


Love in the Time of Tyranny

A New Perspective on the Song of Songs

Limmud
25 December 2022

1. 'Solomon's'



Andrew Levy



1

שִׁיר הַשִּׁירִים אֲשֶׁר לְשִׁלְמֹה
The Song of Songs which is Solomon's



- What is the Song of Songs?
- Secular Love Song?
- Allegory of relationship between God and Israel?
- Crucial is the role of Solomon.
- What does that first verse mean?
- שִׁיר הַשִּׁירִים אֲשֶׁר לְשִׁלְמֹה

2

Biblical works mentioning Solomon at the outset



- Rabbis said three works written by Solomon – Proverbs, Ecclesiastes and the Song of Songs.
- This is based on superscription.
- Two questions arise for each book.
- 1. Did Solomon write the book?
- 2. Does the superscription say that Solomon wrote the book?

3

Biblical works mentioning Solomon at the outset – Book of Proverbs



- 1. Did Solomon write the book of Proverbs?
- Some of the language and the ideas are much later than the period when Solomon lived (10th Century BCE).
- Other parts, paradoxically, state verbatim the words of older sayings from Egypt (Amenemope).
- Answer – clearly no.
- 2. Does the superscription of Proverbs say that Solomon wrote it?
- Proverbs - משלי שלמה 'Proverbs of Solomon' (Proverbs 1.1).
- Very little within the book about Solomon.
- But it has a regal patriarchal feel to it.
- So the answer is probably yes.

4

Biblical works mentioning Solomon at the outset – the Book of Ecclesiastes



- 1. Did Solomon write the book of Ecclesiastes?
- The language throughout the book is late Biblical Hebrew.
- Answer – clearly no.
- 2. Does the superscription of Ecclesiastes say that Solomon wrote it?
- Ecclesiastes - דברי קהלת בן דוד מלך בירושלים - 'The words of Kohelet, son of David, king in Jerusalem' (Ecclesiastes 1.1).
- Often written in first person – at one point describing scenes in Solomon's life.
- Answer – probably yes.

5

Biblical works mentioning Solomon at the outset – the Song of Songs

- 1. Did Solomon write the Song of Songs?
- As with the other books, the language is much later than the reign of Solomon indicating that he could not have written it.
- Answer – clearly no.
- 2. Does the superscription of the Song of Songs say that Solomon wrote it?
- The Song of Songs has a different form of superscription.
- שיר השירים אשר לשלמה
- The Song of Songs which is Solomon's.
- Answer – completely ambiguous.
- A fuller answer depends on how we interpret one Hebrew (and English) letter.
- שלמה - Solomon's.

6

שִׁיר הַשִּׁירִים אֲשֶׁר לְשָׁלֹמֶה

- 1. The Song of Songs by Solomon
- 2. The Song of Songs about Solomon
- 3. ~~The Song of Songs to be used by Solomon~~
- 4. ~~The Song of Songs dedicated to Solomon~~
- 5. The Song of Songs in the Solomonic tradition
- 6. The Song of Songs in Solomonic style






7

שִׁיר הַשִּׁירִים אֲשֶׁר לְשָׁלֹמֶה

שחורה אני ונאווה בנות ירושלם באהלי קדר כיריעות שלמה:

Black am I and beautiful, O daughters of Jerusalem, like the tents of Kedar, like the curtains of Solomon

(Song of Songs 1:5)

8

שִׁיר הַשִּׁירִים אֲשֶׁר לְשָׁלֹמֶה

מי זאת עלה מן המדבר כחימרות עשן מסקות מור ולבונה מכל אבקת רובל:
הנה משהו שלשלמה ששים גברים סביב לה מגברי ישראל:
כיום אף חרב ממנו מלחמה איש חרבנו על ירכו מפחד בלילות: (ס)
אמריו עשה לו המלך שלמה מעצי הלבנון:
עמדיו עשה כסף ופידתו זהב מרכבו ארגמן חובו רחוק אהבה מבנות ירושלם:
צאנה | וראינה בנות ציון בפלך שלמה בעקרה שעורר לו אמו ביום חתנתו וביום שמחת לבו: (ס)


Who is this coming up from the desert like pillars of smoke, rendered more fragrant in myrrh and frankincense than all the powder of the merchant?

Look: Solomon's bed, sixty heroes surround it from the heroes of Israel. All carrying a sword, trained in warfare, each man has a sword by his thigh, because of fear at night time.

King Solomon made himself a palanquin from the trees of Lebanon. Its pillars he made from silver, its back from gold, its seat was purple. In its midst it was inlaid with love.

Daughters of Jerusalem, go out, and rejoice, daughters of Zion, about King Solomon, about the crown, with which his mother crowned him, on the day of his wedding, on the day of his heart's joy.

(Song of Songs 3:6-11)





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שיר השירים אשר לשלמה

כרם היה לשלמה בבעל המון נתן את־הכרם לנטרים איש יבא בפרוץ אלף כסף:
כרמי שלי לפני האלף לך שלמה ומאתים לנטרים את־פרוץ:


Solomon had a vineyard in Baal Hamon [the Master of Plenty], he gave the vineyard to the guards. A man earns a thousand pieces of silver for his fruit.
My own vineyard is all mine in front of me; the thousand is yours, O Solomon, and two hundred to those who guard his fruit.
(Song of Songs 8:13-14)

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שיר השירים אשר לשלמה



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Love in the Time of Tyranny – Who was Solomon?



- Second son of David and Bathsheba.
- Bathsheba was the wife of Uriah the Hittite whom David murdered in order to have an affair with her.
- First son was the result of the affair – killed by God as a result of the sin.
- We hear nothing of Solomon's childhood...
- But we can only imagine dysfunction.

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Love in the Time of Tyranny – Who was Solomon?



- Both Solomon and Bathsheba disappear from the David narrative until close to David's death.
- Solomon is not the eldest son of David; Adonijah is older than he is.
- Adonijah seeks to claim the throne publicly.
- Bathsheba (Solomon's mother but not Adonijah's) in league with Nathan the prophet contrives to get David to proclaim Solomon king with him so that he can rule by himself after David's death.
- Solomon is proclaimed king while David is alive.
- Once David dies, Solomon loses little time in getting rid of David's enemies and his own (Adonijah).

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Love in the Time of Tyranny – Who was Solomon?



- So we know from being a silent youth, Solomon has developed into the ruthlessness needed to survive.
- Yet is this really the same Solomon who is known for his wisdom?
- Yes it is the context for the wisdom which Solomon shows.
- Wisdom as judge (the two women claiming to be the mother of the child)
- Wisdom as knowledge – 3,000 proverbs and 1,005 songs.
- But there was one other thing for which Solomon is just as well known positively...
- He is lauded for having built the temple.

14

Love in the Time of Tyranny – Solomon's Temple

- The temple is seen as the crowning glory of Solomon's reign.
- But the temple was only part of a greater building project.
- Solomon built a palace as well as building a temple.
- Yet the way they were built indicates exploitation and aggrandisement.



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Love in the Time of Tyranny Solomon's Temple - Exploitation

- Solomon imposed a מס ('Mas') on Israel.
- What is a מס?
- Modern Hebrew – 'tax', 'levy'.
- Here it is forced labour. It is the same word which is used to describe the oppression of the Israelites before Pharaoh.

וישימו עליהם עשר מסים למען עבדו בסבלתם ויבנו ערי מסכנות לפרעה את פתם ואת רעמסס:
So they set masters of forced labour over them to oppress them with their burdens; and they built garrison cities for Pharaoh: Pithom and Raamses. (Exodus 1:11)



- 'It all reminds one of the days of slavery in Egypt. Except that this time the people do not need to return to Egypt; Egypt comes to them' (Micha Goodman).

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Love in the Time of Tyranny – Solomon's Temple - Aggrandisement



- Temple took seven years to build – it is described in great detail.
- Yet Solomon's palace took thirteen years to build and was more than four times the size.
- The forced labour brought the cedar wood and cypresses which were used to build both the temple and the palace.
- The forced labour workers went to Lebanon to cut down the wood which was brought by sea and then taken up to Jerusalem.

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Love in the Time of Tyranny – Solomon and women



- The Queen of Sheba arrives – astounded by his wisdom and brings spices.
- Solomon had 'a thousand wives'.
- The Bible only says he had seven hundred wives and three hundred concubines.
- This is seen as his major fault.
- Yet we can also see the aggrandisement in building the temple and palace.
- To sum up...

18

Love in the Time of Tyranny – Summary of who Solomon is

- Second son (first dies as a result of murder/adultery of David).
- Dysfunctional upbringing.
- His mother, Bathsheba, is the power behind his becoming king.
- The Solomon portrayed has great wisdom and great wealth.
- He demonstrates the wisdom by judging between the two mothers.
- He demonstrates wealth by acting tyrannically in building the smaller temple and larger palace – tyrannically because he exploits his people in the way Pharaoh had done in Egypt.
- The Queen of Sheba, on hearing of his wisdom, brings him gifts including spices.
- He had 'a thousand wives'.

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Love in the Time of Tyranny – Solomon – link to the Song of Songs



So how does this link to the Song of Songs?

קרות בתינו אֲרָזִים רחיענו [רהיענו] ברוחמים:

The beams of our houses are cedars, our rafters are cypresses.

(Song of Songs 1:17)



- The lovers are outside describing their 'houses' in nature.
- They have chosen trees which are not native and cannot grow in the Jerusalem area where they have their idyll.
- Cedar trees can only grow above 1,000 metres above sea level (i.e. only in Lebanon in the Middle East).
- These are the trees which were used to build Solomon's temple and palace.


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Love in the Time of Tyranny – Solomon – link to the Song of Songs

- What does this mean?
- The poem could have been written originally in Lebanon.
- But it was used in this poem in a way which linked it to the temple.
- So it was appropriated by the author of the Song of Songs to describe the two lovers.
- Their 'houses' are natural. Solomon's are constructed.
- A subtle, yet clear, jibe at Solomon.


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Love in the Time of Tyranny – The Song of Songs - שִׁיר הַשִּׁירִים

- Next time (2.10pm today) we will focus on the Song of Songs.
- In Hebrew שִׁיר הַשִּׁירִים.
- We will look at what is meant by a 'Song of Songs'.
- And look at what more is going on beyond eroticism in some of the most beautiful poetry which has survived from the ancient world.








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Love in the Time of Tyranny







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