

**Little, Tim and Angela. *Song of Songs for Singles: Lessons on Love from King Solomon*. Ankeny, IA: Faith, 2023. 266pp. + 8pp. (back matter).**

This book is authored by a professor of OT at Faith Baptist Theological Seminary and his wife Angela. The target audience is high school students and above (11). The book arose as Tim recognized the need for singles to hear the Bible’s message about sexual intimacy to counteract the worldly ideas that otherwise shape their thinking. The book progresses sequentially through the Song of Songs; so in one sense it could be read as a commentary on the Song. However, its target audience affects the nature of the commentary: “As we wrote *Song of Songs for Singles*, we imagined what we would approve of our young teenage son reading. Writing from this perspective has obvious disadvantages. For example, we will not answer some questions because to do so could unintentionally awaken the sleeping desires of the innocent. Those desires need to sleep (Song 2:7; 3:5; 8:4)” (11). In general, the Littles succeeded in addressing their target audience, though the discussion of Song 4, while guarded, may be too much for a high schooler and more appropriate for someone approaching marriage. Likewise, the discussion of Song 5 also seemed more suited to older singles—those preparing for marriage—than for the high school audience.

The Littles hold that just as Proverbs is directed primarily at the son, the Song is directed primarily at daughters. Of course, both books are applicable to people of both sexes and all ages. They reject the allegorical and dramatic readings of the Song. Though Solomon is the author of the book, the primary man in the book is neither Solomon nor a historical man. Instead, he (as is the woman) is constructed by Solomon the poet to instruct the readers in wisdom about marriage. Solomon writes himself into the book as an example of what not to be (see especially 8:11–12).

This book evidences wide and deep reading in the scholarly literature, and it exhibits swift movement from the biblical text to application. For instance, chapter 2 draws on the work of Shalom Paul to argue that the latter part of 1:4 is a continuation of the woman’s speech, not a speech of the virgin daughters (as in the NKJV, ESV, CSB). The same chapter also applies 1:2 to singles by arguing that they do not need to know about lovemaking in general. They should wait to learn what pleases their spouse when/if they marry.

Some chapters are less a commentary than an essay on a topic raised by the passage under consideration. Chapter 3 takes Song 1:5–11 as an opportunity to launch a discussion on the topic of beauty. The discussion is well done. It argues that beauty is objective. It draws on the Bible and on general revelation to sketch out some universals regarding beauty. It distinguishes between objective beauty and subjective tastes, and it cautions readers about becoming locked into a specific culture’s tastes regarding beauty. The Littles rightly acknowledge the reality of blemishes, and they observe that some people are more beautiful than others. They note that the woman in the Song acknowledges her blemishes while the man rejoices in her beauty. They encourage the husband to delight in his wife’s beauty. They observe that flaws that are the result of the Fall may be fixed, while warning against seeking to “correct” things that are not a result of the Fall. They warn against making too much of beauty, but they note that beauty is not insignificant and that adornment can be biblical.

In the chapter that discusses the adjuration refrain (2:7; 3:5; 8:4), the Littles define love. They distinguish between family love, neighbor love, and the “permanent, exclusive, jealous unquenchable kind of love” that the Song is concerned with (84). They argue that love has both an intellectual and affective component. The adjuration refrain urges the readers, with a particular focus on the virgin daughters, not to awaken love until it pleases, which the Littles take to mean “until you can take pleasure in it.” They observe that the question many young people ask is, “How far can we go?” The biblical question is, “Does this awaken love?” This question is then applied to the topics of kissing and dancing. While they note that there are different kinds of kissing and dancing (e.g., kissing as a greeting in some cultures or dancing in celebration of a military victory), the question at hand is romantic kissing and the dancing of a couple. In both cases, the Littles argue against the conclusion that these are permitted because there is no Bible verse forbidding them. These actions awaken love.

Song of Songs 3 is a challenging passage to interpret. The Littles understand 3:1–5 to indicate that the wife pursues her husband sexually. She is not merely passive. She especially pursues him when he is in a dangerous situation: in the streets at night (the lurking place of *dame folly*). She brings him back to the chamber of love. The authors take the remainder of chapter 3 to refer to Solomon’s wedding, but they do not identify Solomon and his bride with the couple who is the focus of the Song. I believe this is the correct interpretation, but I would have benefited from some additional reflection about why a Solomonic wedding is included here.

Many of the applications proposed should be readily accepted by Bible-believing Christians. In their discussion of 1:12–2:7 the Littles discuss the power of words and the need to restrict flirting to marriage. They also affirm the appropriateness of flirting within marriage. Their treatment of 2:8–17 deals with the ideas that marriage leads to a “happily ever after” and that sexual temptation disappears after marriage. They claim that these verses envision a separation between the partners, which provides the occasion for sexual temptation (though, it must be observed, that sexual temptation is not explicitly present in the text). They also focus on the statement concerning the little jackals that spoil the vineyard—connecting these with little sins of selfishness or even larger sexual sins against a spouse.

Other interpretations will cause readers to stop and think. The Littles understand Song 5 to be about the wife’s selfish rejection of her husband’s sexual advances. While she is understood to be wrong, the husband rightly accepts her refusal. His departure actually arouses her desire, which is then expressed in the beginning of chapter 6. The Littles then take the rest of chapter 6 to refer to the couple’s working through the resulting difficulties that arise from chapter 5. I am open to this interpretation of chapter 6 but not entirely persuaded.

The Littles argue that Song 7:11–8:4, as well as other parts of the Song, present the wife as the primary initiator of sexual intimacy. They do not deny that the husband may initiate (Song 2:8; 4:3; 5:2ff.), but they think the creational pattern is for the wife to initiate. Further, they lay on the wife the responsibility to initiate (and suggest she do so several times a week). Part of their concern has to do with husbands whose desires have been distorted by pornography combined with a widespread belief in Christian circles that wives are to submit passively to their husband’s desires. They are correct that this combination is likely to lead to marital problems, and their solution could be practically helpful

in certain marriages. But it seems to over-read the text to conclude that the wife should be the primary initiator of intimacy while the husband remains somewhat passive.

While there were appropriate warnings about not being married for selfish reasons and while the final chapter appropriately stressed the importance of pursuing marriage, there was perhaps insufficient acknowledgment that God may not open the way for every individual to be married. The Littles do briefly engage with 1 Corinthians 7, but they take the “present distress” (7:26) to refer to a localized time of trial. However, it seems that Paul explains his meaning in verses 29 and 31: “This is what I mean, brothers, the appointed time has grown very short. . . . For the present form of this world is passing away” (ESV). In other words, Paul advocates singleness for the sake of promoting the Lord’s interests in the world in these last days while also recognizing that many will marry (and encouraging the married to also give primary to the Lord’s interests within their marriage).

These critiques should not detract from the overall accomplishment of *Song of Songs for Singles*. Song of Songs is a difficult book to interpret, and issues surrounding marriage and sex are often controversial. *Song of Songs for Singles* rightly recognizes that the message of the Song is essential for equipping young people with a biblical view of these important topics, and it effectively challenges unbiblical ideas while attractively presenting the Bible’s better way.

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