

About the Song of Songs

The rabbis of the Talmud debated whether the book of erotic poems ascribed to King Solomon and known as The Song of Songs, in which there is no mention of God, should be included in the Biblical canon: was it composed, they asked, *beru'ah hakodesh* (in the spirit of holiness)? Rabbi Akiva declared it to be not merely holy, but “holy of holies”, and his opinion prevailed. The Song of Songs is a regular part of the Jewish liturgical calendar: it is chanted in the synagogue on Shabbat during Passover. Sephardi Jews also read it on Fridays to prepare for Shabbat, especially between Passover & Shavuot, i.e., in the springtime that many of King Solomon’s verses celebrate.

The love between man and woman expressed in The Song of Songs is understood in Jewish tradition to represent the love between God and Israel. The Passover festival celebrates that love, too, in retelling the story of the time of the closeness of God and Israel, in the desert, in the springtime of their love.

Christian tradition also takes the lovers of The Song of Songs allegorically, as representatives of Christ and the Church, or sometimes of Christ and the individual soul. In Christian liturgy, these poems have been associated with the cult of Mary.