

I. Introduction

Now we have begun to fast the Holy Great Fast; earmarked as a time of solitude with the Lord Jesus Christ. It is a time of spiritual retreat in which we spend our time or most of our time with the Lord. That is why it was the practice in the early centuries, especially in the monasteries that monks leave their monasteries and go to the inner sanctuary of the deserts to spend the forty days of the Holy Great Fast in prayer, retreat, and solitude and then return to their respective monasteries on the last Friday of the Holy Great Fast to celebrate collectively the Holy Week and the Glorious Feast of the Resurrection.

The Holy Great Fast is a time period in which we try to stay away from any unnecessary worldly distractions; whether these distractions are through our work, through entertainment such as television, or through the contemporary ways of communication such as the internet, e-mail, and telephones. We must attempt to stay away as much as we can from all these and any other distractions in order to spend specially designated time with our Lord Jesus Christ.

That is why it is good to reflect on a certain Holy Book of the Old Testament during the Great Fast. This certain book, the Holy Book Song of Songs, is

an exemplary Old Testament Book for such study. Within this Old Testament Book we have the bride looking and longing for private time with her bridegroom. It pertains to feelings we need to reflect upon during this fast. So therefore, the bride here represents all of us longing and looking for private time with our Bridegroom especially during this contemplative occasion of the Holy Great Fast.

I would like to give you an introduction to the Old Testament Holy Book, Song of Songs and its composition of eight chapters. Following this short narrative introduction to the Song of Songs I would like each of you to begin reading one chapter and meditate upon it each week of the Holy Great Fast. You will finish the entire Holy Book during the eight weeks of the fast. But I caution you in that this does not mean you should read only one Holy Bible chapter per week. Rather, this is to be considered additional reading besides your daily reading from the Holy Scripture. This is a spiritual exercise to assist you in your search for more constructive private time with the Lord our God during the Holy Great Fast.

II. Theme of Song of Songs

Classification

The first point about the Holy Book, Song of Songs,

which I would like to begin to discuss with you, is the "theme" of the book itself. What is the "theme" of the Holy Book of Song of Songs? As a premise to the question please remember that there are five poetic books in the Old Testament. Further, as you know, the Old Testament is divided into 1) Historical Books, 2) Poetic Books, and 3) Prophetic Books.

There are five Old Testament Books that are considered poetic, written as poems. These five Holy Books are Job, Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and Song of Songs. Each of these Holy Books reveals one of the basic elements of man. As you know we are composed of body, soul, and spirit. The soul of man has three faculties consisting of the mind (intellect), the emotions (feelings of the heart) and the will. So in summary, when we speak of the elements of man we can say we are composed of body, spirit, mind, emotions, and will.

Voice of the Spirit

As mentioned before, the five Old Testament poetic books reveal these five elements. The Holy Book of Job is the voice of the spirit because the spirit is the deepest component of man. In the Holy Book of Job, we find him through his pain and suffering was searching for the Spirit of God as we read in Job, *"Oh, that I knew where I might find Him"* (Job 23:3). So the spirit of the prophet Job was searching

for the Spirit of God. This reminds me of "*Deep calls unto deep*" (Psalm 42:7). The deepest part of man is his spirit which called unto the deepest part of God (His Spirit). Thus, the Holy Book of Job is the cry of the spirit searching for the Spirit of God.

Voice of the Heart

The Holy Book of Psalms is the voice of the heart.

Why? Any emotion or any feeling you may experience in your life, you will find it expressed in the Holy Book of Psalms. When you are happy, you will find Psalms speaking about joy and happiness. When you are sad you will find Psalms speaking about sadness and grief. When you are afraid, you will find Psalms addressing this feeling of fear. When you are anxious you will find Psalms speaking about anxiety. That is why many people love the Holy Book of Psalms as it relates to their present state and ever-fluctuating stages of life.

The Holy Book of Psalms contains the human expression of our every emotion and should be turned to when we have any kind of feeling we need assistance with and discover how it is expressed within this book. It can rightly be said that the Holy Book of Psalms is the voice or the cry of the heart.

Voice of the Mind

The Holy Book of Ecclesiastes is the voice of the

mind. King Solomon, through his mind and famed wisdom, was trying to find if there was any meaning to life. He tried to search the whole world with his mind and he came to this conclusion, that everything away from God is vanity. That is why the last verse of the Holy Book of Ecclesiastes states that the conclusion of the whole matter regarding the meaning of life is to fear God and keep His commandments for this is man's all.

Voice of the Will

The Holy Book of Proverbs is the voice of the will because both the heart and the mind give knowledge to man and man through his will discerns to make the right choice. We read in the Holy Book of Proverbs "*trust in the Lord with all your heart*" (Proverbs 3:5). This is a decision made by our will. "*And lean not on your own understanding*" (Proverbs 3:5). This is again a choice we make by our own will. "*In all your ways acknowledge Him and He shall direct your paths*" (Proverbs 3:5). This is again a choice made by our own will.

When a person makes a conscious decision, it is made through their feelings and mind. You say, "I don't feel comfortable with a decision or a project" and your mind will analyze the project and you may say these are the pros and cons. You will ask the

mind and the heart to provide information to the will and the will makes the choice.

To summarize what I have said thus far, the Holy Book of Job is the voice of the spirit, the Holy Book of Psalms is the voice of the heart, the Holy Book of Proverbs is the voice of the will, and the Holy Book of Ecclesiastes is the voice of the mind.

Voice of the Body

Then remains the Holy Book of Song of Songs and that is the voice of the body but what do I mean by that? What do our bodies seek and long for? St. Paul answers this question in the Holy Book of Romans when he says, "*Even we ourselves groan within ourselves, eagerly waiting for the adoption, the redemption of our body*" (Romans 8:23). So our bodies are waiting eagerly to be redeemed.

After the fall, corruption entered into our bodies, which is why we get tired, sick, and eventually die. Our bodies look for its redemption because in the last day, when we are raised from the dead we will be raised with glorified bodies, bodies that do not get tired, that do not get sick, bodies that are immortal and will live forever. That's the redemption of the body.

So our bodies are waiting eagerly, waiting for that day when the bodies will be redeemed which means

the bodies will be glorified but St. Paul said, the redemption of the body is related to our adoption. So he is making a connection between adoption and the redemption of the body. What is adoption?

Adoption is to be considered children of God, and what is the process of becoming children of God. The adoption will happen through our marriage to our Bridegroom, the only begotten Son of God, our Lord Jesus Christ. Let me give you an example: if you have a son and you have a girl who is a servant in your house. This servant we cannot call her your daughter. But if your son decided to marry this servant, then she will not be a servant anymore. She will be a daughter-in-law and she becomes eligible for inheritance. This is exactly what happened with us.

We are created from the dust of the earth. We are servants, not children of God by nature. There is only one Son by nature, for God the Father, the Logos, our Lord Jesus Christ, the only begotten Son. But because the only begotten Son chose to marry the Church, through this marriage, we became the children of God, through our union with the Son; we became one with the Son. Through this marriage we became children of God. That is why one of the titles of the Lord Jesus Christ is Bridegroom.

St. John the Baptist spoke about the Lord Jesus Christ as the Bridegroom. St. Paul in his second letter to the Corinthians said, "*For I have betrothed you to one husband that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ*" (2 Corinthians 11:2). Even the Lord Jesus Christ, when He told the "Parable of the Ten Virgins" (Matthew 25) presented Himself as the Bridegroom.

Then there is a real marriage between Christ and ourselves as the children of God and through this marriage we become one with the Son of God. Through this marriage we will be adopted and become children of God and through the adoption our bodies will be redeemed, our bodies will be glorified, our bodies will be raised in glory and will live forever without seeing the corruption of death. Here now we see the link between the adoption and the redemption of the body and how Holy Book of Song of Songs is the cry of the body.

The Holy Book of Song of Songs speaks about the bride and the bridegroom, about you, me and Christ. This is the cry of the body because through this marriage we will be adopted and through adoption our bodies will be glorified. The theme of this Holy Book, Song of Songs, is marriage, marriage between the Lord Jesus Christ and His Church. We can say the theme of Song of Songs is love, because marriage

without love is suffering. If we remove love from marriage it will not be marriage anymore.

III. Characters, Symbolism, and Setting

Characters

The Holy Book of Song of Songs explains how the Bridegroom, our Lord Jesus Christ, loves us, His bride and how the bride loves her Bridegroom, our Lord Jesus Christ. So the theme of the Holy Book Song of Songs is the marriage between the Lord Jesus Christ and the Church and how they love each other. This love is an unconditional, limitless, sacrificial, and willful love.

The other point I would like to address is the interpretation of the Holy Book Song of Songs. The Holy Book of Song of Songs is written similar to a dramatic play. There are some predominant characters in the play which include two main characters the bridegroom and the bride. There is a choir of characters represented by the daughters of Jerusalem.

Type and Anti-type

Here I would like to explain the significance of the word "type" and the word "anti-type." The word "type" means symbol and "anti-type" means the fulfillment of the symbol. The word "type" is derived from the Greek word "typos" as we chant in the

Doxology of the Heavenly, Michael is the first, Gabriel is the second, and Raphael is the third as a symbol of the Holy Trinity

Another example we can give is that circumcision is the type and baptism is the anti-type. We can say the sacrifices of the Old Testament are the type and the Eucharist (the Holy Communion) is the anti-type.

The Holy Book of Song of Songs is written in a symbolic manner, so when we read this book, we need to see every symbol (type) and find the anti-type. For example, the bridegroom in the Holy Book of Song of Songs is King Solomon. So King Solomon is the type, therefore who is the anti-type? The anti-type is the Lord Jesus Christ. So when we read about Solomon in the Holy Book of Song of Songs we understand that Solomon here is a symbol of the Lord Jesus Christ.

When we read about the couch of Solomon, this is a type; the anti-type is the Throne of God. So the first character within the Holy Book of Song of Songs is Solomon, the bridegroom who is the type of the Lord Jesus Christ, the true Bridegroom. The second character within the Holy Book of Songs is the bride and her name is Shulamite. Shulamite is the feminine form of Solomon. As you know, the name Solomon means peace and the name Shulamite

means the "one who received peace". Because the Lord Jesus Christ is the King of Peace, when we are with Him, we will be full of peace and full of joy.

The character of Shulamite here is the type and the anti-type is the Church; that is you and me, the bride of the Lord Jesus Christ. The daughters of Jerusalem are the type of our fellow believers. Our brothers and sisters in the Lord Jesus Christ are the assembly of believers. These are the main characters of the Holy Book of Song of Songs.

Shulamite is a simple country girl who was working as a keeper of the vineyard. As she said in the first chapter of the Song of Songs, "*They made me the keeper of the vineyards, but my own vineyard I have not kept*" (Songs 1:6). The story, one of symbolization not factual, begins as King Solomon disguising himself as a young shepherd lad goes to the vineyard and meets Shulamite. She did not recognize him as the king and they loved one another. King Solomon promised her marriage.

Now how can we apply this to our Lord Jesus Christ? The initial part of the story explains to us the mystery of Incarnation because God the King of Kings and Lord of Lords disguised Himself and was born like a human being and many people did not know that He was God Incarnate. So as King

Solomon disguised himself as a young shepherd lad and went to the vineyard, in the same way God disguised Him and took the form of man and was born like us and as such, like a servant.

As King Solomon met this simple country girl, the Lord Jesus Christ, following His birth, was in communication with all of us, we saw Him, we touched Him, and we fell in love with Him. Although in the beginning we did not know He was the Son of God.

There was definitely something unique about the Lord Jesus Christ, that attracted us to Him and made our heart to burn within us and made His Words pierce our hearts and we fell in love with Him. Like the Samaritan woman when she met the Lord the first time, she did not know that He was the Messiah. She spoke to Him just as a simple Jewish man but she was immediately attracted to Him and her blindness began to be removed gradually.

The Samaritan woman told Him; are You greater than our father Jacob, then I see that You are a prophet. At the end, the Samaritan woman knew and recognized the Lord Jesus Christ as the Messiah.

The Lord Jesus Christ betrothed us to Himself, not with a ring or a precious stone, not with gold or

silver but He betrothed us to Him with His precious blood upon the Holy Cross.

The story in the Holy Book of Song of Songs continues with King Solomon after promising the young girl with marriage, going away and remained absent for some time. During this time Shulamite was crying out for Him. She was waiting eagerly for His return in order to marry her and take her to His house.

This represents the Ascension of the Lord Jesus Christ to Heaven and we are here now abiding on earth longing for His return, waiting eagerly for His Second Coming to take us with Him to His Heavenly Kingdom where we will dwell with Him forever. We feel lonely here in our earthy life, which is why in the conclusion of the Holy Book of Revelation it states "*Amen, even so, come, Lord Jesus*" (Revelation 22:20). We are waiting for His Second Coming and we chant at the conclusion of the Orthodox Creed, "We look for the resurrection of the dead and the life of the age to come." That is the cry of the bride in her loneliness waiting for the return of the bridegroom.

Suddenly, there was an announcement that the king was coming on His couch. That is the Second Coming of our Lord Jesus Christ when He comes on the clouds surrounded by His holy angels and His

archangels. The Lord will come in glory, not like the First Coming when He disguised Himself, but in the Second Coming, He will come in His glory as the King on His Couch, on His Throne, on the cloud, surrounded by the angels and archangels.

Shulamite received word that the king would see her and take her away and marry her in the palace that is similar to when we are caught up to meet the Lord Jesus Christ in the clouds which is referred to as the rapture of the believers when we are caught up to meet the Lord on the clouds. We read in the Holy Book of Revelations, there is the wedding and the supper of the wedding (Revelation 19:9) and we will be married to the Lord Jesus Christ and live with Him forever and ever.

Therefore, the Holy Book of Song of Songs explains to us our life with our Bridegroom, how He came to the world, disguised Himself as a shepherd and proposed to marry us through the shedding of His Blood on the Holy Cross. He went away and ascended into Heaven, then He will return again in His glory as a King to take us with Him to marry us and we will live eternally with Him.

Setting

This is the narration of the Holy Book of Song of Songs: The play's setting is in Jerusalem, the capital

of Israel. There is a chorus of singers referred to as the Daughters of Jerusalem. Many times Shulamite would address the Daughters of Jerusalem. As I mentioned, the language of the Holy Book is very secretive and symbolic. In order to benefit from this Holy Book, you need to understand the type and the anti-type of each symbol, the meaning of each symbol, and you will immensely enjoy reading this Holy Book, Song of Songs.

Sometimes we get confused and do not know who is speaking whether it is the bride or the bridegroom especially for people who speak English, but as a rule when you read "my love" usually the bridegroom is addressing the bride and when you read "my beloved" the bride is addressing the bridegroom.

IV. Chapter Synopsis

Now let me give you a chapter synopsis of the Holy Book. This Holy Book describes the joy and also our weaknesses that we may face in our earthly journey with our beloved Lord Jesus Christ. In the process of engagement, betrothal, and marriage our souls will be transferred, purified and finally matured.

First Chapter

In the first chapter, the King visits the vineyard as a shepherd. So the first chapter is about the day you met the Lord Jesus Christ because the King is God,

the vineyard is the Church, and the young girl is your soul and my soul. The first chapter speaks about the day you met the Lord, like the day the Samaritan woman met the Lord, like the day Zacchaeus met the Lord, like the day that Nathaniel met the Lord, like the day when St. Peter and St. Andrew met the Lord, and like the day the blind man met the Lord.

Second Chapter

In the second chapter of the Holy Book of Song of Songs, the King goes to the humble girl's house to marry her and like when God proposed to marry us and the day we accepted His proposal is the day we believed in Him. As we read about the man who was born blind, when the Lord Jesus Christ healed him and proposed to him, he accepted His proposal and believed in the Lord Jesus Christ.

Third Chapter

Within the third chapter of the Holy Book of Song of Songs, King Solomon and the Shulamite marry and here I would like to explain that the Jewish marriage is completed in three steps. The first step is the engagement, the second step is the betrothal, and the third step is the consummation of the marriage. Betrothal is similar to a legal marriage but the couple does not live together. The wife at this step has all the legal rights as a married wife, as we read about

St. Mary as the wife of St. Joseph although the marriage was not consummated.

So the third chapter is about the betrothal, not the consummation of marriage. This is the day of our baptism as St. Paul said, "*For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ*" (Galatians 3:27), and we became one with the Lord. So here we are children of God and the bride of Christ.

Fourth Chapter

The fourth chapter of the Holy Book, Song of Songs is like the honeymoon. It is our life with the Lord Jesus Christ after the betrothal. Here the reader has the first description of the bride. Here you discover how God perceives you following baptism. Here God recounts how He sees you with glorious and loving symbols. That is why we wear white because we are lovely in the eyes of God. We are pure in the eyes of God.

Fifth Chapter

In the fifth chapter of the Holy Book of Song of Songs, the marriage is celebrated. The celebration of marriage represents the Eucharist, when we eat His Body and drink His Blood. The Lord said, "*He who eats My flesh and drinks My blood abides in Me, and I in him*" (John 6:56). Eucharist is the

celebration of marriage. Now "*We are members of His body, of His flesh and of His bones*" (Ephesians 5:30). We are united with Him bodily.

In this chapter, the bride describes her bridegroom. Usually during Holy Communion we chant, praise God in His saints, praise Him for His mighty acts, etc. That is how the bride sees her bridegroom. After Holy Communion our tongues are released, praising God how beautiful He is, chanting and praising Him.

Sixth Chapter

Then in the sixth chapter of the Holy Book of Song of Songs is the transformation of the bride because after the Eucharist our life is transformed like the life of St. Paul before and after meeting the Lord Jesus Christ. In this sixth chapter we read about the bride being glorified in the garden of the king. The garden of the king is the Church. After her transformation, there is the second description of the bride by the bridegroom. So the Lord sees you more beautiful after the Eucharist.

Seventh Chapter

In the Holy Book of Song of Songs, seventh chapter, we read how the Shulamite, the bride is completely matured and the signs of her maturity is her dedication to evangelism. The bride of the Lord Jesus Christ should preach His name to the whole

world. The Lord said, "*you shall be witnesses to Me*" (Acts 1:8).

Shulamite evangelized and preached about the bridegroom "*Oh, taste and see that the Lord is good*" (Psalm 34:8) and the Bridegroom described the bride when He saw her evangelizing and preaching for the third time with a more beautiful description than the first and second description. The first description was after the baptism, the second description was following the Eucharist and the third description after being a missionary.

Eighth Chapter

The last chapter is the day when Shulamite went to live with her bridegroom forever, the consummation of the marriage. That is the day of our departure from earth to live with the Lord Jesus Christ. As St. Paul said, I have "*a desire to depart and be with Christ, which is far better*" (Philippians 1:23). So the eighth chapter of the Holy Book of Song of Songs is about eternal life with the Lord Jesus Christ and also the eternal love with the Lord.

V. Concept of Marriage

The last point I would like to speak about is concerning the concept of marriage in the Holy Book of Song of Songs. In the Holy Book of Romans chapter 7, while St. Paul was speaking about our

justification with the Lord Jesus Christ, he was speaking about marriage, although he did not mean marriage or did not intend to speak about it as a family life.

So what does this verse mean in the Holy Book of Romans, *"Or do you not know, brethren (for I speak to those who know the law), that the law has dominion over a man as long as he lives. For the woman who has a husband is bound by the law to her husband as long as he lives. But if the husband dies, she is released from the law of her husband. So then if, while her husband lives, she marries another man, she will be called an adulteress; but if her husband dies, she is free from that law, so that she is no adulteress, though she has married another man"* (Romans 7:1-3)?

Here St. Paul was speaking about us. Our human souls were created to be in a marriage relationship. I am speaking of spiritual marriage. After the fall of man, we were married to Satan, to the devil. The devil was our bridegroom. That is why every person who died before Christ, even the righteous, went to Hades. They went to their bridegroom, Satan.

As St. Paul says, the woman cannot marry another husband until her first husband dies. In the same way the devil must die so that we can get married to

the Lord Jesus Christ, our Bridegroom. That is what St. Paul was trying to say in the verse. The Lord said you cannot serve two masters, so the Lord was saying you must serve one master whether the devil or the Lord Jesus Christ.

Those who choose the devil will be destroyed, but those who chose to be the servants of the Lord Jesus Christ will be full of love, joy and happiness. If you think about Adam in the Paradise, he did not have any stress. Adam's life consisted of nothing to make him unhappy but he was unhappy and felt jealous from the animals because they had partners.

When God created Adam he initially created him to be in union with God. But Adam found it very difficult to be in union with God because for him God is incompatible. God was a spirit but Adam was a spirit and body, so how can the spirit and body be in union with God who is spirit only? So God wanted to challenge Adam and told him I understand it is not good for you to be alone, so I will create a partner for you and I will create her from your own bone and your own flesh.

This way you cannot say that we are incompatible, as she will be bone of your bones and flesh of your flesh. But I will create her different though. She is part of you but she is different and here is the

challenge. God told Adam, I want you to be one with her and through this oneness with your wife you will learn how to be one with me, because you will learn how to be one with your wife who is different from you. So you can be one with me who is different from you.

Thus the marriage here is schooling in which we learn how to be one with the incompatible, with the different, and through this school we will learn how to be one with God, the different and incompatible. That is the similarity between how God created Eve for Adam and how God created the Church as a bride for the Lord Jesus Christ.

God put Adam to sleep and God put his Son, the Lord Jesus Christ to sleep on the Holy Cross. God opened the side of Adam and on the Holy Cross the Lord Jesus Christ's side was opened by the spear. God took a rib from Adam's side and made this rib woman, and from the side of the Lord Jesus Christ God took blood and water and from that the Church was created. Then God awoke Adam from his sleep as the Lord Jesus Christ rose from the dead on the third day. Then God presented Eve to Adam his bride and God presented the Church to the Lord Jesus Christ as His Bride. So the Holy Bible is telling us that you cannot live without marriage, without

this relationship. Even the monks and the celibates are in a relationship with God.

VI. Conclusion

The Holy Book of Ecclesiastes speaks about how man was trying to find peace and joy from the pleasures of this world but it was vanity because the world cannot satisfy our hearts but the Lord Jesus Christ is larger than our hearts, so only the Lord can satisfy our hearts.

The Holy Book of Song of Songs is telling us that through your marriage to the Lord Jesus Christ, you will find meaning to your life; you will find joy, happiness and peace in your life. That is why when they asked the Lord, what is the greatest commandment the Lord said, "*You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with your entire mind*" (Matthew 22:37).

Why is this the greatest commandment? When we love God, we will find meaning to our life. This Holy Book of Song of Songs describes to us our relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ, our marital relationship with the Lord and the blessings we will have with this relationship. So during this Holy Great Fast you will need to spend time with the Lord Jesus Christ and enjoy it. The Holy Great Fast is the

spring time of our spiritual life in which we enjoy our company with the Lord Jesus.

Let me conclude with this verse from the Holy Book of Song of Songs. The bride is saying "*My beloved spoke, and said to me: 'Rise up, my love, my fair one, and come away. For lo, the winter is past, the rain is over and gone. The flowers appear on the earth; the time of singing has come, and the voice of the turtledove is heard in our land. The fig tree puts forth her green figs, and the vines with the tender grapes give a good smell. Rise up, my love, my fair one, and come away! "O my dove, in the clefts of the rock, In the secret places of the cliff, let me see your face, let me hear your voice; for your voice is sweet, and your face is lovely"*" (Songs 2:10-14).

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