
Review Article

The Song of Solomon: An Introduction and Commentary

by *G. Lloyd Carr*

Tyndale Old Testament

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This is a valuable commentary — enlightening and stimulating. Perhaps it is more technical and therefore more demanding than other volumes in this series, but no more than a most creditable examination of the Song requires. Dr. Carr is a professor of Biblical and Theological Studies at Gordon College, Massachusetts. He has a thorough grasp of the Song and its problems, the literature which has been produced on it and has also studied Ancient Near Eastern love poetry. He can, therefore, compare and contrast the Song with that type of literature. Most important of all, his perspective on the nature of Scripture is sound.

This work is divided into four parts, viz. introduction, subject studies, analysis and commentary. With regard to analysis, the author points out in the introduction that a firm and generally accepted analysis of the book is difficult to come by, but he has one to propose which he argues for and it is most interesting. In the author's preface, he pleads that the "commentary should not be read in isolation (a difficult thing to do to say the least), but with regular attention to and comparison with

the Bible itself". This indicates the high aim of the author in producing this commentary. There are many helpful comments on difficult words and expressions in the text and stimulating insights too, but devotional comment is excluded. The aim is to get at the meaning of the text.

The subject studies treat the garden, love, lover and wine. These are well worth careful examination in connection with the footnotes and the usage of these terms in the actual text of the Song. A wide range of material is covered from the Old Testament and the Septuagint.

The major question which this work will raise concerns Carr's solution of the age-old problem of the nature of the book. Is it allegory, typology, drama or is it a love poem? And is its purpose cultic, instructive or celebratory? Carr opts for its being a poem in praise of love, but discusses all the other options in some detail and most helpfully. Though he does not personally endorse Solomonic authorship, he quite clearly declares that a tenth century origin of the book and such a view of its opening statement are perfectly justifiable.

Though Carr opts for the "natural" view of the book's nature, he places its content very firmly in a sound biblical and theological context of creation and divinely ordained sexuality. He distances sexual love from the cultic associations of the Ancient Near East and anchors his view of the book in Genesis and

Hebrews 13:2. Chapter 3:6 provides the context of a marriage ceremony for the theme. Surely this emphasis is needed today — and among evangelicals.

His reasons for not favouring the typological interpretation, i.e. Christ and the Church, are in the main two. On the one hand, the vocabulary of the Song lacks the theological terms found in Psalm 45 — an associated passage in terms of theme. This amounts to saying that there is no specific evidence **in the Song** for treating it as a description of divine-human relationships. On the other hand, whereas Psalm 45 is quoted in the New Testament in a Christological manner, establishing that Psalm as typical, the Song is not cited in the New Testament in that way. So, Carr deduces two principles:

When the New Testament writers, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, selected certain Old Testament texts and applied them to Jesus, etc., their application and interpretation are correct.

It is not legitimate, however, to say, therefore, that all the Old Testament or even other specific texts must also be interpreted in the same way. Where the New Testament does not make these connections, we are not required to either.

Readers will want to ponder the latter of these principles. It must mean that explicit New Testament support is required before anything in the Old Testament is accorded typological significance. Is this not

difficult to accept in view of the breadth of reference explicit in Luke 24:27 and 44, and also that things are listed in Hebrews 9:5 as having such a character while their typological significance in detail is not spelt out? To take the view that explicit New Testament support is not needed is not the high road to allegorising, cf. Vos in **Biblical Theology**. The setting of the Song in the canon of Old Testament and also the New where marriage is used to describe God's relation with Israel and Christ's with the Church is, some will feel, not given sufficient weight.

Carr has one suggestion which if it were taken seriously would justify the typological interpretation. It concerns the Hebrew word *DODHI* frequently used in the book and translated "my beloved". Carr points out the consonantal identity between *DODH* and *DAVIDH* — David. He says: "If the Song is to be understood as a royal wedding song, the king in question ought to be David rather than Solomon? King David, MLK DWD, would be the 'beloved king' and the lover of the song."

Given this, what sense could be made of Song 1:1 where Solomon is mentioned? Would it not be Solomon as of the line of David on the basis of the promise in 2 Samuel 7? And would this not make the reference Messianic? However, this is a serious, responsible and useful piece of work on a difficult book of Holy Scripture.

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