

The Song of Songs does not resemble Mesopotamian love poetry. Mesopotamian love poetry often is crude and graphic. Most Mesopotamian love poetry pertains to a sacred rite in which a priestess representing a goddess marries the king, who represents a god. The theology of these love poems thus is much different from, and in many ways contradictory to, the theology of the Old Testament. One example is the need to satisfy the sexual cravings of the goddess to assure cosmic stability.

Based on the extreme and many differences between the Song of Songs and Mesopotamian love poetry, we must conclude there was no effort on the part of God and the human compiler of the Song of Songs to emulate Mesopotamian love poetry. Thus there is no basis in Mesopotamian love poetry to guide us in interpreting the Song of Songs. This weakens the long-standing Jewish and Christian interpretation of the Song of Songs as an allegory about God's relationship with his people. Surely neither God nor the human compiler would have chosen to communicate that sacred relationship by emulating a genre so offensive to Old Testament theology.

The Song of Songs does have similarities with Egyptian love songs which were popular at the time of Solomon. The Egyptian love songs have a similar look and feel to the Song of Songs, with similar imagery [e.g. love being better than alcohol], themes [love sickness], structure [interchange of dialogue between lovers], and metaphors [royal]. Egyptian love songs were secular and literal, not religious and allegorical. Since the Song of Songs apparently follows the genre of Egyptian love songs, we should interpret the Song of Songs to speak of love between a man and a woman. Its canonicity suggests the sanctification [setting out for God's purposes] of marital erotic love.

Egyptian love songs were for entertainment and sometimes were gathered together into larger collections, which might have a common theme. As the Song of Songs apparently follows the genre of Egyptian love songs, it could be one long song with a narrative or a collection of songs which would have thematic unity but not an ongoing narrative. If the latter is the case, imposing a narrative on the Song of Songs would create false connections between the songs and lead to erroneous inferences. If the former is the case, denying the narrative would obscure some of what the Song is teaching. There is cohesiveness to the Song of Songs, along with homogeneity of style, consistent refrains, and a consistent setting of spring in the country, all of which suggests this is an integrated unit, not a mere collection of individual parts.