

THE SONG OF SOLOMON – A POEM OF LOVE

The last work in the Wisdom and Poetry section of the Old Testament is also attributed to Solomon. It describes the love of the writer for a simple country girl - the deep longing the couple have for each other, the agony of separation, and the joy of reunion. There are different characters who speak in turn – the **Lover**, his **Beloved**, and the **Daughters of Jerusalem** (modern translations of the Bible have notes to show which is speaking). Classic poetry, it uses elaborate similes and figures of speech – the bridegroom is both a gazelle and an apple tree, and his bride in turn a mare, a lily and a beautiful garden. The intriguing question is, how did it come to be included in the Bible? The answer is probably that it is intended to have a deep symbolic meaning. There is one tiny clue in Paul's New Testament letter to the Ephesians. In the fifth chapter, which centres on marriage, he speaks of Christ's tender care for his Bride, the Church. In verse 27 he says Jesus lovingly prepares his bride for the wedding, making sure she is "*without spot or wrinkle or any such thing*", and this seems to be a quotation from the Song of Solomon 4:7. So perhaps the poem is an allegory of the intense love that Jesus has for his followers. He spoke of himself as a bridegroom in Matthew 9:15, and of his return from heaven for the wedding in the parable of the Ten Virgins, Matthew 25:6. If we truly follow him, we shall long with the same intensity to be united with him.