

Song of Solomon

Song of Solomon 1:1 The Song - best of all songs - Solomon's Song !

The plan for our Bible Study today is to read through the entire book of the Song of Solomon. There are 8 chapters and so this will take most of our time. We had 2 men and 2 women volunteer to read for us and so hopefully they have read through the book a time or two in preparation for their big moment.

We are reading tonight from The Message which is a paraphrase of the Bible rather than a translation. It is not possible for any translation from one language to another to be an exact word for word translation. This is because every language has idioms or ways of saying things that are unique to itself. A translation has to use the idioms of the language that it is being translated into in order to be readable and understandable. Bible translations could be put on a graph with one side of the number line representing word for word and the other end representing meaning for meaning. By remaining close to a word for word a translation allows the reader to better see the ambiguities of the original language and make up one's own mind as to the intended meaning. A translation that

is closer to a meaning for meaning rendering of the text will be more readable, which will be an advantage when it comes to devotional exercises. The meaning for meaning translation will make more interpretive decisions for the reader and the reader would not normally be aware that these decisions are being made. Careful analysis will sometimes give reason to question the decisions made in a meaning for meaning translation. A paraphrase makes no pretense of being a word for word translation and the interpretive decisions would tend to be more arbitrary and less reasoned than in a meaning for meaning translation. The advantage of a paraphrase is that it will be generally even more readable than the meaning for meaning translation and in the case of the Song of Solomon, possibly the most efficient way to have a sense of the content of the book.

So let's make some initial observations in respect to tonight's exercise: 1) We drew attention last week to the end of verse 6 in which the Shulamite woman explains the darkness of her skin. The NKJ reads, "My mother's sons were angry with me; they made me the keeper of the vineyards, but my own vineyard I have not kept."

We made the point that the Song makes use of literary devices and that when the woman says, "but my own vineyard I have not kept," she is most likely using the word "vineyard" to refer metaphorically to her appearance. A careful reading would see this but a casual reading might miss it. The Message paraphrases the end of verse 6, "My brother's ridiculed me and sent me to work in the fields. They made me care for the face of the earth, but I had no time to care for my own face." Notice that The Message agreed with our interpretation of the NKJ reading but that when reading the NKJ we had to make a decision about the reading that is made for us by the Message. Being in agreement would be the normal experience but this would not always be the case.

2) We also noted last week that there is disagreement among interpreters as to how the Song should be understood, even as to the basic structure of the book. A comparison of The Message with the NKJ also demonstrates this point. In the NKJ the daughters of Jerusalem speak twice in verse 4 and once in verse 11. The Message does not have the daughters of Jerusalem speak until verse 9 of chapter 5. The speakers are not identified in the original text and each reading is interpretive.