

THE MESSIANIC MUSIC OF THE SONG OF SONGS:
A NON-ALLEGORICAL INTERPRETAION

In academic discussions of the Song of Songs, the nearest thing to a discussion of the Messiah in the Song is a nod to the Christian, allegorical reading of the Song which interprets the poetry with reference to Christ and the church.¹ I am yet to find a discussion of the Song of Songs which highlights the interlocking messianic themes of the Song's music: the Song is about Israel's shepherd king, a descendent of David, who is treated as an ideal Israelite enjoying an ideal bride in a lush garden² where the effects of the fall are reversed.³ The thesis of this study is

¹This is not to deny the openness of some to what might be termed a "Christian appropriation" of the Song, but that is not what I have in mind when I speak of a *messianic reading* of the Song. In the modern discussion, I have found no one who argues that the Song was intended as a Messianic document. See e.g., Michael V. Fox, *The Song of Songs and the Ancient Egyptian Love Songs* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1985), 236–39; M. H. Pope, *Song of Songs*, AB 7C (New York: Doubleday, 1977); Tom Gledhill, *The Message of the Song of Songs* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1994); Roland E. Murphy, *The Song of Songs*, Hermeneia (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1990), 91–94; Barry G. Webb, *Five Festal Garments*, NSBT (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2000), 17–35; Renita J. Weems, "The Song of Songs," in *The New Interpreter's Bible* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1997) 5:361–434; F. Delitzsch, *The Song of Songs*, in *Commentary on the Old Testament* by C. F. Keil and F. Delitzsch, 10 vols. trans. M. G. Easton (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1866–91; reprint, Peabody: Hendrickson, 2001), 6:493–626. G. Lloyd Carr, *The Song of Solomon*, TOTC (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1984), 31; Duane Garrett and Paul R. House, *Song of Songs/Lamentations*, WBC 23B (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2004); Robert Gordis, *The Song of Songs and Lamentations*, rev. ed. (New York: Ktav, 1974), 3–4; T. Longman III, *Song of Songs*, NICOT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001); H. G. Reventlow, "Hoheslied I," *TRE* 15:501–502; P. Kuhn, "Hoheslied II," *TRE* 15:503–508; U. Köpf, "Hoheslied III/1," *TRE* 15:508–13; J. M. Vincent, "Hoheslied III/2," *TRE* 15:513–14. Cf. also W. Brueggemann, *An Introduction to the Old Testament* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2003), 323–28; B. S. Childs, *Introduction to the Old Testament as Scripture* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1979), 569–79; W. J. Dumbrell, *The Faith of Israel*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2002), 278–83; Paul House, *Old Testament Theology* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1998), 463–69.

²Though I do not explore it, I should note that the Song is in part set in a city (e.g., 3:2–4; 5:7), and the most natural interpretation is that the city is Jerusalem (cf. the reference to "daughters of Zion" in 3:11). Zion is, of course, also associated with Messianism (cf., e.g., Ps 2:6; *Pss. Sol.* 17:22, 30; *Sir.* 24:9–12).

³None of the studies catalogued in Peter Enns, *Poetry & Wisdom*, IBR Bibliographies 3 (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1997), 148–58 (§700–58) are described as (non allegorical) messianic interpretations. Nor do we find discussions of what the Song adds to messianic expectation in discussions of OT Messianism. See, e.g., T. N. D. Mettinger, *King and Messiah: The Civil and*

that when the Song is heard in the context of the three movement symphony of Torah, Neviim, and Ketuvim, this lyrical theme, the sublime Song, proves to be an exposition of the messianic motif of the Old Testament.⁴ I am suggesting that the Song of Songs, read in the context of the Old Testament, is messianic music that we do not need allegorically imaginative ears to hear.⁵

It will be helpful to clarify the kind of messianic interpretation this study is pursuing. A recent article provides a helpful working definition: “the phrase ‘messianic expectations’ will be used to refer to expectations focusing on a future royal figure sent by God who will bring salvation to God’s people and the world and establish a kingdom characterized by features such as peace and justice.”⁶ In this vein we are also aided by John Sailhamer, who has written, “In the

Sacral Legitimation of the Israelite Kings, Coniectanea Biblica, OT Series 8 (Lund: CWK Gleerup, 1976); Antti Laato, *A Star Is Rising: The Historical Development of the Old Testament Royal Ideology and the Rise of the Jewish Messianic Expectations*, University of South Florida International Studies in Formative Christianity and Judaism (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1997); John Day, ed., *King and Messiah in Israel and the Ancient Near East*, JSOTSupp 270 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1998); Philip E. Satterthwaite, Richard S. Hess, and Gordon J. Wenham, eds., *The Lord’s Anointed: Interpretation of Old Testament Messianic Texts*, Tyndale House Studies (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1995); Gerard Van Groningen, *Messianic Revelation in the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1990), 407.

⁴Cf. Nicholas Perrin, “Messianism in the Narrative Frame of Ecclesiastes?” *RB* 108 (2001), 38: “It is my view that both phrases [‘Son of David’ in Eccl 1:1 and ‘one shepherd’ in 12:11] are in fact denominations for the Davidic messiah who functions within Ecclesiastes (in its final form) as sage *par excellence*.” I owe this reference to conversation with Tremper Longman, who alerted me to Perrin’s excellent study after I had completed this essay. The degree to which the OT is messianic is, of course, disputed in scholarship. For a thoughtful discussion of the issue, see J. Gordon McConville, “Messianic Interpretation of the Old Testament in Modern Context,” in *The Lord’s Anointed*, 1–17.

⁵A messianic reading of the Song might have motivated the translator of the Song into Greek to stay close to the Hebrew. Pope notes, “One would expect to find in the earliest translation of the Song of Songs, in the Septuagint (LXX), some intimations of the mystical or allegorical interpretation. The evidence, however, is surprisingly meager” (Pope, *Song of Songs*, 90).

⁶W. H. Rose, “Messiah,” in *Dictionary of the Old Testament Pentateuch*, ed. T. Desmond Alexander and David W. Baker (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2003), 566; similarly Perrin, “Messianism in the Narrative Frame of Ecclesiastes,” 38 n. 3. See also John Barton’s narrow and broad definitions of “the Messiah” in “The Messiah in Old Testament Theology,” in *King and Messiah in Israel and the Ancient Near East*, 373. Barton helpfully cites Neusner’s definition of “A Messiah.” These definitions orbit around concepts of Davidic kingship and eschatological salvation.

Pentateuch . . . the Messiah is a prophetic priest-king like Moses, who will reign over God’s kingdom, bring salvation to Israel and the nations, and fulfill God’s covenants. . . . In the prophets and the writings, we find a full and detailed *exposition* of the Pentateuch’s messianism.”⁷ In this study I am seeking the Song’s exposition of pentateuchal messianism. I am not pursuing an allegorical interpretation, which would be characterized by the abstraction of the text from its historical meaning followed by the pursuit of an edifying, and perhaps fanciful, interpretation. As Longman notes, the two errors of the allegorists were the suppression of the emphasis on human love in the Song and the imposition of arbitrary meanings.⁸ The present study is after will pursue this reading of the Song of Songs. Everyone agrees that the Song was written after David, and so it is possible that the Song is celebrating royal, Davidic, messianic themes as a way of focusing Israel’s hopes on David’s line.⁹

I am building on the hypothesis that a developing messianic expectation manifests itself in the pages of the OT. Put simply, this study is not seeking to read either the relationship between Christ and the church or the relationship between Yahweh and Israel into the Song of Solomon. That interpretation has its rightful place, but it is not sought here.¹⁰ Walter Wifall

⁷John H. Sailhamer, “The Messiah and the Hebrew Bible,” *JETS* 44 (2001), 13–14 (emphasis his).

⁸Longman, *Song of Songs*, 70. See also Gerald Bray, *Biblical Interpretation* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1996), 103. Bray and Longman both note that allegorical interpretation can be used positively.

⁹Contra George M. Schwab, who suggests that “the original intention of the Song was to convey allegorical meaning concerning the relationship between God and his people Israel” (Schwab, *The Song of Songs’ Cautionary Message Concerning Human Love*, SBL 41 [New York: Peter Lang, 2002], 9). Murphy rightly concludes, “In short, the classical Jewish interpretation of the Song came to be ‘allegorical,’ but we are unable to trace the roots of this interpretation with any certainty or even to be sure that it began in pre-Christian times” (Murphy, *Song of Songs*, 14). Cf. also Dianne Bergant, *The Song of Songs*, Berit Olam (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical, 2001), ix: “The earliest Jewish readings of the Song of Songs seem to have been literal. . . .” And Garrett points out, “Allegorizing the Song . . . did not pave the way for canonization; that it was in the canon prompted the allegorizing of the Song” (*Song of Songs/Lamentations*, 15).

¹⁰See L. Cantwell, “The Allegory of the Canticle of Canticles,” *Scripture* 16 (1964): 76–93.

provides important clarification for us. He writes, “The so-called ‘myth-ritual’ school has even claimed that *ancient Near Eastern sacral kingship is the most important premise for Israel’s religion*. By ‘messianism,’ they mean *an elaborate king ideology*. . . . According to this view, the words ‘messiah’ and ‘messianic’ may ‘very appropriately be used of the pre-exilic Israelite sacral king and even of the ancient Oriental divine king; they may also be used of his lineal descendant, the eschatological Son of David of later Judaism and equally of the Son of Man.’”¹¹ Sailhamer claims, “The books of the OT were written as the embodiment of a real, messianic hope.”¹² I am testing this dictum against the Song of Songs. Sailhamer goes on to write, “I believe the messianic thrust of the OT was the *whole* reason the books of the Hebrew Bible were written. In other words, the Hebrew Bible was not written as the national literature of Israel. It probably also was not written to the nation of Israel as such. It was rather written, in my opinion, as the expression of the deep-seated messianic hope of a small group of faithful prophets and their followers.”¹³ If he is correct, then the Song of Songs is in the canon because it was written from a messianic perspective in order to nourish a messianic hope.¹⁴ This messianic hope is rooted in the soil of the promise that the seed of the woman will crush the head of the seed of the

¹¹Walter Wifall, “Gen 3:15—A Protoevangelium?” *CBQ* 36 (1974), 361–62 (emphasis added). Wifall cites A. Bentzen, *King and Messiah* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1970), 38. Rose notes that the term “messiah” did not receive its technical meaning until the Second Temple period, but he rightly argues, “It is a matter of confusing language and thought . . . to conclude on this basis that one can speak of messianic expectations properly only after a particular word was used to refer to the person at the center of these expectations” (“Messiah,” 566).

¹²Sailhamer, “The Messiah and the Hebrew Bible,” 23.

¹³Sailhamer, “The Messiah and the Hebrew Bible,” 23. Cf. Isa 8:16–20.

¹⁴For a history of the discussion of the Messianism of the OT, see R. E. Clements, “The Messianic Hope in the Old Testament,” *JSOT* 43 (1989): 3–19. I am increasingly convinced that the OT is a messianic document, written from a messianic perspective, to sustain a messianic hope. I am advocating this as a historical perspective, not an allegorical one. Not all early Christian interpretation of the OT was allegorical. For a beautiful treatment of the desire to be the mother of the hoped-for seed of Abraham, the Messiah, see Jacob of Serugh’s “Verse Homily on Tamar.” For translation and commentary of this lovely piece of early Christian literature/interpretation, see Sebastian Brock, “Jacob of Serugh’s Verse Homily on Tamar (*Gen.* 38),” *Le Museon* 115 (2002): 279–315. I wish to express my gratitude to Tim Edwards for alerting me to this piece.

serpent,¹⁵ watered by the expectation of a king from the seed of Abraham via Judah, and fertilized by anticipations of an eschatological return to the Garden of Eden.¹⁶ If we have ears to hear the music, the Song sings precisely these themes.

If this is a legitimate understanding of the Song, it opens the door to a more satisfactory explanation of how the Song got into the canon than is generally given. On the one hand there are some who see the Song as basically secular, with only an “incidental” connection to Israel’s faith.¹⁷ On the other hand are those who would see the Song as a celebration of God’s good creation, with a particular focus on human love.¹⁸ Roland Murphy credibly concludes that “the eventual canonization of the work . . . can best be explained if the poetry originated as religious rather than secular literature.”¹⁹

¹⁵Jack Collins has persuasively argued that when the term “seed” is accompanied by singular verb inflections, independent pronouns, object pronouns, suffixes, and adjectives, it can be read as singular rather than as collective. See Jack Collins, “A Syntactical Note (Genesis 3:15): Is the Woman’s Seed Singular or Plural?” *TynBul* 48 (1997), 139–48.

¹⁶Commenting on Gen 3:15, Stephen G. Dempster writes, “In the light of the immediate context, the triumph of the woman’s seed would suggest a return to the Edenic state, before the serpent had wrought its damage, and a wresting of the dominion of the world from the serpent” (Stephen G. Dempster, *Dominion and Dynasty: A Theology of the Hebrew Bible*, NSBT 15 [Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2003], 68). Incidentally, the proposal I am setting forth regarding the interpretation of the Song fits so well with Dempster’s exploration of the theology of the OT through the lens of “dominion and dynasty, geneology and geography” that I was honestly surprised to find that he did not argue for this view in his book. Perhaps he inadvertently moved me to this view, though no one, of course, should blame him for my position.

¹⁷Cf. Fox, *The Song of Songs and the Ancient Egyptian Love Songs*, 250: “How then did a song of this sort become holy scripture? We do not know.” Fox goes on to suggest, “It may be enough to postulate that the Song, though not intrinsically religious, was sung as part of the entertainment and merrymaking at feasts and celebrations, which would naturally take place for the most part on holidays in the religious calendar. . . . When (according to this hypothesis) the Song had worked its way into the people’s religious life and had thus acquired a certain aura of sanctity, the religious leadership legitimized that association by means of allegorical interpretation.” I find this suggestion implausible at best.

¹⁸Cf. Duane A. Garrett, *Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs*, NAC (Nashville: Broadman, 1993), 365: “The best interpretation of Song of Songs is that it is what it appears to be: a love song.”

¹⁹Murphy, *Song of Songs*, 94–95.

Garrett's explanation of the Song as wisdom literature has its merits,²⁰ but if we hear the music of the OT canon that surrounds the Song of Songs, it seems that the wisdom of the Song is played in a messianic key. In order to validate this reading of the Song of Songs, the messianic elements of the Song will be discussed under the two broad rubrics of The Royal Son of David and The Conquered Curses of Genesis 3. As these topics are considered, the broader canonical context will be briefly sketched before we consider the Song's interpretation of these themes.²¹

THE ROYAL SON OF DAVID

In this section I will rely heavily on the work of others to sketch in the developing messianic hope seen in the OT. My contribution to the observations of these scholars will consist in the application of their insights to the Song of Songs.

The Hebrew Bible is much concerned with kingship. Genesis readies readers of the OT for a monarch. It would seem that even Adam is presented in royal terms, for having stated that man and woman are to be in his own image and likeness, God's first statement about them

²⁰Garrett, *Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs*, 366–67; similarly Murphy, *Song of Songs*, 97–99.

²¹Another argument that the Song was written from a messianic perspective is the fact that the NT interprets the *whole* of the OT messianically (cf. Luke 24:27, 44). Particularly relevant here is the messianic interpretation of the wedding song of Psalm 45 found in Hebrews 1:8–9. Pope notes that before moving on to an allegorical interpretation, “Origen conceded that the Song might be an epithalamium for Solomon’s marriage with Pharaoh’s daughter” (Pope, *Song of Songs*, 89). If Psalm 45 can be read messianically, why not read the Song in the same typological way? Though Carr argues against this view of the use of the OT in the New (Carr, *Song of Solomon*, 26–32), I do not think that he has accounted for the arguments presented in G. K. Beale, “Did Jesus and His Followers Preach the Right Doctrine from the Wrong Texts?” *Themelios* 14 (1989), 89–96 and Bruce K. Waltke, “A Canonical Process Approach to the Psalms,” in *Tradition and Testament* (Chicago: Moody, 1981), 3–18. Waltke presents a way to understand all the Psalms as messianic, and Beale argues that the NT uses legitimate historical and contextual methods to interpret the OT. Perhaps the common assumption that the NT does not interpret the OT according to its own intended meaning results from a failure to understand the messianism of the OT.

is, “Let them rule” (Gen 1:26; cf. 1:28).²² Wifall finds the early narratives of Genesis so harmonious with the messianic kingship of Jesse’s son that he gives the following explanation: “Apparently, Gen 3:15 owes its present form to the Yahwist’s adaptation of both the David story (2 Sam-1 Kgs 2) and ancient Near Eastern royal mythology to Israel’s covenant faith and history.”²³ Whatever view one takes of the relationship between the narratives concerning David and the statements in Genesis 3, Wifall’s presentation of Genesis 2–11 and Genesis 3:15 as “messianic” is stimulating evidence that these texts testify to a common hope.²⁴

Wifall also argues for a “Davidic background of Gen 3:15” from the correspondences between it and the “royal Psalms.” He writes,

David is addressed as God’s “anointed” or “messiah” (Ps 89:21,39; 2 Sam 22:51) whose “seed” will endure forever under God’s favor (Ps 89:5,30,37) As Yahweh has crushed the ancient serpent “Rahab” (Ps 89:11), so now David and his sons will crush their enemies in the dust beneath their feet (Ps 89:24; 2 Sam 22:37–43).

Other “royal” Psalms tend further to establish the Davidic background of the Yahwist’s portrait in Gen 3:15. In Ps 72:9, the foes of the Davidic king are described as “bowing down before him” and “licking the dust.” In the familiar “messianic” Psalms, God is described as having placed “all things under his feet” (Ps 8:6) and will make “your enemies your footstool” (Ps 110:1).²⁵

It seems more likely that these statements in the royal Psalms and in the David narratives are scattered echoes of the compact, primal narrative of Genesis 3 than that Genesis 3 was shaped after the Psalms and narratives were in place. But whether the chicken or the egg came first is not the issue. The issue is that these texts are testifying to a common messianic expectation.

The kingship expectation is organically related to the promises to Abraham that

²²Cf. Dumbrell, *The Faith of Israel*, 16–17. Commenting on Gen 1:26, the “image” of God, Dumbrell writes: “Mesopotamian analogies to which we could appeal indicate that the king as an image of the deity was conceived of as a servant of the gods. ‘Image’ referred to his royal function, as one having a mandate from the gods to rule . . . humankind is depicted in royal terms.”

²³Walter Wifall, “Gen 3:15—A Protoevangelium?” 365.

²⁴Wifall, “Gen 3:15—A Protoevangelium?” 361–64.

²⁵Wifall, “Gen 3:15—A Protoevangelium?” 363

through his seed would come blessing for all the nations (Gen 12:3; 18:18; 22:18). T. Desmond Alexander notes that “although he is nowhere designated a king, Abraham is presented in various episodes as enjoying a status similar to that of contemporary monarchs (Gn. 14:1-24; 21:22-34; 23:6).”²⁶ Abraham is promised that he will sire kings (17:6, 16), and Jacob is told that “kings will come from your body” (35:11). Then Judah is blessed with the “scepter” and the “ruler’s staff” (49:10). Sailhamer observes that “Balaam’s words about a future king in Num 24:9a . . . are virtually identical to Jacob’s words about the king of Judah in Gen 49:9b.”²⁷

Sailhamer writes of Genesis 49:1–28, “The central compositional theme of this poem is found in the segment about Judah (Gen 49:8–12). It presents a vision of the victorious reign of a future Davidic monarch whose authority extends even to the Gentile nations. The imagery of 49:11–12 suggests that the days of this monarch will be accompanied by a restoration of the abundance of the Garden of Eden.”²⁸ Then of Numbers 24:1–24 Sailhamer states, “In Num 24:5, Balaam begins his oracle with a vision of the restoration of the garden planted by Yahweh (24:5–7a) and the rise of a future king in Israel (24:7b–9). The poem thus begins with allusions both to the Garden of Eden, Genesis 2, and the king in Genesis 49. According to Balaam, the king, who is consciously identified with the king in Genesis 49, will be victorious over ‘Agag’ Most if not all commentaries see the specific mention of the historical king, Agag, as an obvious attempt to identify the Davidic monarchy (which ruled over the Amalekites) as the fulfillment of Balaam’s prophecy.”²⁹

Alexander concludes from these kinds of observations and more that “when . . . Genesis is viewed as a literary unity, there can be little doubt that it is especially interested in

²⁶T. Desmond Alexander, “Royal Expectations in Genesis to Kings,” *TynBul* 49 (1998), 205

²⁷John H. Sailhamer, “Creation, Genesis 1–11, and the Canon,” *BBR* 10 (2000), 93.

²⁸Sailhamer, “Creation, Genesis 1–11, and the Canon,” 96.

²⁹Sailhamer, “Creation, Genesis 1–11, and the Canon,” 97. Cf. also Dempster, *Dominion and Dynasty*, 115–16.

pointing towards the coming of a unique king.”³⁰ Observing that “special care is taken to establish the identity of the one through whom this line of seed is traced,” Alexander adds to this the claim that “it becomes evident that the book of Genesis in its final form anticipates the coming of a king through whom God’s blessing will be mediated to all the nations of the earth.”³¹

But this is not limited to Genesis, for Alexander concludes, “By giving due attention to the existence of a unique line of ‘seed’ in Genesis, it becomes apparent that the entire Genesis-Kings narrative is especially interested in the coming of a divinely-promised king.”³² Some confirmation of Sailhamer’s claim that the rest of the OT develops the hope engendered by the Pentateuch is provided by Rose’s conclusion regarding the predictions of the coming of a Davidic king in Amos, Isaiah, and Micah, “This future king was in many ways an ideal figure who would meet the expectations of peace and justice, which many of the actual kings failed to meet.”³³

This is but a brief summary of the messianic expectations seen in the Song’s canonical context. The Song is in harmony with this expectation, for it names Solomon in its opening verse (Song 1:1). The only Solomon in the Old Testament is the son of David, third king over Israel. Whatever view one takes of the lamed prefixed to the name “Solomon” in Songs 1:1 (לְשֹׁלֹמֹה),³⁴ the person who is the immediate referent of the promises to David concerning his “seed” (2 Sam 7) is invoked. It is generally agreed that “Beginning with the time when the oracle of Nathan

³⁰Alexander, “Royal Expectations in Genesis to Kings,” 199.

³¹Alexander, “Royal Expectations in Genesis to Kings,” 204. Cf. also Rose, “Messiah,” 567: “The expectation of a future royal figure is from the beginning focused on one particular family line.”

³²Alexander, “Royal Expectations in Genesis to Kings,” 211.

³³Rose, “Messiah,” 567.

³⁴For the options, see Pope, *Song of Songs*, 295–96, who concludes, “It is, nevertheless, most likely that the intent of the superscription was to attribute authorship to Solomon.”

fixed the hope of Israel on the dynasty of David (2 S 7,12-16), each king issuing from him became the actual ‘Messiah’ by whom God wished to fulfill His plan with regard to His people.”³⁵

The male in the Song is repeatedly referred to as “king” (1:4, 12, 7:6 [ET 5]), and in 6:12 he is called a “prince.” The name “Solomon” also recurs in the Song (1:5; 3:7; 8:11, 12), and there are a pair of references to “King Solomon” (3:9, 11).³⁶ It has been suggested that when the lover is called a king, for instance, in 1:4, what we have is “probably an expression of endearment and esteem.”³⁷ Pope writes, “For the allegorists the king is either YHWH or Christ; for proponents of dramatic theories, it is Solomon, in the Syrian wedding festival the bridegroom is ‘king’; and ‘king’ is a common title of the male deity in fertility liturgies throughout the ancient Near East.”³⁸ The option that Pope does not name is the interpretation taken here: the king is the son of David, presented as Solomon. But the Solomonic king here represents the ultimate expression of David’s royal seed.³⁹ For it to be established that the designation “king” is

³⁵Pierre-Emile Bonnard and Pierre Grelot, “Messiah,” in *Dictionary of Biblical Theology*, ed. Xavier Léon-Dufour, trans. P. Joseph Cahill (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1967), 312.

³⁶I take the view that the Song has three speakers: the male, the female, and the witnesses of the relationship. I do not think that there is a lover in addition to Solomon. The Song is presented as a unified poem, for as Fox observes, “The title of Canticles identifies the book as a ‘song’ in the singular. . . . the singular is unambiguous in Hebrew. Whoever added the title to Canticles saw it as a single song” (Fox, *The Song of Songs and the Ancient Egyptian Love Songs*, 95). Cf. also Garrett, *Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs*, 366: “Song of Songs is a single, unified work, as its chiasmic structure demonstrates” (now also Garrett, *Song of Songs/Lamentations*, 25–35). For a possible (among the many proposed) chiasmic structure of the Song, see Williams H. Shea, “The Chiasmic Structure of the Song of Songs,” *ZAW* 92 (1980), 378–96. Similarly Webb, *Five Festal Garments*, 22. Pace Pope, *Song of Songs*, 54. Murphy’s comments are also relevant, *Song of Songs*, 97.

³⁷Weems, “The Song of Songs,” 5:380. Similarly Longman, *Song of Songs*, 92; Garrett, *Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs*, 385: “this is not to be understood literally; rather it is the language of love.”

³⁸Pope, *Song of Songs*, 303.

³⁹Perrin refers to Solomon as “a kind of prototypical messiah,” (“Messianism in the Narrative Frame of Ecclesiastes,” 44), and N. T. Wright, commenting on Matt 12:42/Luke 11:31,

used as a “term of endearment,” examples of this usage in the Old Testament would be necessary. This does not appear, however, to be a meaning of מֶלֶךְ (king) attested in the OT.⁴⁰ Thus, the door is open to the possibility that the male in the Song is presented as the Davidic king, with all the messianic connotations that status carries.

Pope’s observation that the title “king” is used in Syrian wedding festivals⁴¹ and in ANE fertility liturgies does not support the conjecture that the Song only uses the term as one of endearment, for these settings are hardly representative of the OT canon.⁴² Fox observes, “Nor does the statement in Pirquey [*sic*] de R. Eliezer §16, ‘a bridegroom resembles a king,’ show that it was customary to *call* a bridegroom ‘king.’”⁴³ Nevertheless, Fox thinks that “‘king’ is simply a term of affection,” and compares this to Egyptian love songs where “The lovers are called kings, princes, and queens because of the way love makes them feel about each other and about themselves.”⁴⁴ But with so much attention given to the genealogies in the OT, the main purpose of which appears to be the record of the male line of descent of the expected king (cf. e.g., Ruth 4:18–22),⁴⁵ such a casual use of the appellative in a canonical document seems unlikely.⁴⁶ This

writes, “Solomon, the Temple-builder, is an obvious messianic model. . . . for Jesus to compare himself with Solomon . . . was to stake a definite messianic claim” (*Jesus and the Victory of God* [Minneapolis: Fortress, 1996], 535).

⁴⁰Cf. BDB, 572–73; HALOT, 591–92; Philip J. Nel, “מֶלֶךְ” in *NIDOTTE* 2:956–65.

⁴¹Fox calls this parallel “rather shaky” (Fox, *The Song of Songs and the Ancient Egyptian Love Songs*, 98).

⁴²Cf. Dempster, *Dominion and Dynasty*, 42: “The celebration of human sexuality in the Song of Songs should not be understood apart from the general context of human sexuality in the canon.”

⁴³Fox, *The Song of Songs and the Ancient Egyptian Love Songs*, 98 (emphasis his).

⁴⁴Fox, *The Song of Songs and the Ancient Egyptian Love Songs*, 98.

⁴⁵Eusebius appears to confirm this assessment, for he recounts the tradition that though Herod burned the records of the Israelites “because he was goaded by his own consciousness of his base birth, thinking to appear noble if no one else was able by public documents to trace his family . . . a few who were careful, having private records for themselves, either remembering the names or otherwise deriving them from copies, gloried in the preservation of the memory of their good birth; among these were those mentioned above, called *desposyni*, because of their relation to the family of the Saviour, and from the Jewish villages of Nazareth and Cochaba they

highlights what seems to me to be the decisive issue with regard to the Song's interpretation: the Song must be interpreted not only in its Ancient Near Eastern context, but also in the context of the OT canon.⁴⁷

Other factors would seem to point to the interpretation of the references to the king in the Song as messianic. For instance, though Carr argues against the possibility of the interpretation being advanced here, he nevertheless observes, "It is worth noting here that the name David (Heb. *dawid*) is derived from the same Hebrew root as *dôdî*, and in the old consonantal text the two words would be written in identical form *dwd*. Might it be worth suggesting here that, if the Song is to be understood as a royal wedding song, the king in question ought to be David rather than Solomon? King David, *mlk dwd*, would be the 'beloved king', and the lover of the Song."⁴⁸ In the context of the Old Testament canon, the royal imagery in the Song, the invocation of the name Solomon, the similarity of מְדַבֵּר to דָּבַר, and the garden setting all point us to the possibility of a messianic understanding of the Song of Songs.

The Song is messianic in the sense that it is leading readers to combine the images of Israel's wisest king with the hints at her king after God's own heart. As the Song progresses, readers hear of a king accompanied not by thirty mighty men but by sixty (Song 3:7), while the din of battle (3:8)⁴⁹ and the uproar of the harem is a distant memory (6:8)⁵⁰ replaced by this

traversed the rest of the land and expounded the preceding genealogy of their descent" (Eusebius, *The Ecclesiastical History*, I.VII.13–14, translation from Kirsopp Lake, LCL 153 [Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1926], 63). Cf. also Abraham Malamat, "King Lists of the Old Babylonian Period and Biblical Genealogies," in *I Studied Inscriptions from before the Flood*, ed. Richard S. Hess and David Toshio Tsumura, Sources for Biblical and Theological Study 4 (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1994), 183–99.

⁴⁶Cf. Nel, "מֶלֶךְ" in *NIDOTTE* 2:958–60; Alexander, "Royal Expectations in Genesis to Kings."

⁴⁷Paul House and Stephen Dempster stress this point, but they do not draw out its messianic implications (cf. House, *Old Testament Theology*, 464; Dempster, *Dominion and Dynasty*, 207–208).

⁴⁸Carr, *The Song of Solomon*, 65.

⁴⁹Cf. David's bloody hands that kept him from building the temple (2 Chr 22:8; 28:3).

idealized relationship (6:9). Here the recent emphasis on the Song as confirmation of “earlier teachings about marriage while adding its own unique contribution about pre- and postmarital passions”⁵¹ is complemented by the fact that the model lover in the Song is also the model Israelite, the messianic king.

This messianic understanding of Canticles is not allegorical, nor need it even be typological, it is strictly historical and canonical. It assumes that the Song of Songs was written from the hope for an anointed king reflected in the rest of the OT,⁵² but it neither imposes foreign concepts nor imports the NT into the interpretation of the poetry.⁵³ The garden imagery and the edenic quality of the Song call us to consider the points of contact between the lyrical beauty of the Song, the pristine bliss of Eden, and the one who would bring restoration.

⁵⁰Cf. the many women of Solomon, who turned his heart away (1 Kgs 11:3).

⁵¹House, *Old Testament Theology*, 469.

⁵²The hope for an anointed king is not limited to the OT. It is also reflected in the Targum on the Song at 1:8, where the reference to the “tents of the shepherds,” apparently prompts admonishment to “present prayers by the mouth of the pastors and leaders [מְדַבְּרִין] of her generation” and “to go to the Assembly House and to the House of Learning; then by that merit, they will be sustained in the Exile until the time when I send the King, the Messiah, who will lead [מְדַבְּרִין] them to rest in their Dwelling, the Sanctuary which David and Solomon, the shepherds of Israel, will build for them” (as cited by Pope, *Song of Songs*, 335, bracketed notes mine). So it seems that the “tents of the shepherds” in Song 1:8 are interpreted in the Targum as the Assembly House, the House of Learning, their Dwelling, and the Sanctuary. The reference to “shepherds” in 1:8 appears to be interpreted as contemporary leaders, the Messianic King who will lead them when the exile is over, and this Messianic King will lead them to a Sanctuary built by David and Solomon. The Messiah is also a shepherd in *Pss. Sol.* 17:40. My references to the original language of the Targum are taken from the text provided by *BibleWorks6*, whose Targum material is derived from the Hebrew Union College CAL (Comprehensive Aramaic Lexicon) project. See further the Targum’s messianic statements at Song 1:17; 4:5, 9; 7:4, 5(?), 14; 8:1, 2, 4. Sigmund Mowinckel states, “The bridegroom in the Song of Songs was interpreted in the Targums as the Messiah” (*He that Cometh*, trans. G. W. Anderson [Nashville: Abingdon, 1954], 283). Unfortunately, he cites no text(s). His statement seems to oversimplify the issue, for the Targum on the Song does not interpret the Song so much as it takes different words and statements made in the Song as points of departure for wider discussions of Israel’s past, present, and future. The Messiah comes up in these discussions, as noted above, but the Targum on the Song does not even attempt to present a consistent interpretation of the male in the Song.

⁵³The fact that the Song is a canonical document persuades me that it should be read in light of the rest of the OT. Contra Garrett, *Song of Songs/Lamentations*, 99.

THE CONQUERED CURSES OF GENESIS 3

Alan Jon Hauser has carefully treated the theme of intimacy and alienation in Genesis 2–3,⁵⁴ but he focuses on the loss of intimacy and the onset of alienation, neglecting the hints at a return to intimacy seen in Genesis 3. These pointers toward reconciliation are developed in chapter 4 and through the rest of the book. That God initiates contact with the transgressing couple at all moves in this direction. When Adam names his wife “the mother of all living” (3:20), he appears to be convinced that they will be allowed to continue in life because God has shown them mercy, and thus they are not going to die (cf. 2:17). Eve’s responses to the births of Cain and then Seth (4:1, 25) indicate that she is expecting a fulfillment of the promise of a “seed” who will triumph over the serpent (3:15), and the same can be said of other uses of “seed” in Genesis.⁵⁵

This progress back toward intimacy in spite of alienation would appear to be the melody of the Song of Songs.⁵⁶ I have argued above that the Song’s male character, the king, the son of David, should be understood in light of Israel’s hope for the promised anointed one. In this section I wish to explore the Song’s gravitation toward intimacy and the implications of the resonations with Eden that can be heard in the Song. One of the arguments against a messianic understanding of the Song might be that it would fail to deal with the details of the Song apart from allegorization.⁵⁷ Dumbrell, however, gets at the nature of poetry when he writes, “Since the Song of Songs is a symbolic representation of ideal love, characters or figures cannot be pressed

⁵⁴Alan Jon Hauser, “Genesis 2–3: The Theme of Intimacy and Alienation,” in *I Studied Inscriptions from before the Flood*, 383–98.

⁵⁵See Dempster, *Dominion and Dynasty*, 68–72; and T. Desmond Alexander, “Further Observations on the Term ‘Seed’ in Genesis,” *TynBul* 48 (1997), 363–67.

⁵⁶See Longman’s discussion of “The Story of Sexuality Redeemed,” in his *Song of Songs*, 63–67.

⁵⁷Cf. Dumbrell, *The Faith of Israel*, 283: “While the interpretation of the book as an analogy of Christ and the church fails to deal adequately with its contents, the Song of Songs as an idyll of perfect love clearly points in this direction.”

for literal correspondence to historical persons (e.g., to Solomon or to the daughters of Jerusalem).”⁵⁸ It does not seem wise to press the details, but a major theme of the Song seems to be the recovery of intimacy after alienation, and this appears to match the hope engendered by Genesis 3:15 for a seed of the woman who would come as the royal messiah to restore the gladness of Eden.⁵⁹ Here I will trace the theme of the abolition of alienation and the restoration of intimacy through the Song, hoping to highlight the messianic meter of the music.

Overcoming Alienation: The Rhythm of the Music

This theme is introduced in the first words of the Song, where the woman longs for the kisses of the king (1:2–4). She yearns for the intimacy she is not presently experiencing. Somehow the love depicted here is love in which it is “right” (מִיִּשְׁרָיִם) for others to indulge (1:3c; 4c). I would suggest that it is upright for all the righteous to admire the Davidic king and to benefit from the depicted glories of the idealized relationship between the hoped for messiah and his splendid bride.⁶⁰

The theme of intimacy overcoming alienation continues when the woman appears to doubt her appearance (1:5–7). This attitude is the opposite of the unabashed nakedness of Adam and Even in the garden (Gen 2:25).⁶¹ Israel’s king, depicted here as a good⁶² shepherd,

⁵⁸Dumbrell, *The Faith of Israel*, 283.

⁵⁹Cf. Webb, *Five Festal Garments*, 31: “The love experienced by the lovers becomes a kind of return to Eden.” So also R. M. Davidson, “Theology of Sexuality in the Song of Songs: Return to Eden,” *AUSS* 27 (1989): 1–19.

⁶⁰I find this explanation of the MT as it stands, taking מִיִּשְׁרָיִם in its usual sense of “rightly/correctly,” more plausible than the suggested re-pointing and re-division of the text argued by Fox, *The Song of Songs and the Ancient Egyptian Love Songs*, 98–100. Cf. Pope, *Song of Songs*, 305: “There is no warrant for assuming a sense for *mêšarîm* other than the well-attested meaning ‘equity,’ or the like. . .”

⁶¹Commenting on Gen 2:25, Webb writes, “With some justification the Song of Songs may be seen as a kind of extended commentary or poetic meditation on this verse” (*Five Festal Garments*, 30). Similarly Carr, *The Song of Solomon*, 35. Francis Landy refers to this as “inversion,” *Paradoxes of Paradise* (Sheffield: Almond, 1983), 183. Garrett demurs from this view (*Song of Songs/Lamentations*, 99).

overcomes the fears and shame of his beloved with reassuring compliments (Song 1:8–11). By her confident response and exultation in the king (1:12–14), and through their mutual affirmation and enjoyment of the health of their relationship, the Song’s audience experiences their edenesque enjoyment (1:15–2:6). The Song then seems to go from verse to refrain, as the daughters of Jerusalem are urged not to stir up love until it pleases (2:7).⁶³

Alienation resurfaces in 2:8–15. As the bride observes the king coming for her, they are separated by a wall, windows, and lattice (2:8–9). Seeking to overcome the separation, the king pleads for intimacy. Wooing the bride to rise and flee with him to springtime hills (2:10–13) that he might see her face and hear her voice (2:14), he calls for spoiling elements to be removed (2:15). From the bride’s response in 2:16–17, the separation appears to have been successfully overcome.

The longing of the bride’s dream in 3:1–2 renews the motif of separation, so central to all love stories. The bride passes by watchmen (3:3) before finding the king (3:4) and voicing again the refrain (3:5), whose point seems to be that when the time is right love will awaken.

The king comes to his wedding in glory in 3:6–11,⁶⁴ and upon his arrival he sings a song of praise to his beloved (4:1–5),⁶⁵ followed by a declaration of both her beauty and his desire (4:6–16). She invites him to put an end to separation and alienation (4:16b), and when announces that he has done so (5:1a) the return to intimacy is celebrated (5:1b).

⁶²He appears unsoiled by the veiled women of 1:7 (contrast Judah’s failure, Gen 38).

⁶³Murphy rightly observes that these “touches” argue against a “free love” interpretation of the Song (Murphy, *Song of Songs*, 97).

⁶⁴I find Fox’s arguments that Canticles is not a wedding song, and that “the couple that speak in it are not a bride and groom,” altogether unconvincing. The Song’s place in the OT canon insures a more “moral” hearing of the Song than Fox prefers (cf. Fox, *The Song of Songs and the Ancient Egyptian Love Songs*, 231–32). Rightly Gordis, *The Song of Songs and Lamentations*, 19–20, 43. Similarly Garrett, *Song of Songs/Lamentations*, 102–104.

⁶⁵A *wasf* is “a song in which one lover praises the other’s body part by part” (Fox, *The Song of Songs and the Ancient Egyptian Love Songs*, 128). Cf. M. Falk, *Love Lyrics from the Bible* (Sheffield: Almond, 1982), 80–87.

Estrangement has not been banished for good, however, and the struggle for intimacy continues in 5:2–6. Interestingly, the bride repulses her king, only to be roughly handled by the watchmen, whose presumed responsibility is to protect her (5:7). Then the refrain returns like a chorus between the verses of the Song (5:8).

The question posed in 5:9 provides the bride with an opportunity to extol her king, and the first characteristic named is that he is “ruddy” (5:10), bringing David to mind (1 Sam 16:12; 17:42). After the virtues of the king are sung (5:10–16), another question is posed as to the location of the king (6:1). It is remarkable here that the king with Davidic characteristics has gone to his garden (6:2), where he enjoys the intimacy of his bride (6:3). If the music is in a messianic key, it has an edenic pitch.⁶⁶

This is followed by another song of praise (6:4–10), the bride’s account of how she came to be with the king (6:11–12), and delight in the gracefulness of the bride (7:1, ET 6:13–7:1a). The king and his bride then exchange the pleasantries of their renewed intimacy (7:2–14, ET 7:1–13), before the slightest hint of lingering alienation is alluded to in 8:1–2. But this alienation appears to be finally overcome in 8:3. The refrain-chorus is sung again (8:4), with a recapitulation on the coming of the one born of a woman, who comes from the wilderness (8:5). Then the song swells and rolls to its conclusion with reflections on the worth of love and the cultivation of faithfulness (8:6–12), punctuated by final calls for the end of alienation (8:13–14).

Details and Impressions: The Melody of the Music

How does the reading of the Song being advanced here deal with the specific details of the text? For instance, if, as I am suggesting, the male in the Song is to be understood as Israel’s hoped for Messiah, who is the woman? This line of questioning can be met on two levels: first, with observations on poetic language; and second, with an observation on the nature of

⁶⁶*Pace* Garrett, who contends, “Relating the Song to Gen 2–3 is . . . extraneous (*Song of Songs/Lamentations*, 99)

messianic expectation.

Gordis offers helpful comments on interpreting the language of the Song. He writes, “It is of the essence of poetry that it employ *symbolism* to express nuances beyond the power of exact definition. . . . Symbolism is much more profound than allegory. In allegory, the imaginary figures that are chosen as equivalents for the real characters and objects involved have no independent reality of their own. The language of symbolism, on the other hand, is superior to literal speech as well, because its elements possess both existential reality and a representational character.”⁶⁷ Read this way, the Song symbolizes an ideal relationship in which the lovers are succeeding in overcoming the obstacles presented to love in life outside Eden. To explain every figure of speech moves one closer to understanding, but it also uncoils the poetry’s spring.

So if we ask who the female *symbolizes* if the male is the messiah, the simplest answer is that she is the messiah’s beloved. If it is true that the sons of David who were anointed king over Israel were in a sense Israel’s messiah, then it would seem plausible to suppose that the developing messianic expectation could have extended to the messiah’s most intimate relationship. The Song sings that the Messiah will attain intimacy, and that overcoming the obstacles thereto is as triumphant as the subjugation of the nations. Why would Israel’s expected messianic king not have a queen? And why would their relationship not be worthy of the most majestic Song?

CONCLUSION

In this study I have sought to interpret the Song as it might have been understood by a member of the messianic remnant within Israel in the years prior to the coming of Jesus of Nazereth. I am thus trying to read the Song as it might have been understood prior to the allegorizations introduced by both the Rabbis and the early Christians. It seems to me that this non-allegorical messianic interpretation of the Song is simultaneously the most plausible

⁶⁷Gordis, *The Song of Songs and Lamentations*, 37–38 (italics his).

interpretation of the Song given its canonical context,⁶⁸ and the most “Christian” understanding of the Song, for the early Christians read similar texts messianically (cf. the use of Psalm 45 in Hebrews 1).

The hermeneutical implications of this study are far reaching. Roland Murphy writes: “recent critics have been unable to establish an objective exegetical basis for decoding the Song along the lines of patristic and medieval Christian exposition. While this does not negate the value of the expository tradition in its own right, it leaves us without empirical criteria by which to assess the possible connection between ‘original’ authorial intent and subsequent creations of hermeneutical imagination.”⁶⁹ If the non-allegorical messianic interpretation of the Song proposed here is correct, it would appear to explain the allegorizations produced by both Jewish and Christian interpreters after the life of Jesus of Nazareth. The Christians ascribed deity to Jesus, and quickly conceptualized him in ways that corresponded with his divine status.⁷⁰ In their view, the Messiah described by the OT would have his people as his bride rather than a particular human female. It is conceivable that the Rabbis developed their understanding of the Song in response to and in dialogue with the way the early Christians treated it. Adjusting their interpretation in light of the claims of the Christians, they might have shifted their interpretation away from messianic expectation toward the allegorization of the Song as the story of Yhwh’s

⁶⁸It is the Song’s canonical context that invalidates readings of the Song such as Pope’s. Cf. Murphy, *Song of Songs*, 97; and for a broader discussion, see Dempster, *Dominion and Dynasty*, 41–43.

⁶⁹Murphy, *Song of Songs*, 94. Pope notes that the development of the “normative Jewish interpretation” of the Song as an allegory of the love of Yhwh for Israel “apparently” took place “between the destruction of the Temple, A.D. 70, and the revolt of Bar Kokhba, A.D. 132” (Pope, *Song of Songs*, 92). Cf. also his discussion of the interplay between church and synagogue regarding the Song’s interpretation (Pope, *Song of Songs*, 96–101).

⁷⁰Cf. R. E. Murphy, “The Song of Songs: Critical Biblical Scholarship vis-à-vis Exegetical Traditions,” in *Understanding the Word*, ed. J. T. Butler, E. W. Conrad, and B. C. Ollenburger, JSOTSupp 37 (Sheffield: JSOT, 1985), 68: “The traditional understanding of the Song complements the literal historical sense by extending it along certain paths which, as we have seen, can themselves be illumined by means of modern scholarship.”

love for his people Israel.⁷¹

To understand the Song messianically, we must attend to the impressions generated by the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings, which took their origin from emotion recollected in tranquility.⁷² And perhaps the strongest impression one gets from reading the Song as a unified poem in its canonical context is of a shepherd king rejoicing with his bride in a garden. The Song is certainly ripe with garden imagery, evoking scenes from Eden.⁷³ Interestingly, what might be the Song's climactic expression of the restoration of the intimacy lost in Genesis 3 is expressed in language that echoes the onset of alienation. The end of the curse on the woman in Genesis 3:16 reads, "and your desire (תִּשְׁקֶהָ) will be for your husband, and he will rule over you." This is reversed in Song 7:11 (ET 7:10) where we read, "I am my beloved's, and his desire (תִּשְׁקֶהוּ) is for me."⁷⁴ Even Duane Garrett, who doubts that this is a "deliberate allusion to

⁷¹See Ephraim E. Urbach, "The Homiletical Interpretations of the Sages and the Expositions of Origen on Canticles, and the Jewish-Christian Disputation," *Scripta Hierosolymitana* 22 (1971), 257: "By comparing the homilies of the Sages with Origen's interpretation we can recover, in this instance, a Judaeo-Christian dialogue that began in the third century and continued in the fourth." I wish to thank Tim Edwards for this reference. Further, in his presentation on "The Targum of the Psalms" at the meeting of the Tyndale Fellowship on Wednesday, 30 June 2004, Edwards noted that the only place in Rabbinic literature where Psalm 45 is treated as messianic is in the Targum on the Psalter. For discussion of Jewish interpretations, cf. also Murphy, *Song of Songs*, 12–14.

⁷²I am here paraphrasing the comments of William Wordsworth in his "Preface to *Lyrical Ballads, with Pastoral and Other Poems*" (1802), in *Norton Anthology of English Literature*, 6th ed., vol. 2, ed. M. H. Abrams (New York: Norton, 1993), 151.

⁷³See Francis Landy, "The Song of Songs and the Garden of Eden," *JBL* 98 (1979), 513–28. Gledhill notes, "There are a number of literary and thematic parallels between the Song and the garden of Eden story in Genesis 2. Both contain imagery of luscious vegetation and of beautiful and mouth-wateringly sweet fruit. Both refer to a garden watered by springs or wells. There is joyful complementarity and union between the man and his wife. There is nakedness and no sense of shame. The Song seems to look back on and recapture these scenes of primal innocence, and reaffirms the doctrine of the goodness of God's creation" (T. D. Gledhill, "Song of Songs," in *NDBT*, 217). Similarly Webb, *Five Festal Garments*, 30–31.

⁷⁴I owe this observation to Dumbrell, *The Faith of Israel*, 282. Dumbrell, however, does not connect this to OT messianism. Gordis (*The Song of Songs and Lamentations*, 98) refers to this as the lovers desiring one another, but the text speaks only of the male's desire for the female, which makes this the true opposite of Gen 3:16. Similarly Phyllis Trible, *God and the Rhetoric of Sexuality*, OBT 2 (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1978), 160.

Genesis,” states when commenting on this verse, “In the Song, the ideal of love and marriage is represented almost as though the fall had never happened.”⁷⁵

The Song sings of the son of David,⁷⁶ who is king,⁷⁷ in ideal terms.⁷⁸ In spite of the alienation that must be overcome, this king—seed of the woman, seed of Abraham, seed of Judah, seed of David—enjoys uninhibited, unashamed intimacy with his beloved,⁷⁹ in a garden that belongs to him.⁸⁰ It would seem that the burden of proof would be on those who would argue that this, the OT canon’s sublime Song, is anything other than messianic. This messianic interpretation of the Song not only explains the Song’s presence in the canon and sheds light on how it exposites the Pentateuch’s messianism, it also connects the Song to the rest of OT theology.

In the music of the Song of Songs, the messianic remnant of Israel got a glimpse of the one they hoped would arise to restore them to Eden. In the fragmentation and ruin the nation experienced outside Eden, though the hearts of her kings were led away from Yhwh by foreign women, the Song sang the beauty of the king who would piece them back together. It is fitting that the Song is poetry, for as Percy Bysshe Shelley wrote, “Poetry is a mirror which makes beautiful that which is distorted.”⁸¹

⁷⁵Garrett, *Song of Songs/Lamentations*, 99, 246.

⁷⁶Song 1:1, 5; 3:9, 11; 8:11, 12.

⁷⁷Song 1:4, 12; 3:9, 11; 7:5.

⁷⁸Song 3:6–11; 5:10–16.

⁷⁹Song 2:16–17; 4:16b–5:1; 6:2–3; 7:11–13; 8:3, 13–14.

⁸⁰Song 6:2.

⁸¹Percy Bysshe Shelley, “A Defence of Poetry,” (1821) in *Norton Anthology of English Literature*, 757.