

THE OLD TESTAMENT LOVE SONGS AND THEIR USE IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

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During my preliminary work on the Song of Solomon it soon became evident that the major problem I would have to face was the vexed question of how this book was to be interpreted. H. H. Rowley's old but still very valuable essay sets out the options clearly in some detail, and Brevard Childs' recent *Introduction* provides a handy summary.¹ It is not my purpose here to examine all these options in detail, but for the sake of putting this material in perspective a brief summary of the positions is in order.

Historically, the most common interpretive approach to the Song has been that of allegory/typology. For the rabbinic scholars the lover/beloved exchanges were understood to describe the relationship between Yahweh and Israel (or Wisdom and the wise man), and every detail of the text was understood to explicate that relationship. Until recently, the majority of Christian commentators have also used this method for dealing with the text. Here, however, the relationship between Christ and the Church or the individual believer takes precedence. A classic example, popular among certain circles of American Christianity, is the little chorus based on Song 2:4: "He brought me into the banqueting house, and his banner over me was love."² I will return to this question later in the presentation.

About a hundred years ago the idea, apparently first suggested by Origen about A.D. 250, that the Song was a drama suddenly was revived and received considerable attention, first from Franz Delitzsch in his commentary and then by numerous other writers. A number of variations on this perspective have been proposed, such as Calvin Seerveld's oratorio and Meek's or Kramer's development of the ritual-drama concept.³ Pope also develops this basic point of view. As I have dealt with this issue elsewhere I will not pursue it here, except to note that

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¹H. H. Rowley, "The Interpretation of the Song of Songs," *JTS* 38 (1937) 337-363, revised and expanded in *The Servant of the Lord and Other Essays on the Old Testament* (2d ed.; Oxford: Blackwell, 1965) 195-246; B. S. Childs, *Introduction to the Old Testament as Scripture* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1979) 571-579.

²There is an almost unlimited bibliography demonstrating this approach. Note, simply as examples, the notes in *JB; Commentary on the Song of Solomon by Rabbi Abraham ben Isaac ha-Levi TaMaKH* (trans. and ed. L. A. Feldman; Assen: Van Gorcum, 1970); and Origen's *Commentary on the Song of Solomon* (New York: Newman, 1957), for representative points of view. M. H. Pope, *The Song of Songs* (AB 7c; Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1977), gives extensive examples and parallels from the various traditions.

³C. Seerveld, *The Greatest Song* (Palos Heights, IL: Trinity, 1967); T. J. Meek, *Interpreter's Bible* (New York: Abingdon, 1956); S. N. Kramer, *The Sacred Marriage Rite* (Bloomington, IN: University Press, 1969).

I have not been persuaded of the validity of the dramatic interpretation.⁴

A third option is that the Song of Solomon is a collection of love songs, perhaps related to a marriage ritual,⁵ or, more simply, expressing the deep human love between a man and a woman. This "natural" interpretation has found many proponents and is the one I propose as correct. That assumption, however, needs some examination and is the reason that this paper was developed.

The problem can be focused by an examination of the love-song genre in the Biblical materials. Love songs are ubiquitous. Whether the lyrics be "I love ya, I love ya, yeah, yeah, yeah" or the more sedate "How do I love thee? Let me count the ways," every generation of every society has its love-song tradition. Again, detailed development of the nature of the genre is impossible here, but a summary of the major elements can be made relatively quickly:⁶

1. While the third person is used of the beloved when a third party is addressed or present, the bulk of the material is in the "I-thou" formulation.

2. The most common theme, expressed in a variety of ways, is the joy and excitement the lovers find in each other's presence. Of course separation, caused by some outside person or situation, is frequently encountered, but even these experiences serve primarily as a foil to underscore the joy of reunion.

3. Elaborate descriptions of the beauty of the beloved, often couched in highly erotic terms, are a common element. Linked with these are various combinations of animal and bird imagery, floral parallels, perfumes, and so forth. The simple exclamation of Gen 2:23 and the extensive metaphors of Song 4:1-15 and 5:10-16 are good examples of the variations possible on this theme.

4. The encounter between the protagonists takes place either in the secrecy of the bedchamber (Song 8:2) or outdoors in secluded areas in the thickets and groves of parks and gardens (7:12).

5. Specific descriptions of the joys of touching, kissing, fondling, and so on, ultimately leading to sexual consummation are frequent (2:6; 4:5-10).

6. Family terms ("sister," "brother") and royal designations ("king," "queen," "prince," "princess") are common, and although some take these in their literal sense in these poems it is fairly obvious that this sort of vocabulary is nothing more than one more convention for expressing the high regard the lovers have for each other.

Frankness, openness, and tenderness, coupled with ardent longing for the beloved, mark love poetry from all over the ancient Near East, and the OT is no exception.

Beyond the identification of the elements of the love-song genre there remains the more important problem of how this material is used in the NT. Admittedly the whole question of the use of the OT in the NT is a vexed one, on which there is

⁴G. L. Carr, "Is the Song of Songs a 'Sacred Marriage' Drama?," *JETS* 22 (1979) 103-114, and the bibliography there.

⁵See, e.g., K. Budde, *Die Heilige Schrift des Alten Testaments*, 1923.

⁶J. B. White, *A Study of the Language of Love in the Song of Songs and Ancient Egyptian Poetry* (Missoula, MT: SBL/Scholars Press, 1978), and A. Hermann, *Altägyptische Liebesdichtung* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1959), have extensive sections on this material. See also my article "Ancient Near Eastern Love Poetry" (forthcoming).

a considerable difference of opinion.⁷ Nevertheless, some general observations can be made:

1. Direct quotation of or obvious reference to OT passages are very frequent in the NT.
2. All the OT books except Ruth, Ezra, Ecclesiastes and Song of Solomon⁸ are quoted, with most quotations coming from Genesis, Exodus, Deuteronomy, Psalms, Isaiah and Jeremiah.
3. For the most part the quotations are from the LXX rather than the MT.
4. Apart from those that are merely historical references (e.g. Acts 7), most of the quotations are introduced either to support the argument for some doctrinal position or are directly related to the person and ministry of Jesus.
5. The selection of OT passages seems, at this distance, to be rather haphazard, with verses taken out of their OT contexts and applied almost in a proof-texting fashion.

From these observations the following conclusions can be drawn:

1. When the NT writers, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, selected certain OT texts and applied them to Jesus, his ministry, and so forth, their application and interpretation is correct.
2. It is not legitimate, however, to say therefore that all the OT or even other specific texts must also be interpreted in the same way. Where the NT does not make these connections we are not required to either.
3. This does not mean that the rest of the OT *may* not speak of Christ. It means only that it does not *necessarily* speak of Christ—even though there is a long tradition of such exegesis in the Church, perhaps beginning as early as Luke 24:27.
4. Careful attention needs to be given to vocabulary, meaning, grammar and context before one can legitimately argue that a given text or passage be interpreted Christologically.

With these cautions before us, let us return to the love songs. In the OT, apart from the Song of Solomon, there are two other poetic units identified as “love songs”—that is, Psalm 45 and Isa 5:1-2—and two or three other texts that will need at least cursory examination.⁹ The key, it seems to me, is the use of the fam-

⁷For some representative views see C. H. Dodd, *According to the Scriptures: The Sub-structure of New Testament Theology* (London: Nisbet, 1952); F. F. Bruce, *New Testament Development of Old Testament Themes* (Exeter: Paternoster, 1968); B. Lindars, *New Testament Apologetic* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1961); E. E. Ellis, *Paul's Use of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1957); *Prophecy and Hermeneutic in Early Christianity* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1978); A. A. van Ruler, *The Christian Church and the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1971). For a summary treatment see G. W. Grogan, “The New Testament Interpretation of the Old Testament: A Comparative Study,” *TB* 18 (1967) 54-76.

⁸J. S. Sibinga, “Une citation du Cantique dans La Secunda Petri,” *RB* 73 (1966) 107-118, examines the possibility that 2 Pet 1:19 was influenced by certain OL versions of Song 2:17; 4:6. The evidence for this view is rather tenuous. The omission of these four books from the NT does not reflect negatively on their place in the canon. Rather, in the Jewish arrangement of the books Ezra was part of the same scroll as Nehemiah; Ecclesiastes and Song were both parts of the “Five Rolls”; and Ruth, later also one of the “Five Rolls,” was earlier attached to Judges. Since other parts of these scrolls were quoted, the argument for the acceptance of these parts as canonical Scripture also is very strong.

⁹Some commentators regard the whole unit Isa 5:1-7 as a “love song.” But the shift to the *rib* or *lawsuit*

ily of words *dôd*, *y^edîd* (plural *y^edîdôt?*) and *y^edîdût*.¹⁰ Look first at *y^edîdût*, which occurs only in Jer 12:7. The context is a series of oracles against Judah and Jerusalem (11:1, 6, 9, 17, and so on) for their sin in following the Baal cult. The prophet, in response to his prayer (12:1-4), gets the word from Yahweh: "I have forsaken my house, I have abandoned my heritage; I have given the beloved (*y^edîdût*) of my soul into the hands of her enemies" (v 7). The LXX renders the last clause of v 7 as follows: *edôka tēn ēgapēmenēn psychēn mou eis cheiras echthrōn autēs*. In Nestle's Greek NT the editors suggest that in Rev 20:9 *tēn polin tēn ēgapēmenēn* ("the beloved city") surrounded by the hordes of Gog and Magog is described by a quotation from Jer 12:7. Similarly Jesus' words against Jerusalem in Matt 23:38 (and the parallel in Luke 13:35)—*idou aphietai hymin ho oikos hymōn erēmos*, "Behold, your house is forsaken and desolate"—are linked with the first part of Jer 12:7 (LXX *Engkataloipa ton oikon mou, aphēka tēn klēronomian mou*).¹¹ There certainly is a relationship between the Jeremiah passages and these NT texts, but the evidence for calling them "quotations" is rather tenuous. Probably all we have here, particularly in the Revelation passage, is the use of a common epithet for Jerusalem. In any case, in the NT texts the "beloved" that is to be left desolate is Jerusalem (and/or Israel), not the Son or his Church.

Second, there are a couple of uses of *y^edîd* to examine. In Jer 11:15, part of the same series of oracles, Yahweh asks, "What right has my beloved (*dîdî*; LXX *hē ēgapēmenē*) in my house when she has done vile deeds?" Nestle links this verse with Rev 20:9 also, but this seems to be stretching the material even thinner.

In Deut 33:12, Moses' blessings on the Israelites, Benjamin is described as "the beloved of the LORD who dwells in safety," and in 2 Thess 2:13 Paul prays for the church at Thessalonica, calling them "beloved brethren, beloved of the Lord . . . chosen from the beginning for salvation." Here again I think we have just the use of a common expression, with no direct intent to quote from the Torah. Benjamin was certainly his father's favorite, but the tribe never appears as the especial recipient of the divine favor in either Testament.

The other uses of *dôd* and *y^edîd* merit closer attention, but before turning to the specific texts some additional comments on the meaning of the words themselves are necessary. Apart from the uses of *y^edîd* already mentioned, there are only five additional occurrences in the OT (Psalm 45 title [Hebrew v 1]; 60:5 [Hebrew v 7]; 84:1 [Hebrew v 2]; 108:6 [Hebrew v 7]; 127:2). The Psalm 45 reference is the most important for us and will be examined below. Of the other four, three are simply "the beloved"—that is, the one whom God loves and protects. The fourth, in Ps 84:1, is translated "lovely" in the RSV and is a reference to the beauty of the beloved temple in Jerusalem.

pattern in v 3 seems to indicate that the "love song" is limited to vv 1-2. The "vineyard" and "garden" of v 7 suggests an *inclusio*, but this probably means only that vv 1-7 are a poetic unit and not necessarily that they are a "love song."

¹⁰There is some uncertainty regarding the relationship between the root *dwd*, which is assumed (BDB 187) for the first of these words, and *ydd* (BDB 391), the root for the other in the series, but certainly by the time of the monarchy the words have coalesced in meaning. See further Pope, *Song*, 298-299, for evidence of the parallel use of *dd*, *yd* and *ahbt* in Ugaritic. Cf. J. Sanmartin-Ascaso, "dôdh," *TDOT* 3, 143-156.

¹¹The Aland-Black text links this with Jer 22:5: *eis erēmōsin estai ho oikos houtos*.

The noun *dôd*, on the other hand, is much more common. It occurs 36 times in the Song of Solomon and 21 times elsewhere. With the first-person suffix, "my beloved" becomes the most frequent epithet for the lover in the Song. The girl addresses him 27 times this way, and the women of Jerusalem—"the city girls"—use it of him five times ("your beloved"). Outside the Song *dôd* is translated as "uncle" in 17 cases. This concept is attested in both the Biblical and extra-Biblical literature, sometimes specifically of the brother of a parent and sometimes more generally of any relative or kinsman (e.g. 2 Kings 24:17; Amos 6:10).

The early extra-Biblical literature from the ancient Near East, however, indicates that the word originally meant "beloved partner." It was used in a clearly erotic sense in the love poetry and the fertility rituals, occasionally occurring as a euphemism for the genitals or as an epithet for a deity.¹² The use of *dôdî* in Isa 5:1 is a Biblical example of this latter usage. The other seven occurrences of *dôd*—Song 1:2, 4; 4:10; 7:12 (Hebrew v 13); Prov 7:18; Ezek 16:8; 23:17—demand the idea "lovmaking" in its specific physical meaning of sexual union. Thus at least seven times in the OT the ancient meaning "beloved (sexual) partner" is preserved for *dôd*.

The "love songs," then, are poetic units using explicit sexual elements intrinsic to the genre. This of course has caused problems for generations of Biblical interpreters—especially those who were influenced negatively toward human sexuality by the obviously obscene extremes of the ancient Near Eastern fertility rituals or by the more subtle but equally erroneous gnostic-type philosophical rejection of the possibility of any "good" being found in anything material.

Turning now to the three major love songs from the OT, let us look first at the shortest of them, Isa 5:1-2. These two verses, containing only 28 words, appear to be a self-contained unit. Allowing for repetitions within the unit, 14 of the 25 different words are shared with either Psalm 45 and/or the Song of Solomon. Admittedly this sample is too small statistically to provide any firm conclusions, and of course many of the terms are common words that appear frequently throughout the OT (e.g. *bânâ*, "to build," occurs over 400 times and *âsâ*, "to make," over 2700 times). But it is worth noting how the pattern of the genre is reflected here in this short metaphor. (1) Since the beloved is not addressed directly the "I-thou" form is not present, but the first-person/third-person pattern of the *rtb* form of vv 3-7 is anticipated in the love song. (2) The nature element is of course evident in the "vineyard" figure with the two types of grapes, and the manifest devotion of the lover for the beloved is reflected in the care expended in hoeing and cultivating the ground and removing the stones from the soil. (3) The anticipation of the fruitfulness on the "very fertile hill" and the care to safeguard the beloved with hedge and tower all demonstrate the lover's concern.

The poem, however, is explicitly an allegory—v 7 leaves no doubt about that—and thus the basic problem of interpretation for this unit is solved. Yahweh is the "lover"; Israel is the "beloved." So in Matt 21:33-45 (and the parallels in Mark 12:1-12 and Luke 20:9-19), the Lord's parable of the vineyard and the murdering stewards, the allegory is clearly elaborated. The parable is of course somewhat different in its development. In the NT the unjust stewards, not the vineyard, are destroyed, and the vineyard itself, rather than being devastated, is given over to another nation that will bring forth fruit for the master.

¹²For documentation see the material in *TDOT* 3, 143-148.

Nevertheless I think there can be little doubt that the prophetic love song underlies the gospel parable.

To summarize our material to this point, it can be said that what we have so far in the NT use of the OT love songs is really nothing more than the NT writers' borrowing from a common pool of ideas and expressions derived in part at least from the OT prophets but without any obvious or necessary attempt to quote the OT texts and explicate them specifically in terms of the new revelation.

That, however, leaves us with two other love songs—Psalm 45 and the Song of Solomon—and it is at this point that the basic issue of this paper surfaces. It has been remarked frequently, especially by Catholic and evangelical scholars, that the close relationship between the Song of Solomon and Psalm 45 provides a clear precedent for seeing in the Song of Solomon some allegorical or messianic meaning, and that if an adequate case for the nonallegorical interpretation of the Song is to be made, a comparative analysis of the Song and of Psalm 45—noting the significant differences between them that call for different interpretive approaches—will have to be made.¹³ While an exhaustive treatment of this issue would be too extensive for consideration here, this point needs to be faced for both allegory and typology.

Psalm 45 is a "love song" (*NIV* "wedding song") in honor of a royal wedding. While there is nothing in the Psalm itself to identify to which king it was dedicated or for which particular royal wedding it was written, the crux of the problem for us is the quotation of vv 6 and 7 in Heb 1:8, 9, where the author applies the OT text to Christ. The argument there concerns the superiority of the Son over all the angels. Apart from the quotation and the attribution—"but of the Son he says"—there is no development of the OT text, nor is there any other use of this Psalm either in Hebrews or elsewhere in the NT.

The Psalm is a relatively short one of 17 verses plus a title, containing 160 words. Allowing for repetitions, there are 120 different words used in the Psalm. Of these, 51 are also used in the Song of Solomon and 69 are not in the Song, although most are used elsewhere in the OT. What is of particular interest is that many of these 69 are cultic or "theological" terms that are entirely absent from the Song of Solomon.¹⁴

¹³See M. G. Kline, "The Greatest Song: In Critique of Solomon' by Calvin Seerveld," *Gordon Review* 11 (1968) 54.

¹⁴Some of the more important of these are: v 2 "anoint," "pour" (*yāsaq*); "grace" (*hēn*); "God" (*ʾēlohīm*); "bless"; v 3 "glory" (*hōd*); "majesty"; v 4 "truth"; "humility" (but cf. the commentaries on alternate readings here); "righteousness"; "fear"; v 6 "throne"; "scepter"; "equity"; "kingdom"; "wickedness"; "anoint" (*māšah*); "joy"; v 8 "garment"; "palace"/"temple"; v 9 "noble," "honorable"; "queen" (*šāgēl*); v 10 "forget"; "father"; v 11 "desire" (in the form used here, always in a bad sense); "lord," "master"; "beauty"; "bow down," "worship"; v 12 "offering," "sacrifice"; v 13 "glorious"; v 14 "garment"; "bring as a gift or sacrifice to someone," "lead to"; "virgin" (*be tūlāh*; a cognate in the Ugaritic texts is one of the epithets of the goddess Anat); v 16 "prince" (in several of the Egyptian love songs a "Prince Mehy" appears; some scholars argue that this may be a quasi-fictional character used to conceal the identity of the real person involved, but others take him to be an actual royal person although no firm identification or even of what dynasty he was can be made; he appears to be the legendary lover—a Don Juan type by reputation; for a brief discussion of the identity of Mehy see P. C. Smither, "Prince Mehy of the Love Songs," *JEA* 34 (1948) 116; for the text of the love songs see W. K. Simpson, *The Literature of Ancient Egypt: An Anthology of Stories, Instructions, and Poetry* [New Haven: Yale University Press, 1972], esp. pp. 305, 317; S. Schott, *Altägyptische Liebeslieder* [Zurich: Artemisverlage, 1950] 68-69); v 17 "generations"; "praise"; "forever" (versus "death" in the Song of Solomon).

In addition to these, which do appear in Psalm 45, some of the other important theological words that

In the two verses from the Psalm that are quoted in Hebrews there is a strong element of the theological basis of the kingship. As Kidner notes,¹⁵ the plain sense of v 6 is "Your throne, O God, will last for ever and ever," and if limited to the earthly Davidic king is incomprehensible. Admittedly, vv 16 and 17 suggest the more normal understanding that the children of this royal wedding will be the first of a long dynasty that will rule, but it is going too far to suggest that the *'ēlōhīm* of v 6 are the "children" of v 16.

The scepter, symbol of the kingly rule, was given into the hands of the tribe of Judah as early as Gen 49:10, with the divine promise that it would remain there "until he comes whose it (rightfully) is."¹⁶ Thus this is linked with the paradisaical fertility of the messianic age, the time (eternity) when the Anointed One (Ps 45:7: *mšh*), who loves righteousness, rules in equity (*NIV* "justice").

There are other words elsewhere in this Psalm that are clearly linked with the rule of Messiah. For example, "grace" (v 2) and "truth" (v 4) are attributed to Jesus in John 1:14, 17; "blessed" (v 2) may be reflected in Rom 9:5b; the Hebrew for "humility" (v 4) is also used in a different form in Zech 9:9 and in its Greek equivalent in the NT quotation of that text in Matt 21:5.

In the Psalm, however, the subject shifts from the king/Messiah to his bride at v 10, and an examination of some of the terms used in this section excludes the possibility of taking this passage as referring to the Church as the bride of Christ. For example the verb "desire" in v 11 in the form it is here is to be understood in the bad sense of "lust," not as just a general attitude but the actual individual impulse toward illicit sexual activity. Similarly "beauty" (*ypy*) in the same verse has a pagan connotation in Ugaritic where it is used of offerings presented to the gods. Even the "queen" (*šāgēl*) in v 9 is not the "bride" but rather the "harem favorite." The verb from which this noun is derived was considered obscene by the rabbinic writers and was everywhere replaced in the reading of the Scriptures by the more acceptable verb *šākab*, "to sleep."

What, however, of the words that Psalm 45 and the Song of Solomon share in common? An examination of these reveals the following data: (1) Many of these words are simply common words used in everyday speech and are frequent in all parts of the OT. Some examples would be "word," "good," "king," "strong," "people," "son," "daughter," "hear" and "see," as well as the common prepositions and conjunctions. (2) Others of these words are the kind that would be expected in any poem (or prose) that deals with intimate relationships between male and female. There are body-words such as "heart," "tongue," "lips,"

do not appear in the Song of Solomon are: "evil" (*āwen*), "God" (*'ēl*, *'ēlōhīm*), "faithful," "truth," "covenant," "bless," "to sin," "grace" (*hesed*), "be clean," "be unclean," "to save," "glory" (*kābōd*), "justice," "to vow," "to do wrong," "to visit" (God to man), "righteousness," "be holy," "congregation," "evil" (*ra'*), "law." Of the terms relating specifically to cultic observation the following are not found in Psalm 45 or the Song: "ram," "to assemble," "high place," "oxen," "blood," "to sacrifice," "keep a feast," "priest," "cover" (atone), "altar," "sanctuary," "booth," "to assemble" (cultic congregation), "bury" (frequent in the Tammuz ritual), "draw near." Any theory that focuses on the cultic, liturgical, or allegorical interpretation of the Song needs to explain satisfactorily the almost total absence of theological and cultic language in the Song. See E. Yamauchi, "Cultic Clues in Canticles?," *BETS* 4 (1961) 80-88.

¹⁵D. Kidner, *Psalms 1-72* (Tyndale Commentary; Downers Grove: Inter-Varsity, 1973) 172.

¹⁶Cf. D. Kidner, *Genesis* (Tyndale Commentary; Downers Grove: Inter-Varsity, 1967) 218; G. von Rad, *Genesis* (Old Testament Library; Philadelphia: Westminster, 1961) 420.

“thigh” and “teeth”; terms of endearment such as “beloved,” “beautiful,” “love,” “companion” and “friend”; and there are other words associated with love including perfumes such as “myrrh,” “aloes” and “oil,” or words like “adorn,” “gold” and “joy.” It must be remembered, however, that these and many others of the same type are frequent in love poetry from all over the ancient Near East and that the most that can legitimately be said is that they reflect a common human way of expressing human emotional involvement with a loved one.

Turning from the vocabulary of the Psalm and the Song of Solomon, we must give some attention also to the themes present in the Psalm in common with and in contrast to those present in the Song. Again summary is all that is possible, but there are certain things that stand out. Of the things in common at least the following deserve notice. (1) They are both “songs” (and probably both “wedding songs”)—that is, both are lyrical compositions with no overt didactic purpose.¹⁷ (2) Both hint at the role of the royal warrior and his armed guard (Ps 45:4-5; Song 3:7), a motif that is also present in the “Prince Mehy” songs from Egypt. (3) Both are concerned with the relationship between a man and a woman, specifically in marriage context. Some commentators have remarked on the juxtaposition of the coronation/wedding elements in these two poems (e.g. Song 3:11, the coronation, being followed by the two poems in 4:8-15 where the woman is identified as the “bride”).¹⁸ But this parallel is not as clear as it appears at first glance. There is nothing in the Psalm to suggest a coronation ritual, although Broadribb reads v 7 in this light. (4) Both the Psalm and the Song recognize the mystique of the perfumer’s art (Ps 45:8; Song 3:6; 4:10-14). (5) Both acknowledge the presence of the friends (“virgins” [?]) in the encounter (Ps 45:9, 14; Song 1:1b; 5:1; 6:1, 13; 8:8-9). And (6) both apparently were used in public celebrations.

The differences between the two poems are even more important. The Song is aware of the threats and dangers that hinder love (e.g. 5:7-8; 3:1-3) and of the power of love and death (8:6-7). In Ps 45:5 the “right hand” is the one that “teaches dread deeds” (RSV), while in Song 2:6; 8:3 it is the arm of tender embrace. Verses 14-15 of the Psalm reflect the traditional wedding procession of the bride to the husband’s home, but Song 3:4 reverses this, with the bride bringing her lover to her mother’s home. In Psalm 45 the palace is the place of the celebration of love; in the Song it is the garden that fills this role.

One major item frequently overlooked in the treatment of the Song of Solomon is that there is no reference there to the presence or authority of the girl’s father. Mother (1:6; 3:4; 8:1-2), brothers (1:6; 8:1) and sisters (8:8; cf. 4:10, 12; 5:1-2) are all present, but not the father. Yet in the ancient Near East the permission of the father was an essential element in the arranged marriages.¹⁹ Psalm 45:10 recognizes this aspect of the marriage: “Forget your people and your father’s house.” In the Psalm the bride is to “revere” her “lord”; in the Song there is mutual sharing and delight in the other with no hint of subjugation.

¹⁷See, however, the argument in Seerveld, *Greatest*, 68-83; Childs, *Introduction*, 569-579.

¹⁸D. Broadribb, “Thoughts on the Song of Solomon,” *AbrN* 3 (1961-62) 19.

¹⁹Cf., e.g., Gen 21:21; 38:6; 34:4-8; Judg 14:2; Ruth 3:1-2. If of course the father was dead, a different situation, where the brothers have responsibility, would prevail (cf. 1:6). This would be an unusual situation, however, and may suggest that the Song of Solomon was in fact written for a specific wedding.

Finally, the procreation of children is a primary reason for marriage in the ancient Near East.²⁰ This concept is the background of Ps 45:16-17, where the psalmist anticipates a long and fruitful line as a result of this royal wedding. The Song of Solomon, on the other hand, ignores this aspect of the man/woman relationship.

Given these similarities and differences between these two "love songs" it appears that the question of different interpretive approaches can be answered legitimately. Certain parts of certain OT books and chapters are specifically interpreted in the NT with a Christological application. Other parts of the same book and chapter may be used to illustrate certain NT teachings without specific quotation by the NT authors. The burden of the proof of the validity of this method in any given case lies on the side of those who see types and allegories in much of the OT. Of course none of this demands a non-Christological application of any or all of the Song or the Psalm apart from vv 6-7, but it does suggest caution before arguing that because one part of a particular passage of the OT is used in the NT in a specifically allegorical or typological way any other verse or verses can legitimately be interpreted in the same way.

²⁰Note, e.g., Gen 15:1; 16:1; 19:30-32; 25:21; 30:1-2; 38:1-11; Deut 25:5-10; 1 Sam 1:1-20. See also the material on the sacred marriage rite in Mesopotamia.