuse to obey Him. You will either finish life on earth as a poor specimen of Christian, who barely manages to limp into heaven, or you will submit yourself to the Lord and be escorted triumphantly into the presence of the Lord.

In the second part, we have "The Power Of The Church Militant", covering Chapter 6:11-13. The spiritually healthy church, or believer, will be sharing in the concerns of the Lord, just as the bride will be tending the garden of the groom. We work towards producing fruit in our service to the Lord. In the Bible, spiritual fruit comes in the form of growth in Christian graces as well as advance in the gospel. Growth in Christian graces - such as love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control - mentioned in Galatians 5:22, come to us only when we learn correct doctrines and obey the commandments of the Lord. Advance in the gospel comes from being involved in the life of the church. The daughters of Jerusalem need to be ministered to, while the bride marches forward as an army. In other words, our gifts are to be used for the edification of the church, while we get involved in spreading the gospel and planting churches. All these are possible only when we are integrated into the life of the local church.

As we get involved in the life of the church, the Lord will bless us with His presence and power. We might even become so filled with His Spirit that great joy and effectiveness are seen in our service to Him. We might even be blessed with true spiritual revival as we serve Him. For this to happen, we will need to watch against allowing a root of bitterness to grow in the heart. We might, in fact, say it is pointless to become members of the church if we are unwilling to serve the Lord. How would we be different from professing believers who refuse to become church members? In fact, there are non-members who have a better spirit than unwilling members and are, therefore, used by the Lord despite not being members. These said, we must see the importance of church membership if we are to be blessed by the Lord.

Chapter 7

Chapter 7 is about "Christ's Love For The Maturing Church". The first part is "The Beauty Of The Maturing Church", covering Chapter 7:1-9. The maturing church is described in her constituent parts, and then looked at overall. A mature believer is knowledgeable, humble and refreshing to have around. He is not judgmental, but compassionate, understanding, and edifying to others. A mature church would show such characteristics. We must aspire to be such believers. We must aspire to be such a church. There are many Christians who are so inconsistent in their walk with God. They are full of zeal for a moment, and then lose their zeal. They are interested in learning for a moment, but soon lose the interest. They are helpful in the church, but quickly lose their concern for the welfare of others. Are you such? Should you not commit yourself to the Lord, and learn to be more consistent? How are we to grow to

spiritual maturity if we are so inconsistent? Let us be persevering in our walk with God. Let us be consistent Christians.

The second part is about “The Consistency Of The Maturing Church”, covering Chapter 7:9-13. The mature church or believer is characterized by consistency in four areas, namely, in private communion with the Lord, in service to the Lord, in self-examination before the Lord, and in giving to the Lord. There are, of course, other areas of the Christian life where consistency is needed, but these four areas are sufficient to convey the main truth involved, namely, that the mature Christian loves the Lord and expresses it by a life of consistency in his walk with Him. We might summarize all that we have learned by these two words, namely, love and consistency. Firstly, there is love for the Lord. When there is true love, you will be prepared to do anything for the Lord. We do not risk our lives unnecessarily, but we are prepared to accept the risks that come with serving the Lord. In the world, calculated risks are taken - for example, in business. If worldly people are prepared to take risks for things that we regard as temporary and of limited value, why are we not prepared to take necessary risks for the Lord? Have we forgotten the sovereignty of God, or is this just a doctrine in the mind? If God is sovereign - controlling all things to the good of His people, and determining when and how we die - why should we fear so much? We fear for our lives, we fear for our reputation, and we fear disruption to the comforts of life. Everything must be to our convenience before we would do anything in service to our Lord. Is that love?

Secondly, there is consistency in our walk with the Lord. A mature Christian will be consistent in his profession of faith, in his way of life, and in his service to the Lord. Here is someone who claims that he is willing to serve the Lord as a missionary in a foreign land, if it is clearly God’s will for him. Are you really prepared to serve the Lord as a foreign missionary when you are too embarrassed to distribute tracts in the shopping mall? Are you too ashamed to be seen by your relatives and colleagues? Think of the Lord who gave up His glory in heaven to come to earth to save a sinner like you. Think of the humiliation he went through as He hung naked on the cross in the sight of all. Think of the agony He underwent to save you. Are you ashamed of Him? Are you not prepared to be identified with Him? Are you still thinking of “saving your face” and protecting your reputation? We do not want anyone to feel pressured to come to distribute tracts together with us. What applies to tracting applies to other avenues of service. We do not want you to feel guilty for not being able to join us. We would want those who take part to do so willingly, out of a heart of love for the Lord.

Love for the Lord and consistency in our walk with Him are linked together. We see also how consistency is reflected in our lives. A maturing Christian is one who is consistent, reliable, unwavering, and ready to serve the Lord. He is not haphazard and irregular.

Chapter 8

Chapter 8 is about “Christ’s Love For The Expectant Church”. There are four parts to this chapter. In the first part, we have “The Gratitude Of The Expectant Church”, covering Chapter 8:1-4. We should be grateful to the Lord for the salvation He has given to us, for the sustenance to our faith, and for the succour to us in our needs. The Lord truly has been good to us. He truly loves His people. Let us show forth our gratitude to Him in praise, worship, and service. While waiting for Him to return, let us show forth our love to Him in our lives and give of our all to Him. Adherents of the church are challenged to consider becoming integrated into the church, if it is faithful to the Lord and being blessed in her ministry.

In the second part, we have “The Faithfulness Of The Expectant Church”, covering Chapter 8:5-7. Faith is needed right to the end of our lives on earth. Faith will wean us more and more

off worldliness. Faith will keep us focused on our heavenly home. We are such unworthy sinners saved by grace. We must respond to the Lord's love by exercising faith in Him. Those who understand how they have been saved will have deep feelings of love, joy, peace, and gratitude. Love for the Lord must be shown in tangible ways. There must be cravings for assurance of His love, for power to serve Him well, and for spiritual zeal to be sustained. The responses of faith and love are focused on the Lord. We would not want to be diverted from our love for Him. We want to be faithful to our Lord. With God's help, we will remain faithful to Him.

The third part is on "The Consecration Of The Expectant Church", covering Chapter 8:8-12. First, we have reflection on past misery. Then, we have gratitude for present felicity. We learn that believers should be grateful for salvation in Christ, with all the accompanying blessing. We are to show our love to the Lord without reservation. This blessed life in Christ is what we want to share with our unbelieving friends. Those who have not believed should understand that you live in God's world. You have seen His goodness in the world, and in your lives. The world has been badly affected by sin. You would have experienced the miseries of the world as well. You must understand that there is no necessity to remain in the miseries of the world. There is hope in Jesus Christ. There is reconciliation with God through Him. By His death on the cross, He has done everything needful to save sinners. Come to Him!

In the final part, we have "The Longing of the Expectant Church", covering Chapter 8:13-14. The expectation of Christ's return is a fundamental doctrine of the Christian faith. No one can be a true Christian without believing that Christ will return to judge the world. Knowing and believing that Christ will return is one thing, anticipating His return is another. Are we anticipating His return? Are we preparing for His return? How should we be preparing for His return? We have learned that we must commune with Him in the midst of service. Christian service is important, but let us not forget that it is even more important to keep a close walk with the Lord through constant prayer. Our prayer should flow from a prayerful heart, i.e. a spirit of dependence upon Him. Without Him we can do nothing. Practically, that means spending time with the Lord each day, even if it is for fifteen minutes. Once that is a regular affair, we would expect to see faces glow, as it were, with the Lord's presence. We would also expect to see your faces at the prayer meetings of the church.

We learn also to anticipate His return while waiting for Him. He will appear at anytime. We are not fearful of His return. Instead, we look forward to His return, and that is because of various reasons. Firstly, we love our Lord, for He loved us first. Secondly, we long for relief from the oppression of this world. Thirdly, we long to be transformed into His image. If there was a Christian longing for Christ's return, it was the apostle John. He expressed this truth in Revelation 22:20, saying: 'He who testifies to these things says, "Surely I am coming quickly." Amen. Even so, come Lord Jesus!'

III. The Central Characters Of The Book

The central characters of the book are the Lord Jesus Christ and His bride, the church. They are portrayed by Solomon and the Shulamite woman. Let us look at some passages in this book concerning the Lord Jesus Christ. The coming of the Saviour is portrayed by His two natures - the divine and the human - in one Person. Chapter 2:1 says, "I *am* the rose of Sharon, *and* the lily of the valleys." Both the rose and the lily are equally beautiful. The rose grows on the drier highlands, while the lily grows in the valley. As the perfect God-Man, the Lord is able to be the Mediator between God and man. He carries His human nature, now glorified, to heaven. "There is one God and one Mediator between God and men, the Man Christ Jesus" (1 Tim. 2:5). The Lord's redeemed people are made beautiful by Him, so that

they are described as “Like a lily among thorns, so is my love among the daughters”, in Chapter 2:2.

There is the invitation for us to come to Christ, to follow Him, in Chapter 2:10-13, ‘My beloved spoke, and said to me: “Rise up, my love, my fair one, and come away. For lo, the winter is past, the rain is over *and* gone. The flowers appear on the earth; the time of singing has come, and the voice of the turtledove is heard in our land. The fig tree puts forth her green figs, and the vines *with* the tender grapes give a *good* smell. Rise up, my love, my fair one, and come away!’

The sanctification of the believer, and the church, is described in Chapter 2:15, “Catch us the foxes, the little foxes that spoil the vines, for our vines *have* tender grapes.” The little foxes are the sins in our lives, which if not dealt with, will cause much havoc. The resolve of the church to wait for the Lord’s coming is expressed in Chapter 2:17, “Until the day breaks and the shadows flee away, turn, my beloved, and be like a gazelle or a young stag upon the mountains of Bether (Separation)”.

The power of our Saviour to save, and the certainty of His preservation of the saints, are portrayed by Solomon’s carriage or palanquin in Chapter 3:6-10, “Who *is* **she** coming out of the wilderness like pillars of smoke, perfumed with myrrh and frankincense, with all the merchant’s fragrant powders? Behold, it *is* Solomon’s couch, *with* sixty valiant men around it, of the valiant of Israel. They all hold swords, *being* expert in war. Every man *has* his sword on his thigh because of fear in the night. Of the wood of Lebanon Solomon the King made himself a palanquin: He made its pillars *of* silver, its support *of* gold, its seat *of* purple, its interior paved *with* love **for** the daughters of Jerusalem.”

The well-ordered church is described as “a garden enclosed, a fountain sealed”. It is a haven of safety and peace to God’s people. Chapter 4:12-15 say, “A garden enclosed *is* my sister, *my* spouse, a spring shut up, a fountain sealed. Your plants *are* an orchard of pomegranates with pleasant fruits, fragrant henna with spikenard, spikenard and saffron, calamus and cinnamon, with all trees of frankincense, myrrh and aloes, with all the chief spices— a fountain of gardens, a well of living waters, and streams from Lebanon.” The well-ordered church is also a mission-minded church, from which the fragrance of the gospel goes forth into the world. This is expressed in the next verse, “Awake, O north *wind*, and come, O south! Blow upon my garden, *that* its spices may flow out. Let my beloved come to his garden and eat its pleasant fruits.”

The church’s appreciation of the beauty and power of the Lord is described in Chapter 5:10-16, “My beloved *is* white and ruddy, chief among ten thousand. His head *is* *like* the finest gold; his locks *are* wavy, *and* black as a raven. His eyes *are* like doves by the rivers of waters, washed with milk, *and* fitly set. His cheeks *are* like a bed of spices, banks of scented herbs. His lips *are* lilies, dripping liquid myrrh. His hands *are* rods of gold set with beryl. His **belly** *is* carved ivory inlaid *with* sapphires. His legs *are* pillars of marble set on bases of fine gold. His countenance *is* like Lebanon, excellent as the cedars. His mouth *is* most sweet, yes, he *is* altogether lovely. This *is* my beloved, and this *is* my friend, O daughters of Jerusalem!”

The church expresses her love for the Lord, and her consecration to Him, in the words of Chapter 8:6-7, “Set me as a seal upon your heart, as a seal upon your arm; for love *is as* strong as death, jealousy *as* **unyielding** as the grave; its flames *are* flames of fire, a **flame of Jehovah**. Many waters cannot quench love, nor can the floods drown it. If a man would give for love all the wealth of his house, it would be utterly despised.”

The longing for the Lord’s return was expressed earlier in Chapter 2:17. It now takes on a note of certainty, and the expectation that “the mountains of Separation” will become “the mountains of spices”, in Chapter 8:14, “Make haste, my beloved, and be like a gazelle or a young stag on the mountains of spices.”

IV. Conclusion

The theme of the book is Christ’s love for His church. The beauty of Christ’s character is reflected in the beauty of the church. The interaction between Christ and His church shows the constancy of God’s love for His people in Christ, and the inconsistency of the church in her love for the Lord. Despite the fickleness and weaknesses in His people, the Lord continues to be long-suffering towards them. We are raised to heights of ecstasy as we consider the beauty of Christ. We are driven to the ground in gratitude as we contemplate His mercy to undeserving sinners like us. We resolve to spend our time on earth in grateful service to Him. We look forward to the dawning of the eternal days when we shall worship Him perfectly together with all the redeemed of the Lord, to all eternity.

May you find peace with God in Jesus Christ. May the joy and blessedness described in this book be yours.

This is truly the Song of Songs!

*The Song of songs to worship,
Our King, the Lord Jesus;
I sought Him not but He sought
Me in my darkest hours;
My restless soul He gave peace,
My nakedness He clothed;
The Rose of Sharon is He,
Whose righteousness I boast;
The Lily of the Valleys
Who brings joy, light, and cheer;
Our sins He purged, though away
He assures we are dear.*

*A garden enclosed are we
From Him is our beauty;
No merit in all our works,
Save what is our duty;
Should we not give of ourselves
To the Lord more fully?
How oft have I failed Him so,
Oh, what utter folly!
His Spirit I grieved away,
Now I seek His mercy;
O Lord Jesus, turn Your face*

To me and have pity!

*His voice we hear in words near,
To comfort, strengthen, cheer;
His Spirit fills His people
With joy and vision clear;
With love undying we serve
Our Lord who first loved us;
In weakness we cry to God
To give us fruitfulness;
May our fleeting days be spent
In Your love and mercy;
Until gathered to praise You
For all eternity!*

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