

Episode #407 Song of Solomon 3: The Betrothed Couple

I. The “Song of Solomon” is written in the form of a drama in five acts. It tells a story about a love triangle between a country girl, her country boy lover to whom she is betrothed, and Solomon, who tries to steal her away from him. In it we see an example of the kind of love and loyalty we should have toward God, and of the kind of love He has for us.

II. Last time, we saw that Solomon had seen a country girl from a vineyard-keeping family and fallen for her, taking her into his train as he is heading back for Jerusalem after one of his many weddings. She is upset and dismayed, and wants to be back with her betrothed lover, a shepherd.

III. Continuing Act 1. Song of Solomon 1:12-2:4. The First Encounter Between the Girl and her Shepherd.

- A. V.12. While Solomon is busy eating, her shepherd, who has learned what happened and followed her, manages to find her and get an interview with her. This might be thanks to some of the court ladies who took her side.
- B. V.13. This shows that the “spikenard” was the arrival of her beloved. She is overjoyed. She still views him as precious, and she still intends to marry him, not Solomon.
- C. V.14. Her delight seeing him is like seeing a cluster of flowers in a vineyard. “Engedi” = “Fount of the Kid,” a town in Judah on the western shore of the Dead Sea.
- D. V.15. The shepherd is delighted to find her faithful, considering all Solomon would have had to offer. He praises her beauty. “Dove’s eyes” = actually “eyes like doves.”
- E. V.16. She replies in kind (she uses the same word for “good-looking” as he did) and promises again that she plans to marry him and live in the country.
- F. V.17. Their home might be a humble country house made of wood, not a rich palace like Solomon’s, but she does not care.
- G. 2:V.1. These were two very common flowers in that part of the country. The girl claims to be nothing special.
- H. V.2. Her shepherd turns it around, and makes her a beautiful lily among thorns, thus insisting that she is special.
- I. V.3. She turns it back to him, that he is the special one, and makes him a fruit tree among non-fruit-bearing trees. She rests in his love like resting under the tree and eating its fruit.
- J. V.4. He brings her to the vine-arbor and over-shaded her with love. This may reflect her hopes for their future wedding, but more probably this may be describing their betrothal ceremony, which is already past.

IV. What Exactly Was a Hebrew Betrothal?

- A. When we hear “betrothal” we tend to think “engagement,” because that is what we have in our society. They both took place before marriage, but they are not really the same thing.
- B. Betrothal was actually a ceremony, and was legally binding. You actually needed a divorce after betrothal, so it was the legally binding ceremony, not the wedding. You could speak of a “betrothed husband” and a “betrothed wife.” Not a fiancée.
- C. Betrothal took place at least a year or much longer before the marriage. One or both might not even have hit puberty when they were betrothed!
- D. After betrothal, the man (boy) was to go off and learn his trade, while the woman (girl) was to learn how to take care of a household, raise children, etc. She was also

- now going to be part of her husband's family business. Since she now knew what that business was going to be, she could also take the opportunity to learn more about it, since it might be different from her family business growing up.
- E. A woman with no family (father, husband, or sons) to belong to could get not work, outside beggarhood or prostitution. A father would want to make sure his daughter was betrothed into a stable family before he died. If he loved his daughter, he would do it as soon as possible.
 - F. A betrothed couple was not supposed to consummate the relationship until after the marriage ceremony/wedding, when both families agreed they were ready. The wedding was less important than the betrothal. If they did, however, it was considered scandalous, but not outright immoral. The closest we could come is if a couple ran off to consummate the relationship between the wedding and reception. This would seem strange, would cause tongues to wag, but would not be the same as unwed sex.
 - G. During betrothal, either family could break the contract and cause a divorce. After marriage, however, only the husband could call for a divorce (Deuteronomy 24:1). That is what Solomon is hoping to do: arrange a divorce through her brothers (since her father is dead), since he can offer them a better deal.
- V. Conclusion: The Song of Solomon presents to us a picture of the kind of love that God always intended between a man and woman. The girl is faithful to her love, and not interested even in a "better offer." Their love is focused outwardly on each other, not inwardly on themselves. These are all lessons that young people, and really all people, in our society could use to learn today.