SONG OF SONGS

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INTRODUCTION

Although a small book with only eight chapters and 117 verses, the Book of Song of Songs has generated thousands of works since its canonization in the first century. The book was at the center of controversy starting from the process of its inclusion in the canon to its literary genre, authorship, literary unity, frequent change of scenes in the text, as well as its lack of explicit “God-content.” The book’s history of interpretation is one of the most fascinating one. Since the early patristic period until the medieval period, the allegorical interpretation dominates the understanding of the book. It was not until the rise of the historical critical method in the nineteenth century that a diversity of its interpretation flourished. The contemporary scholarship sees the book as a collection of love poems between a man and a woman. Yet, its exact interpretation still thrives with intrigues and tension until this very day.

INTRODUCTORY WORKS

Most introductory works are included in the survey of the Old Testament/Hebrew Bible. Many of these examples are used for textbooks in universities and seminaries (Archer, 1964; Collins, 2004; Longman, 2006; Vriezen, 2005). Many one-volume commentaries (Dunn, 2003; Walton, 2009) and versions of the New Interpreter’s Bible (Brueggeman, 2005; Keck, 1997) also provide introductory materials to the Song of Songs. These introductory works are generally concise.

This is a brief introduction to the Song of Songs. It is one of the starting places for a big picture regarding the content and basic issues of the book.

This is a concise edition of the survey on the Song of Songs without verse by verse commentary. The chapter on the Song of Songs is written by Renita J. Weems in pp. 262-269.

This book contains a brief introduction to the Song of Songs. It was grouped with the Psalms and appears on pages 480-484. It includes several suggested readings on page 486.

This is a one volume commentary. The Song of Songs appears on pages 474-481. It contains a brief discussion of the inclusion of the Song in the canon, a brief commentary, and a brief bibliography.

This is a brief introduction to the Song of Songs. It talks about the divide between the allegorical and the literal interpretations. It affirms the place of sexuality in the biblical canon.


The commentary on the Song of Songs appears in pp. 363-434. The introductory section appears in *The New Interpreter's Bible: Old Testament Survey.* The commentary is brief but is helpful in getting the gist of the passages. The author’s reflection appears after each literary unit is also helpful.


The Song of Songs section appears on pages 451-456. This chapter has extended bibliographical materials on the Song of Songs.


The chapter on the Song of Songs appears on pages 518-533. It includes several pictures of Egyptian portraits such as Akhenaten and his queen, Egyptian love poetry, Pharaoh’s horses and date palm trees, which reflect the images emerged from the Song of Songs.

**GENERAL OVERVIEWS**

General overviews deal with history of interpretation. The history of interpretation of the Song of Songs has over two thousand years of history. The study of its interpretative history is considered a major task. Longman’s work has a chapter on the Song’s history of interpretation, which is more up to date than both Murphy and Pope’s works. Both the introductory sections of the commentaries of Murphy and Pope include significant resources on the Song of Songs but are only limited to the works of their generations and before.


This dictionary devotes three chapters to the Song of Songs. The first chapter provides a general overview of the book. The second chapter gives the ancient Near Eastern background of the book. The third chapter deals with its history of interpretation. A great resource for scholars and general
audience.


This commentary includes a lengthy history of interpretation on the Song of Songs, arranged by its time periods from early Jewish, Origen, to Christian and Jewish interpretation in the Middle Ages, and then from reformation to the modern era (pp. 11-41).


The bibliographical information is arranged by pre-1800 to post-1800 (pp. 236-288). Many of the entries are German and French works on the Song. Among the history of interpretations, Marvin Pope has a massive survey before 1980 (pp. 89-229).

http://www.unc.edu/~cernst/sosintro.htm

This website contains an overview of the two main interpretative strands of the Song of Songs: spiritual and sensual. It provides a helpful overview of the interpretation of the book.

http://www.biblicalstudies.org.uk/article_song1_tanner.html

The original work of this article is authored by J. Paul Tanner, published by *Bibliothea Sacra* 154: 613 (1997): 23-46. It includes an overview of the interpretation of the Song with the respective page numbers of the article. It is easy to cite.

**TEXT OF SONGS OF SONGS**

The Hebrew text of Song of Songs can be accessed online. Many English versions including New International Version, New American Standard Bible, New Revised Standard Bible, King James Version, New King James Version and English Standard Version can be accessed through BibleGateway. This website also contains the Chinese Union Version, the Vietnamese Bible, the Spanish Bible of different versions of translation, the Portuguese Bible, the Italian Bible and many other languages. *The Five Megilloth and Jonah* is a helpful resource for a bilingual text.

BibleGateway.com[http://www.biblegateway.com/versions/]

Readers can find multiple language versions of the Song of Songs in this website including French, German, Italian, Spanish, and Chinese.


This is a bilingual (Hebrew-English) text of the five Megilloth. The Song of Songs appears on pages
5-17. H.L. Ginsberg wrote the introduction and David Ismar did the illustrations.

**ANNOTATED STUDY BIBLES**

The following annotated study bibles provide a convenient way for readers to receive general information on the nature of the Song and give some explanations on particular verses. All are quite similar except for Foster’s work that has a spiritual formation focus and Senior’s study bible that is Catholic oriented. Several study bibles has the apocrypha (Coogan, 2010; Metzger, 1991; O’Day, 1999).

This is a joint effort by members of the Society of Biblical Literature.

The Song of Songs section appears on pages 1020-1021.

The annotations of the Song appear on pp. 959-968.

This Bible draws attention to the aspect of spiritual formation. The annotated material on the Song of Songs appears on pages 963-973. The notes include both the literal interpretation as well as redemption of intimacy in the Garden of Eden.

The annotated material is brief but helpful for beginning readers.

The Song of Solomon appears on pages 859-867.

This study bible includes the catholic canon such as the books of Sirach (Ecclesiasticus), 1 and 2 Maccabees and Baruch. The Song of Songs appears on pages 791-798. The notes are brief and understand the Song as both an ideal version of divine-human love and human-human love.

REFERENCE RESOURCES

These works include basic background, authorship, and interpretative information on the Song of Songs along with bibliographies for further reading. The information is generally concise and brief in nature except for Tremper Longman’s *Dictionary of the Old Testament: Wisdom, Poetry & Writings*, which contains more expansive materials than Freedman’s *The Anchor Bible Dictionary* and Sakenfeld’s *The New Interpreters’ Dictionary of the Bible*.

   The section of the Song appears on pages 150-155. The bibliographic material is limited to the time period prior to 1982.

   The section “Song of Solomon” appears on pages 1242-1244.

   The section on the Song appears on pages 348-354.

   It contains three chapters on the Song of Songs including a general introduction to the book, ancient Near Eastern background, and history of interpretation. A very helpful resource for both academic and non-academic readers (see also “General Overviews”).

BIBLIOGRAPHIES

Most commentaries on the Song of Songs include a list or lists of bibliographies. Some are more extensive and some are more concise. For works before 1977, Pope's bibliography is the most extensive. For more recent works, Biddle’s bibliography is a good resource. The latest version of Longman’s book is always a good place to go for commentaries suggestions.

Old Testament Abstracts
   This online tool provides summaries of current articles and books on the Song of Songs.
This bibliography contains major commentaries and monographs on the Song of Songs. It can be accessed online.
This book contains annotated bibliographical notes on the books of the Old Testament/Hebrew Bible, including the Song of Songs. This book has been updated five times and serves as a helpful tool for researchers.
The commentary includes an extensive bibliography on the Song prior to 1980 (pp. 233-288).
http://tmcdaniel.palmerseminary.edu/Song%20of%20Solomon%20Bibliography.pdf
This website contains an annotated bibliography by an unknown author from Palmer seminary. The list includes journal articles on the Song of Songs. This list, however, is not updated. The latest entry is 1991.

**COMMENTARIES**

Commentaries are available to guide readers through the analysis of the text and offer varying degrees of philological detail or interaction with the history of scholarship. Since interpretation of the Song of Songs poses controversial opinions throughout two thousand years of its interpretive history, massive amounts of commentaries have been produced. This category contains major selected works on modern commentaries on the book. Commentaries produced during the patristic period and the medieval period will be organized in their respective categories.

**Major and Technical Commentaries**
The choices of these commentaries are representative of the scope and nature of the Song of Songs. This collection includes a variety of approaches to the interpretation of the Song: Philological (Barbiero, 2011), literal and poetic (Exum, 2005), Catholic (Griffiths, 2011), evangelical (Hess, 2005), iconographic (Keel, 1994), technical (Murphy, 1990), and funerary rites (Pope, 1977).

This is a translation from the original Italian work. The author uses the literal approach and sees the
Song as in dialogue with other books in the Old Testament. The 500 pages speak of its expansive notes and insights on this biblical book.

This commentary focuses on the literary structure, poetics, and portrayal of gender dynamics in the Song of Songs. The lengthy introduction provides an overview of the Song, of which the gender analysis is particularly illuminating.

Griffith interprets the Song from the Latin text, the *New Vulgate*. The interpretive lenses include both the plain sense and the figural sense, with particular interest in mariological and ecclesial applications. The introduction contains valuable information on the history of the Latin *Vulgate*, its transmission and influence on the church.

This work includes an over 100 page introduction, with an extensive survey of the Song’s history of interpretation. The commentary session follows the tradition of WBC’s commentary series and provides helpful exegetical and theological insights to the Song.

The introductory section is brief compared to other major commentaries. The commentary section combines linguistic, poetic and exegetical insights. It takes the Song literally within God’s created order. The theological implications at the end of each poem highlight and summarize the Song’s messages.

This commentary is a translated work from an original German monograph. Keel uses iconography as its guide post to interpret the Song and provides a visual element to the literary world of the Song. Keel’s insight on the Egyptian context serves as a helpful tool in the understanding of the Song.

This is a technical commentary on the Song of Songs, including an extensive, over 120 page introduction and a detailed bibliography arranged by chronological listing and subjects. Murphy groups the history of interpretation of the Song by different time periods. The commentary separates
technical notes from the section on interpretations.


This work by far is the most ambitious one in scope and length. It identifies the Song as a funerary rite. The commentary uses various sources such as LXX, Ugaritic, Akkadian and Targum to deduce the linguistic and semantic aspects of the Song. The section on the history of interpretation is extensive, around 200 pages.

**Commentaries for General Audiences**

These works are written primarily for the church audience. The applications are theological and pastoral. There are less technical elements compared to the category of major and technical commentaries. Bloch’s book is good for those who know Hebrew. Brenner’s book provides geographical as well as the life setting of the Song in light of the landscape and the climate of Israel. Both Carr and Gledhill’s books are targeted for general audience. Davis’ book connects the text to its spiritual meanings. Jenson and Longman’s work include well balanced discussions about the Song and are suitable for both academic and church audience.


This volume is written for both technical and general audience, yet those who know Hebrew would benefit the most since the commentary uses extensive Hebrew. The book includes a beautiful introduction and Robert Alter’s literary reading of the Song. The commentary section is concise and lack of academic jargons.


This small volume provides helpful information on the literary and cultural dimensions of the Song. It is not a verse-by-verse commentary. The author who has grown up in the land of Israel connects the settings, contexts, and the environment expressed in the Song to the actual life setting in Israel.


This is a compact introductory work. Carr takes the literal view of the Song. His work includes helpful subject studies. This commentary is also full of exegetical and theological insights.


This commentary on the Song reveals intertextuality with other biblical books, particularly Genesis.
chapter two and the prophetic books. Davis presents the Song as a reflection of the temple background and the woman as both a literal figure and a collective symbol of Israel.


Gledhill takes the Song as a literary poetic expression of human love. He explores the Song with sound exegesis combined with personal reflections and applications. There is a helpful summary of themes and discussions in the back of the book. It would be a good reference book for the church.


This is a concise interpretation of the Song. The focus is not on a verse-by-verse with exegetical comments but poem by poem. The author interprets the Song with three senses: plain, overt, and analogue. The reader would need to have a Bible alongside the commentary.


This can be applicable to divine and human love. His writing displays sound exegesis and full of theological insights.

**Commentaries for Devotions**

These commentaries do not have technical details. The tone is meditative and reflective. The purpose is for spiritual nourishment and formation. Paulsell’s book is pastoral and connects the reader to the spiritual realm. Nee’s interpretation is purely allegorical. O’Donnell’s book is also pastoral with practical implications. Pennington’s book is pastoral and allegorical. It includes several illustrations of the Song.


Paulsell’s writing is beautiful and reflective. This commentary is pastoral, practical, and devotional. It would be a great resource for pastors and Sunday School teachers.


This book is translated from the original Chinese work. The interpretation is allegorical, depicting the individual soul in union with Christ. Nee sees the process of love progressing in the Song from the initial stage to the mature love. Those who appreciate the allegorical interpretation would find this work enlightening.

This is a book from the “Preaching the Word” commentary series. It is an excellent work in introducing the Song of Songs as a book about human love found in the Bible and it was written to give people wisdom. This would be a great reference work for pastors and Sunday School teachers.


This book is more like “praying with the Song of Songs.” The author takes the Song allegorically depicting the love between Christ and individual believers. It includes several graphic illustrations in black and white, based on the scenes and images in the Song with respective Hebrew verses on them.

**Specialized Commentaries**

These works approach the text of Song of Songs from a particular methodological perspective or seek to address a specific facet of its interpretation: the Grotesque Body (Black, 2009), love lyrics (Falk, 1982), nature imagery (Feliks, 1983), fourteen songs (Goulder, 1986), intertextuality with prophetic literature (LaCocques, 1998), psychology (Landy, 2011), space and cartography (Meredith, 2013), and politics (Stadelmann, 1992). Most are appropriate for both scholarly and nonscholarly audiences.


Black proposes to use grotesque as a hermeneutical key to view the body imagery in the Song and explores the Song’s politics of representation and gender. It offers an alternative to view the wasf (descriptive praise of the body) in the Song.


Falk takes the Song as lyric anthology and a collection of 31 poems. Her translation of the Song is based on dynamic equivalence. The book contains several helpful subject studies including literary structure, types of love lyrics, wasf, contexts, themes, and motifs. Her translation is frequently quoted by later commentators.


This commentary asserts that the agricultural and flora images in the land of Israel form the imagery of nature in the Song. The book includes many actual photos of the landscape of Israel, its animals, and its flowers which correspond to the images of them portrayed in the Song.

Goulder understands the book as a collection of fourteen songs with a semi-continuous plot. It includes a relative fluid translation. The chapters are brief and easy to read.


LaCocque argues that the Song of Songs is a subversion of the metaphors used in Israelite prophetic literature. It shifts the vertical axis of divine-human love to a horizontal erotic love. The monograph includes an extensive hermeneutical exploration of the Song’s nature and its intertextuality.


This book takes the Garden of Eden as a cue to the interpretation of the Song. Landy compares and contrasts the Eden story with the garden imagery in the Song and takes the Song as an inversion Eden. The study is full of psychological insights and literary creativity.


This study redefines literary space by reading the Song through the lens of cartography, phantoscope and labyrinth. It offers a fresh new perspective to understanding the fluidity of the literary structure in the Song.


The author presupposes the characters in the Song as representing larger social groups. Thus, Shulamite represents the people of Judah, Solomon represents the Davidic dynasty. The author situates the Song in the historical climate of the exiles returning from Babylon and reconciling with those who were left behind in Judah.

**SONG OF SONGS AND EGYPTIAN POETRY**

This section focuses on the inter-connectedness between the genre of love poetry in the Song of Songs and Egyptian love songs. Their works contribute to the interpretation of the Song as a love poetry which influence subsequent generations of commentators. Fox’s study draws upon White’s earlier study.

This commentary interprets the Song in light of its Egyptian parallels. It includes Egyptian texts and hieroglyphic transcriptions. Fox compares literary treatment, form and function as well as themes between the Song of Songs and its Egyptian counterparts. The study contributes to later understanding of the Song as love poetry.


This study compares the Egyptian love poetry with the Song in literary genre, literary features, topoi, and love languages. Although the literature review is outdated, the study serves as a helpful tool to understand the affinities between the two types of love poetry.

**ESSAY COLLECTIONS**

These works include collections of essays or chapters on the different aspects of the Song of Songs. Bloom’s work collects essays from previous published materials by key interpreters of the Song. Brenner’s work focuses on the feminist approaches to the Song and Hagedorn’s work is a collected essay on various perspectives to the Song. Trible’s work has a chapter on the Song “Love’s Lyrics Redeemed” which influences later commentators on the connection between the Song of Songs and the Garden of Eden.


This is a multi-author volume, reading the Song from the lens and interests of women. The range of subjects cover issues of authorship, intertextuality, structure, the *wasf* and includes a section on the Song of Songs in retrospect. The book contributes to diverse ways of reading the Song.


This work is a collaboration of multiple international authors on biblical perspectives, comparative perspectives and later perspectives of the Song of Songs. It covers a broad spectrum of topics from ancient context to interpretation. A quarter of the chapters are in German.

It includes a chapter on the Song of Songs: “Love’s Lyrics Redeemed.” Tribles takes Genesis 2-3 as a hermeneutical key to interpret the book. The role of the woman in the Song reflects a love in mutuality and harmony. This chapter influences many future interpretations of the Song.

TEXTUAL TRADITION

Both Murphy and Pope’s commentaries include materials on the textual tradition of the Song.


Murphy includes a few pages in the introduction regarding the text and traditional versions of the Song (pp. 7-11).


This commentary includes a few pages on the texts and versions of the Song (pp. 233-236).

EARLY CHRISTIAN INTERPRETATION

This period lasts from the first century to the fifth century. Many monographs in this category are devoted to the study of one or more specific writers who had written on the Song of Songs. Many of which have influenced future commentators of the Song such as the commentary of Origen. Most work in this category has Origen in their contents (King, 2005; Lawson, 1957; Louth, 1992; Norris, 2003). The allegorical meaning dominates early Christian interpretation (Desimone, 2000; Elliot, 2000), seeing the lover’s relationship in the Song as depicting the love between Christ and the Church.


The introductory chapter lays out the principles of the patristic interpretation of the Song. It helps the reader to understand how the early church fathers understand the Song as a spiritual Song. The main portion of the book deals with the known figures in the Song’s history of interpretation.


This is a revised dissertation analyzing how the commentators in the early church interpreted the Bride and the Groom in the Song. It is written for scholars who have familiarity with early church interpreters, who know Greek, and who have acquaintances with the primary texts in that era.

King, J. Christopher. *Origen on the Song of Songs as the Spirit of Scripture: The Bridegroom’s Perfect
This study explores Origen’s commentary and homilies on the Song. The first part deals with the
hermeneutics of Origen in how he interprets the Song allegorically. The second part demonstrates the
exegetical procedure in which Origen derives his claim that the Song manifests the spirit of Scripture.

1957.
The prologue serves as the window into Origen’s understanding of the Song as a drama of mystical
meaning, depicting the relationship between Christ and the Church. The commentary is
verse-by-verse, but only up to chapter 2:15. There are two homilies related to the first two chapters of
the Song.

Louth, Andrew. Eros and Mysticism: Early Christian Interpretation of the Song of Songs. London: Guild of
This short piece of 18 pages booklet drawing from Origen and Gregory of Nyssa, attempts to
demonstrate that eros and logos are parts of a greater whole. This book is helpful as an entry point to
Origen and Gregory of Nyssa’s interpretations of the Song.

This commentary sets the texts of the Septuagint and the Vulgate of the Song in juxtaposition and
then draws from ancient commentaries or sermons by prominent figures such as Origen, Gregory the
Great, Gregory of Nyssa, and Bernard of Clairvaux.

JEWISH INTERPRETATION
At the center of Jewish interpretation are Midrash Rabbah (Neusner, 1993; Simon, 1983) and Targum
(Lyke, 2007; Zlotowitz, 1977-1996). Neusner’s work provides details into how the rabbis approach the
Song of Songs from their angles. Rosenberg explains rabbinic exegesis of the Song and their key
characteristics by relating specific key words or phrase in the Song with historical events of Israel. Lieber
explores the Hebrew liturgical poetry as a way to interpret the Song. The allegorical interpretation
dominates this period. The rabbis interpret the lover’s relationship in the Song as depicting the relationship
between God and Israel.

2014.
The first section includes four essays on the Song of Songs. The second section analyzes early
Hebrew liturgical poetry (piyyut) with texts and commentary. The purpose of the second section aims
to enlighten the meanings of the Song. This work fits the category of literary or poetical analysis as well.

The second part of this book has three chapters: one on the Targum to Song of Songs, one on Midrash Rabba to the Song, and one on Origen’s homily to the Song. All pertain to Song of Songs 1:1-4.

Neusner explores selected texts from the Song of Songs Rabba. These texts expressed the love between God and Israel through rabbis’ conversations and imaginations on the Song as well as through their way of connecting the Song to the other texts of the Hebrew Bible.

Rosenberg gives an overview of the authorship and position of the Song in the Hebrew canon. He outlines the rabbinic interpretation of the Song by Rashi who sees the Song as a parable depicting the relationship between God and Israel. The commentary section contains many notes from rabbinic literature.

If one wants to read the whole translated text of Midrash Rabbah on Song of Songs, this is the book to read!

This commentary includes the Hebrew text of the Song with a commentary drawn from Rashi, Midrash, Talmud and other rabbis. The beginning section “Overview” lays out the rational for the allegorical interpretation of the Song, which is beneficial to the understanding of rabbis’ thoughts.

This website contains early and Medieval Jewish interpretation of the Song of Songs, written by Weston W. Fields. It was originally published in Grace Theological Journal 1.2 (Fall, 1980) 221-31. It contains helpful information on the interpretation of the Song during this period.

**MEDIEVAL INTERPRETATION**

Broadly speaking, the European history of the medieval period lasted from the fifth to the fifteenth century, from the fall of the Western Roman Empire to the rise of Renaissance. The allegorical interpretation of Christ and the Church dominates this period (Astell, 1990). Among others, Gregory the Great (DelCogliano, 2012; Turner, 1995) and Bernard of Clairvaux (see his four volume sermons), are two of the prominent figures in interpreting the Song of Songs during this period. Nicholas of Lyra is another one (Kiecker, 1998). The text used in this period was the Latin *Vulgate*, translated by Jerome from the original Hebrew.


The author highlights the significant interpretative motifs including Mary as the Bride. Ann draws attention to the feminine “I” and the feminine “we,” as spiritual response of the readers in the Middle Ages. The book provides a window into the interpretation and spirituality of the Song that defines this period.


This book is a collection of the first twenty sermons of Clairvaux, from sermon 1 on the title of the Song to sermon 20 on the “Three Qualities of Love.” The introductory section explores Clairvaux’s way of interpreting the Song as a spiritual marriage between individual believers to God.


This book is a collection of Clairvaux’s sermons on the Song, from sermons 21 to 46. The text is from Song 1:3 (sermon 21) to Song 1:15-16 (sermon 46).


This book is a collection of Clairvaux’s sermons 47-66. The text is from Song 2:1 (sermon 47) to Song 2:15 (sermon 66).

This book completes the rest of Clairvaux’s sermons, from sermons 67-86. The text is from Song 2:16 (sermon 67) to Song 3:1 (sermon 85). The last sermon, sermon 86 is in praise of the Bride. Out of 86 sermons, Clairvaux only preached the first two chapters of the Song!

This book contains three major parts. The first part introduces Gregory’s life and writings and his exegetical methods on the Song. The second part includes Gregory’s exposition on the Song. The third section supplements with Gregory’s citations on the Song and his correspondences with other scholars of the Song. It is an invaluable resource to understand Gregory’s interpretation of the Song.

The introductory section helps the reader to be acquainted with Nicholas of Lyra’s person and work. The second section includes both Nichola’s original text in Latin and the translator’s version. The content of Nichola’s work seems to be between a sermon and personal reflection. It covers the whole book of the Song of Songs.

This book divides into two parts. The first part explores the meaning of eros in relation to allegory, typology, and imagery. It is helpful in defining and distinguishing the relationships among these conceptual categories. The second part provides primary texts of the Song during the medieval period, including the works of John of the Cross, Gregory the Great, Thomas Aquinas and Nicholas of Lyra. It is an invaluable resource for researches who are interested in medieval exegesis of the Song.

LITERARY ANALYSIS

For over two thousand years, the study of the Song of Songs has placed important emphasis on its interpretation, especially its allegorical and mystically meanings. After the nineteenth century, the interpretive tide turns to the Song’s literal meaning, of which the literary aspect of the Song comes to the fore. The literary aspect of the Song includes its lyric literary structure (Assis, 2009; Dorsey 1999; Elliot, 1989; Roberts, 2007), poetics (Hunt, 2008; Munro, 1995), themes, motifs as well as images and metaphors (Horine, 2001) used in the Song. Through these literary analyses, the meanings of the Song is further enriched and expanded. Van Paridon’s work deals with philology of the Song.
This study divides the Song into five literary units according to its theme. Each unit expresses the lovers yearning to be together and ends with the lovers’ union or reunion. Love is defined as the alteration between desire and anticipation, satisfaction and lack of satisfaction.

This study lays out the literary structure of all the books in the Old Testament. For Song of Songs, Dorsey divides its content into seven units. Each unit begins with shifts in scene, perspective, mood, and ends with a refrain anticipating the lovers’ union.

This is a revised dissertation, attempting to demonstrate the literary unity of the Song of Songs through its poetic structure, both at the formal level with prologues and epilogues and at the stylistic level with setting, theme and motifs. The printing needs to be updated with current type setting.

This study identifies the bridal chamber as the primary image in the Song whereas other metaphorical expressions of the Song such as the wedding chariots, the wine house and the vineyard are connected to it to form a unified thematic framework for the whole book. The argument is quite thorough.

This is a study on the Song’s poetics such as the literary devices employed in the Song, including word play, the fertility imagery in flowers and the animal imagery of stags, gazelles and flocks. It also includes a brief section on the influence of the Song on art and literature.

This is a revised doctoral dissertation. Munro analyzed poetic images in the Song and structured them into four categories: courtly imagery, imagery of family life, imagery of nature, and imagery of space and time. She argues that these images are metaphors of love, aiming to express how the lovers feel.

The author looks at the Song’s micro-units, which are defined by their opening, closure and features that create cohesion. This 400+ page study not only provides a detailed, comprehensive analysis of the author’s own method but also interacts with many other authors’ ways of looking at the Song’s structure.


This 500+ work focuses on the philology of the text of the Song and how it contributes to the literary analysis and thus the interpretation of the Song. The study is well researched and contains many linguistic as well as philological insights. It is a great reference work for scholars.

**RECEPTION**

The books in this section deal with the effect of the Song of Songs on later culture and traditions. Due to the Song’s erotic nature in the biblical canon, numerous art works, paintings (Horovitz, 2010; Lavin, 2001), music, countless sermons (Spurgeon, 1974; See also Origen and Bernard of Clairvaux in “Early Christian Interpretation” and “Medieval Interpretation) have been inspired and produced. The massive amount of literature (Hagedorn, 2005; Matter, 1990) and sermons related to the Song of Songs has been a solid evidence for the Song’s effect and consequences until this day. Sawyers’ book provides a concise reception history on the Song and Wrights’ book captures early Christian interpreters’ comments on the Song.


This volume has several articles concerning the reception history of the Song of Songs in Byzantine, Medieval, German Romantic and Modern Greek Literature.


This book contains rich resources on the influence of the Song from Jewish religious commentaries, Christian commentaries, and literal commentaries, to the effects of the Song in music, fine arts and everyday life. For the section on fine art, numerous paintings and colored photos of art work are included.


This work shows paintings, sculptures and art works by Cimabue, Michelangelo and Rembrandt. Cimabue’s art centers on the portrayal of Christ and Mary (the Church). Michaelangelo focuses on
Madonna and Child. Rambrandt focuses on the Jewish bride. Most of the art works are drawn from the images in the Song.


This study outlines the major trends and themes in the history of interpretation of the Song in the Middle Ages by analyzing Latin commentaries. It is a good resource on that specific genre and time. The book also includes Vulgate text and pictures of the Song painted during that era.


This volume includes one page on the reception history of the Song of Songs. It is the most concise record of its nature.


This collection contains over fifty sermons. The approach is allegorical, identifying the male character of the Song as Christ and the female character as the Church. He often uses one idea or a short phrase from the Song and then expounds on its meaning and implications for the believers.


The Song of Solomon section appears on pages 286-368. The commentary takes the views of early Christian commentators such as Origen, Ambrose, Eusebius, Jerome, Gregory the Great as cues to the interpretations of the Song. It is reader-friendly and serves as a helpful tool to scholars and non-scholars.

De Gruyter’s *Encyclopedia of Biblical Reception* (EBR) is an excellent resource in Reception history of the Bible. The whole series is still in process. Both hard copy and digital version are available. The article on the Song of Songs will address its reception history. [http://www.degruyter.com/view/db/eb](http://www.degruyter.com/view/db/eb)

[http://www.sas.upenn.edu/~jtreat/song/music/](http://www.sas.upenn.edu/~jtreat/song/music/)

This website contains list of musical discs in the late medieval and early modern Europe, inspired by the Song of Songs. It also has a list of the names of the composers and the titles of the music they composed.

**MAJOR WORKS IN FRENCH AND GERMAN**

These works influence later understanding of the Song of Songs. Many English written commentaries owe
their insights to both French and German scholars: Creation and Eden (Lys, 1968), literal meaning and the garden metaphor (Cazeaux, 2008), literal and philological (Gerleman, 1965), messianic (Tournay, 1988), literal and theological (Zakovitch, 2004).

This is a good introductory work on the Song of Songs. The commentary takes both the literal sense of interpretation and the hidden sense, applying the love between the human couple to the love between God and Israel. The author takes the Song as a commentary of Genesis chapter two.

The author divides the Song into seven poems and suggests that the poems are written by seven sages in a joint venture. He analyzes the composition and motifs of each poem and identified the garden as the center in each poem.

This work is a collaboration of multiple international authors on biblical perspectives, comparative perspectives and later perspectives of the Song of Songs. It covers a broad spectrum of topics from ancient context to interpretation. A quarter of the chapters are in German (see also “Essay Collections”).

This is a classic work on the Song of Songs quoted by many subsequent commentators. The introductory section contains several sub-sections on the Song’s background and traditions. The commentary is arranged by small literary units with a few verses each. Both the introduction and the commentary use extensive Hebrew words for explanation.

This work is a translation of the original French commentary "*Quand Dieu parle aux hommes le langage de l’amour*" (Cahiers de la Revue Biblique), J. Gabalda et C, Paris, 1982. The book takes the allegorical interpretation of the Song with emphasis on its messianic aspect. The author uses “double entendre” as a hermeneutical principle. This study is full of insights from the Hebrew as well as from its theological meanings.

This is a very balanced approach to the Song of Songs in every way, linguistics, poetics, literary features and theology. It would make an excellent textbook and reference work on the Song.

**EROS AND GOD**

The theology of the Song of Songs centers on love and the nature of God’s love. Specifically, it deals with human sexuality and the erotic aspect of God’s love in relation to Israel in the Old Testament/Hebrew Bible (Carr, 2003; Keller, 2006; Kingsmill, 2009; Lyke, 2007: Seddon, 2010). Steinstra’s book is an exception since it studies the marriage metaphor in the prophetic books and excludes the Song of Songs for the reason that the text of the Song does not contain explicit verbal evidence for the marriage metaphor. Walsh’s book focuses on the notion of desire and how it plays out in human relationships.


This book attempts to demonstrate that sexuality and spirituality are compatible in the Song. Carr uses “garden” as the unifying imagery to explore the Song through the Hebrew Bible: The Torah, the Prophets, and the Writings. The contents reflect the result of intertextuality and full of textual and theological insights.


This is a collected work including a wide spectrum of articles related to eros, sex, love, passion, and queer desires. Part V centers on the Song and contains a few articles related to interpreting the eros. It appears on pages 289-365 under the subtitle “Rereading the Song of Songs.”


This work studies the inter-textual relationships between the Song and other Old Testament books by analyzing vocabulary in the Wisdom tradition and the Israelite prophetic tradition. The author asserts that comparing to the negative portrayal of the “adulterous” Israel in the prophetic books, the Song presents an ideal picture.


The first part deals with the theology of love in the Hebrew Bible, drawing from the prophetic books, the temple, women and wombs, and the Torah. The second part is on the theology of love in the early interpretation of the Song, including Targum, Midrash Rabba and Origen’s commentary.

This booklet places different schools of interpretations of the Song in perspective and suggests the Song of Songs is the union of polarized readings. It is easy to read and especially helpful for readers to make sense the complex strands of interpretations.


This book studies metaphor, using “YHWH as the husband of his people” as a case. Steinstra explores the marriage metaphor in Hosea, Ezekiel, Jeremiah, and Isaiah but not the Song of Songs. The reason she asserts is that there is no verbal evidence of the marriage metaphor in the text.


This book is for both biblical scholars and those who are not familiar with the Bible. Walsh probes the idea of desire and argues that the Song of Songs is essentially about desire and how two people love and long for each other.