

Sabbath School Today
With the 1888 Message Dynamic

Family Seasons
Lesson 6: The Royal Love Song

The Song of Solomon and the Laodicean Message

There is a hidden love story in the Laodicean message that few of this generation seem ever to have discerned. But thoughtful and reverent students of Scripture have seen it for centuries. Somehow it eluded our pioneers, and our eyes have been too “holden” ever since to see it.

The Greek of Revelation 3:20 reads something like this: “Behold, I have taken My stand at the door and am knocking, knocking. If a certain one hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and will have intimate relationship with him.”

This is a clear allusion to a story in the “Song of Songs” by Solomon, a book that has aroused more embarrassment than thoughtful understanding. The phraseology Christ uses is a direct, exact quotation from the Septuagint, *epi ten thuran*, “at the door,” as found in Song of Songs 5:2: “O sleep, but my heart is awake: the voice of my Beloved *knocks at the door ...*”

The expression “at the door” is not found in the Hebrew Old Testament for this passage. The editors of *The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary* apparently failed to check the Septuagint which the early church freely used, for they say: “The Song of Solomon is nowhere quoted in the New Testament” (vol. 3, p. 1111). But it is, here in our Laodicean message by our Lord Himself! Our Lord also referred to it in John 7:38, saying, “He that believeth on Me, as the scripture hath said, ...” referring to Song of Songs 4:12-16, the only Old Testament scripture that He could have referred to. Thus Christ places His stamp of approval on the book and states that its Hero is Himself.

The heroine must therefore be Laodicea herself. And so she is. Her history is clearly delineated therein.

It was in the history of 1888 that our Lord “knocked” as a Divine Lover seeking entrance at the door of His Bride-to-be. Jesus’ direct quotation from the Septuagint is an inspired commentary that says, “The Laodicean message must be understood in the light of the Song of Solomon.” If Christ is not omniscient (He says He does not know the time of His second coming—Mark 13:21), perhaps He did not foreknow the outcome of the 1888 appeal. Can we not appreciate His divine eagerness to take to Himself His Bride-to-be? Can we not sense how Christ “the Lover” hoped against hope that she would respond?

But Ellen White said afterwards, “The disappointment of Christ is beyond description.”
[1] The Song of Solomon tells what happened better than our own historians have told it. The Bride-to-be is speaking:

A Fruitless Search

I was sleeping, but my heart kept vigil;
I heard my Lover knocking [at the door, LXX];
“Open to Me, my sister, My beloved,
My dove, my perfect one!
For my head is wet with dew,
My lock with the moisture of the night.”

“I have taken off my robe,
am I then to put it on?
I have bathed my feet,
am I then to soil them?”

“My lover put His hand through the opening;
my heart trembled within me,
and I grew faint when He spoke.
I rose to open to my Lover—
but my Lover had departed, gone.
I sought Him but I did not find Him;
I called to Him but He did not answer me.”
(Songs of Songs 5:2-6, *New American Bible*)

The rest of the chapter pretty well describes our decades of history that have rolled by relentlessly ever since. All this is known to the heavenly universe; only we have stumbled on in blindness and pathetic shame, seeking Him whom we once spurned so tragically:

“The watchmen came upon me
as they made their rounds of the city;
They struck me, and wounded me,
and took my mantle from me,
the guardians of the walls.
I adjure you, daughters of Jerusalem,
if you find my Lover—
What shall you tell him?—
that I am faint with love” (verses 7, 8).

What does it mean? “Faint with love” is “sick of love” in the familiar *King James Version*. The Hebrew word means to be “sick, weak, diseased.” It does not mean what we commonly mean as “love-sick,” that is, deeply in love. All other uses of that word in the Old Testament mean “diseased.”

What does the next verse mean?

The Charms of the Lost Lover

“How does your Lover differ from any other,
O most beautiful among women?
How does your Lover differ from any other,
that you adjure us so?” (verse 9).

Is there something distinctive about the Christ whom we will yet learn to love very deeply?

Another word in the Septuagint Song of Songs is arresting. The other women have asked our heroine to tell us why her Lover is so “different” from others. She rhapsodizes on His excellencies in verses 10-16, and then concludes by saying: “Such is my Lover, and such my *friend*, O daughters of Jerusalem.” The word translated “friend” is *plesion*, which means “the other one near or close to” in Greek (cf. John 4:5). What is distinctive about the Christ whom we are to love and proclaim to the world? Ellen White says of the 1888 message:

“On Sabbath afternoon many hearts were touched, and many souls were fed on the bread that cometh down from heaven ... We [she and A. T. Jones and E. J. Waggoner] felt the necessity of presenting Christ as a Saviour who was not afar off, but *nigh at hand*.” [2]

Clearly this is an allusion to the Christology that Jones and Waggoner presented that made Him “nigh,” that brought Him truly near as our “kinsman” who came “in the likeness of sinful flesh,” “tempted in all points like as we are, yet without sin.” There is also a tie-in with Zechariah 12:10 in the Septuagint. The reader will remember the tender passage that describes the close sympathy that God’s people will learn to feel for Christ when they realize that He is the One “whom they have pierced.” The *King James Version* says “they shall mourn for Him, as one mourneth for his only son,” but the Septuagint reads, “they shall mourn for Him, as for a beloved one,” the same word as in the Song of Songs.

Note how Ellen White clearly ties in the Song of Songs phraseology with the results of the 1888 message:

“The Christian life, which had before seemed to them [the youth] undesirable and full of inconsistencies, now appeared in its true light, in remarkable symmetry and beauty. He who had been to them as a root out of dry ground, without form or comeliness, became the chiefest among ten thousand (Song of Songs 5:10) and the one altogether lovely.” [3]

It is a love story indeed—the most poignant ever penned. It breathes the same hope of ultimate reconciliation and reunion as does the Laodicean message.

Such hope is worth dying for, and worth living for. Whether our own poor little souls are at last saved and we get to Heaven to bask in our rewards—this is not at all important. What is important is that the deeply disappointed Lover and Bridegroom-to-be receive *His* reward, that *He* at last receive as His Bride a church which is capable of a true heart-appreciation of Him.

—Robert J. Wieland

Endnotes:

[1] Ellen G. White, *Review and Herald*, Dec. 15, 1904.

[2] *Ibid.*, March 5, 1889, emphasis added.

[3] *Ibid.*, Feb. 12, 1889.

Notes:

Pastor Paul Penno's video of this lesson is on the Internet at:

<https://youtu.be/OyZXIn7S8RE>

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