



Love Story



A STUDY OF THE SONG OF SOLOMON

Song of Solomon 1:1



Song 1:1 The song of songs, which *is* Solomon's.

Introduction

Tonight, we begin a new journey into a book that I have never taught, only studied. The book known as “Song of Solomon,” is a very complicated and controversial book. For about the last 3,000 years, scholars have debated its contents, how to interpret it, and whether or not it should be included in the canon of Scripture.

TITLE

In the Hebrew Bible the title of this book is "The Song of Songs of Solomon." It comes from 1:1. The Septuagint and Vulgate translators adopted this title. The Latin word for song is canticum from which we get the word Canticles, another title for this book. Some English translations have kept the title "Song of Songs" (e.g., NIV, TNIV), but many have changed it to "Song of Solomon" based on 1:1 (e.g., NASB, AV, RSV, NKJV, KJV).

"The name may be a kind of double entendre: it is the finest of Solomon's songs (in the superlative sense of 'song of songs'), and it is also a single musical work composed of many songs."

WRITER AND DATE

Many references to Solomon throughout the book confirm the claim of 1:1 that **Solomon wrote this book** (cf. 1:4-5, 12; 3:7, 9, 11; 6:12; 7:5; 8:11-12; 1 Kings 4:33). **He reigned between 971 and 931 B.C.**


- ❖ Richard Hess believed the writer is unknown and could have been anyone, even a woman, and that the female heroine viewed and described her lover as a king: as a Solomon.
- ❖ Duane Garrett believed that the book was written either "by Solomon" or "for Solomon," by a court poet of Solomon's day.



❖ Some scholars have argued that the book is a collection of songs written by multiple poets, but that view is unsupported by the text.

1 Kings 4:32 And he spake three thousand proverbs: and **his songs were a thousand and five.**

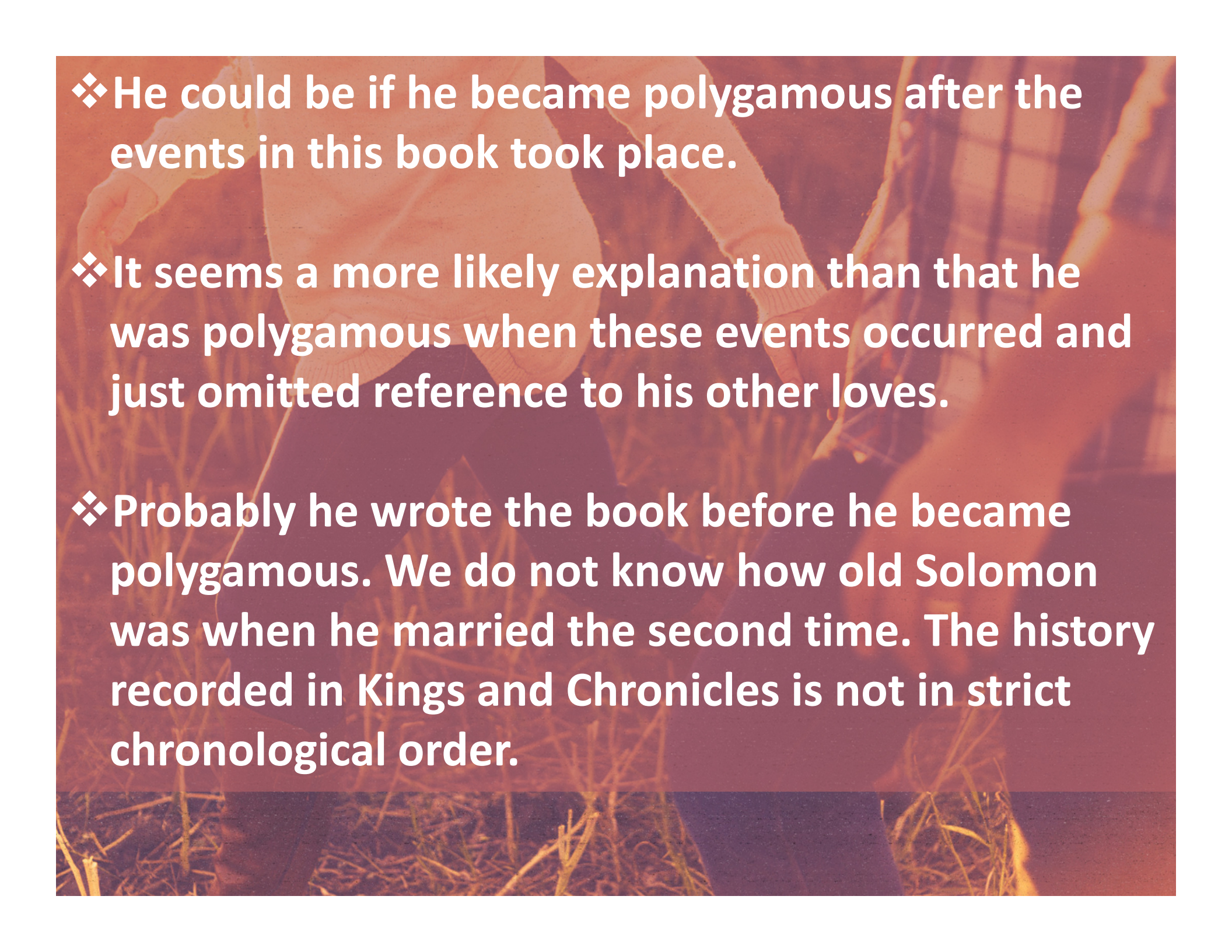
❖ How could Solomon, who had 700 wives and 300 concubines (1 Kings 11:3), be the same faithful lover this book presents?

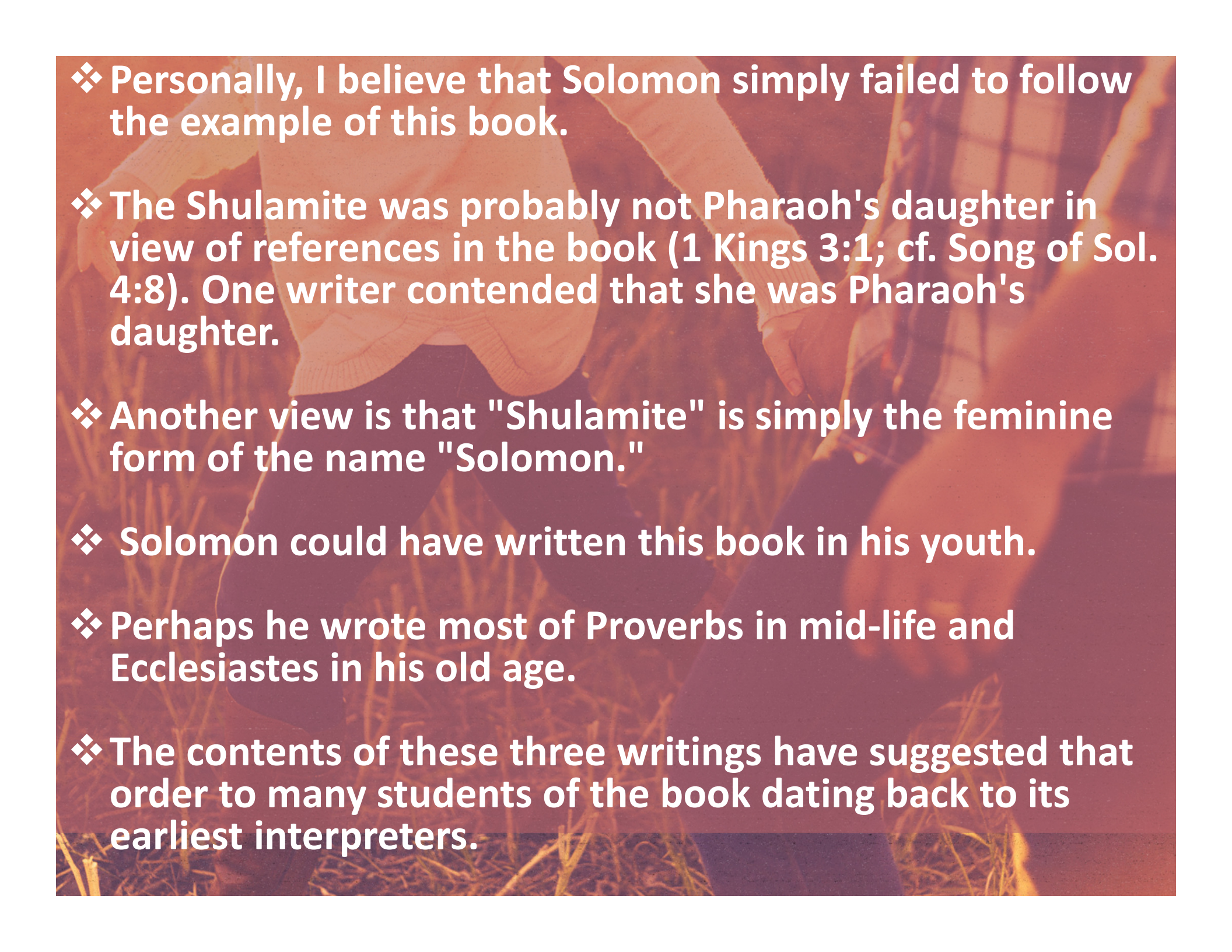
A group of people, including children and adults, are holding hands in a circle. The scene is dimly lit with a warm, reddish-orange glow, possibly from a fire or a low sun. The people are wearing casual clothing, and the overall atmosphere is one of togetherness and support.

1 Kings 11:1 But king Solomon loved many strange women, together with the daughter of Pharaoh, women of the Moabites, **Ammonites**, Edomites, Zidonians, *and* Hittites;

2 Of the nations *concerning* which the LORD said unto the children of Israel, Ye shall not go in to them, neither shall they come in unto you: *for* surely they will **turn away your heart after their gods: Solomon clave unto these in love.**

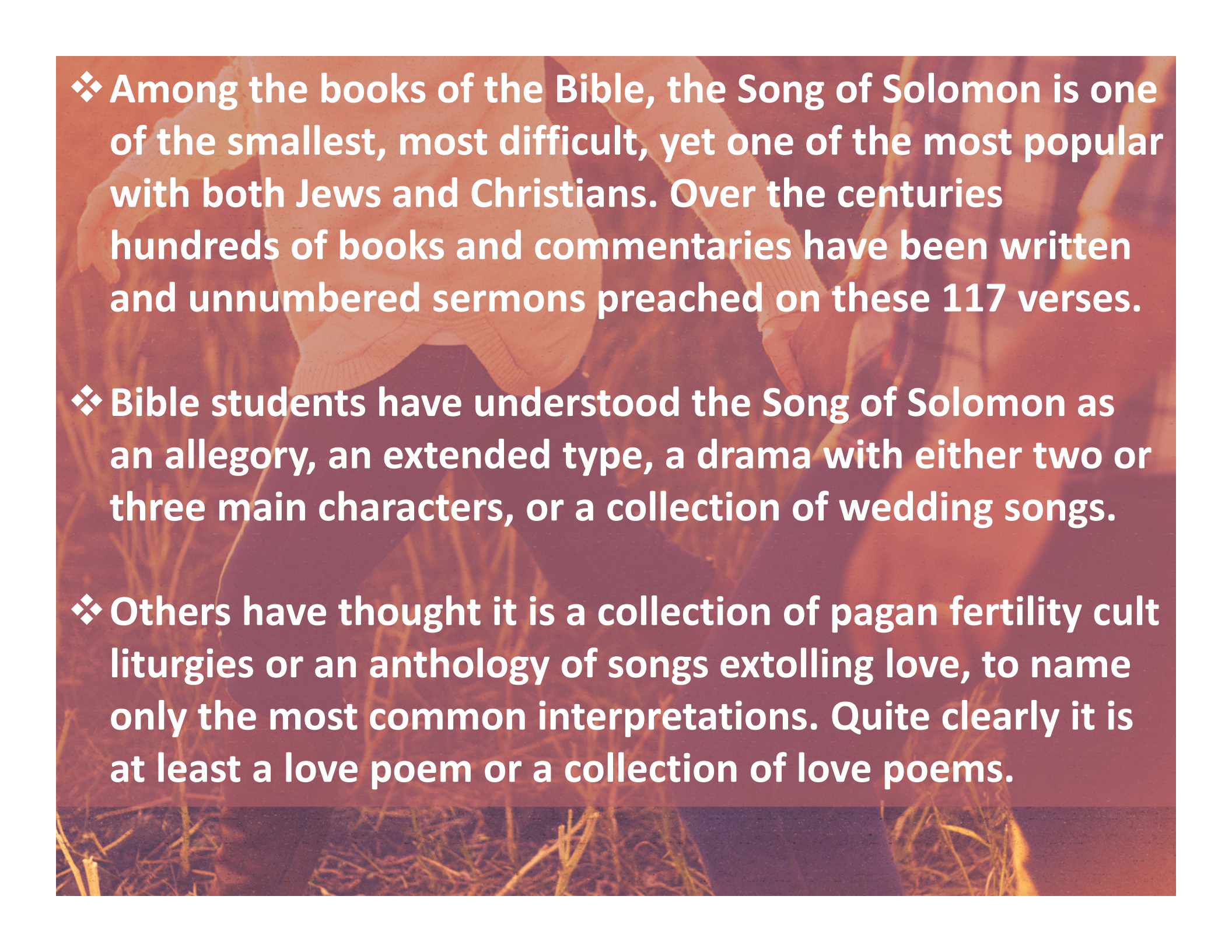
3 **And he had seven hundred wives, princesses, and three hundred concubines: and his wives turned away his heart.**

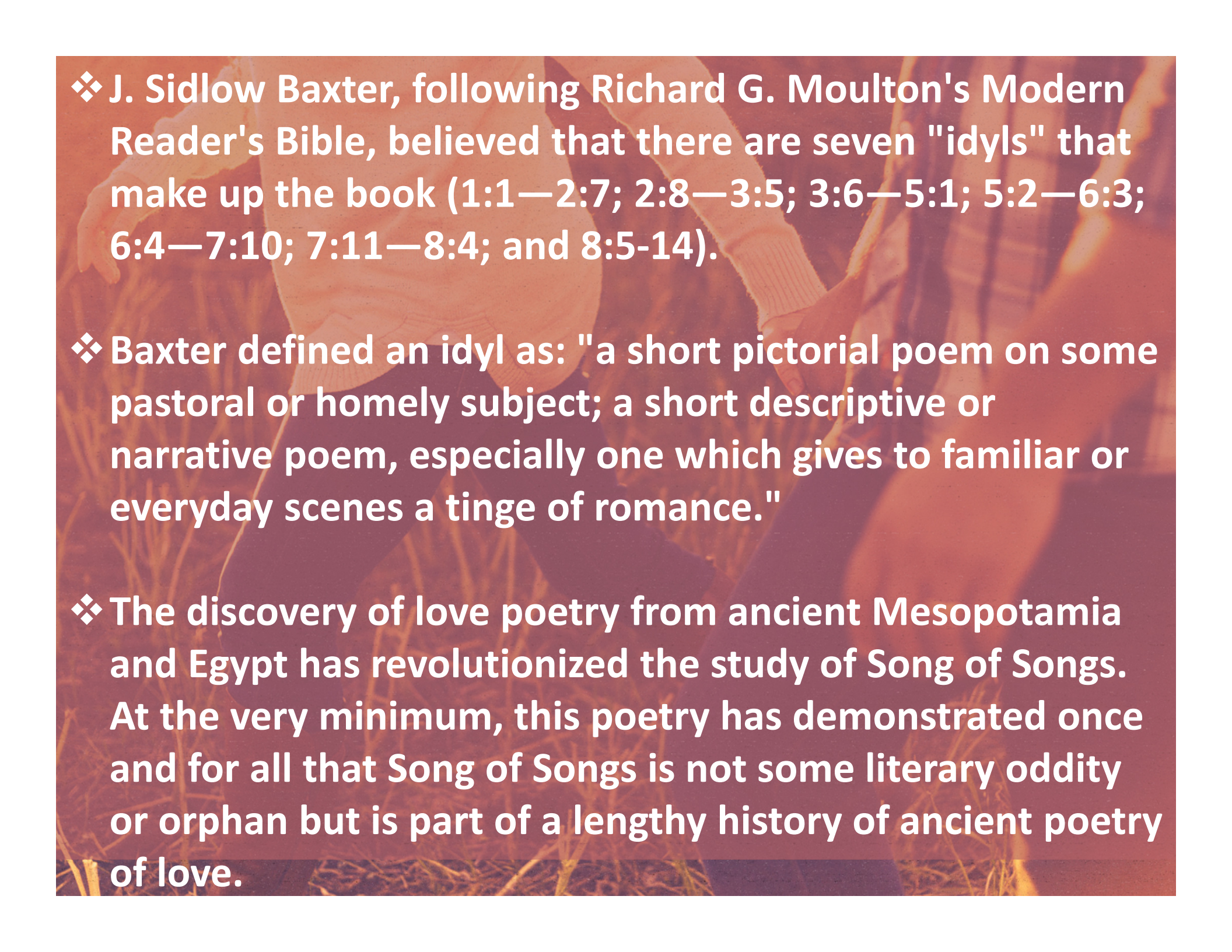
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- ❖ He could be if he became polygamous after the events in this book took place.
 - ❖ It seems a more likely explanation than that he was polygamous when these events occurred and just omitted reference to his other loves.
 - ❖ Probably he wrote the book before he became polygamous. We do not know how old Solomon was when he married the second time. The history recorded in Kings and Chronicles is not in strict chronological order.

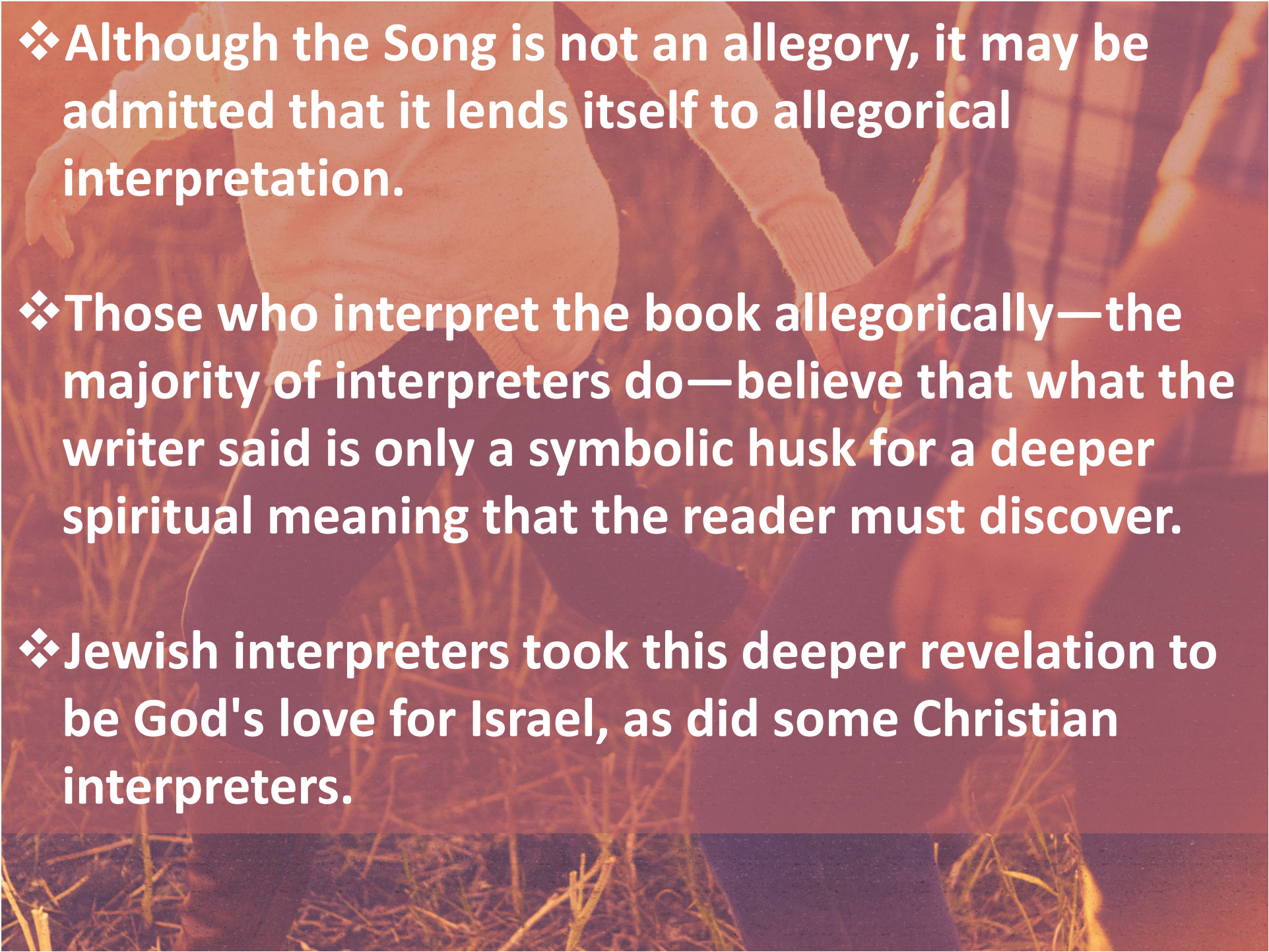
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- ❖ Personally, I believe that Solomon simply failed to follow the example of this book.
 - ❖ The Shulamite was probably not Pharaoh's daughter in view of references in the book (1 Kings 3:1; cf. Song of Sol. 4:8). One writer contended that she was Pharaoh's daughter.
 - ❖ Another view is that "Shulamite" is simply the feminine form of the name "Solomon."
 - ❖ Solomon could have written this book in his youth.
 - ❖ Perhaps he wrote most of Proverbs in mid-life and Ecclesiastes in his old age.
 - ❖ The contents of these three writings have suggested that order to many students of the book dating back to its earliest interpreters.

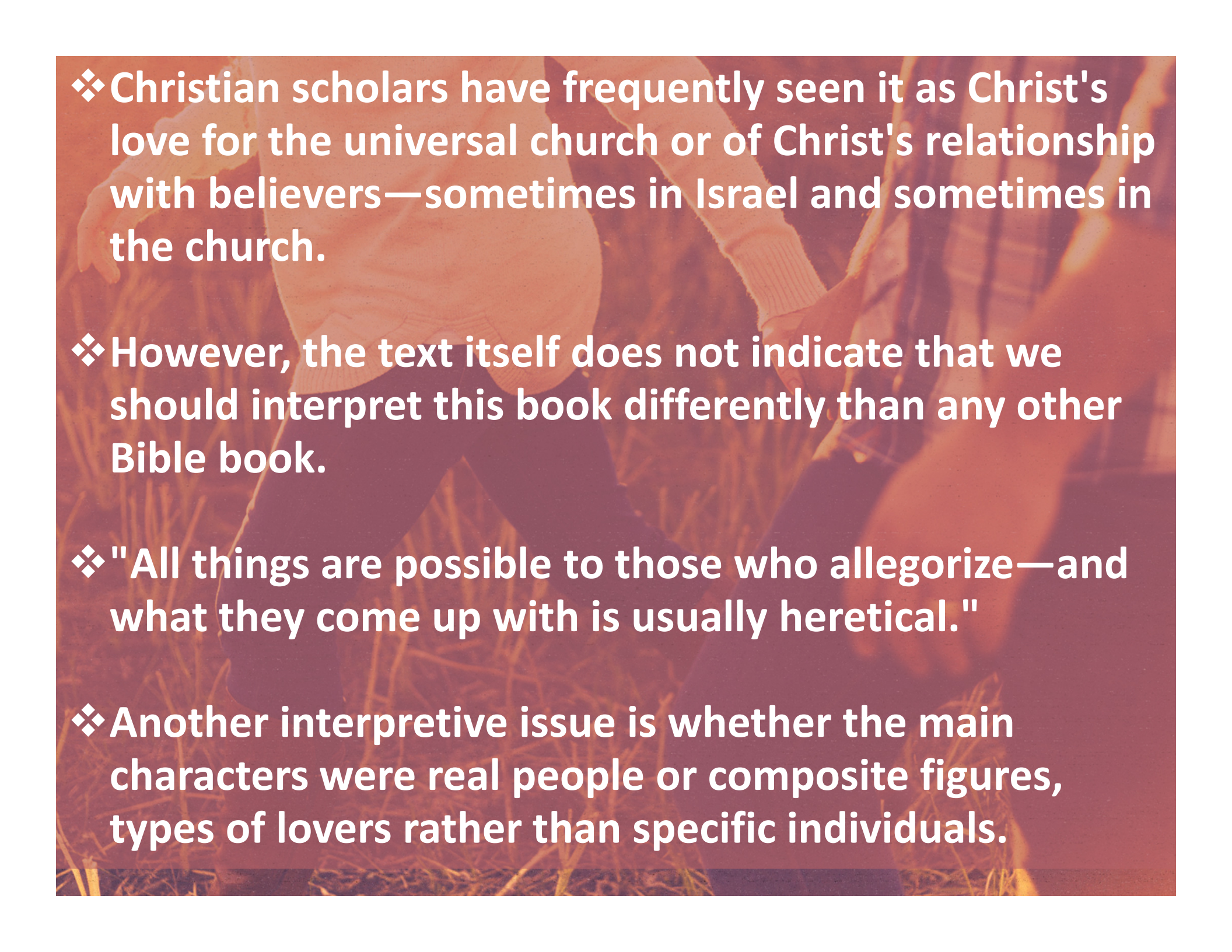
GENRE AND INTERPRETATION

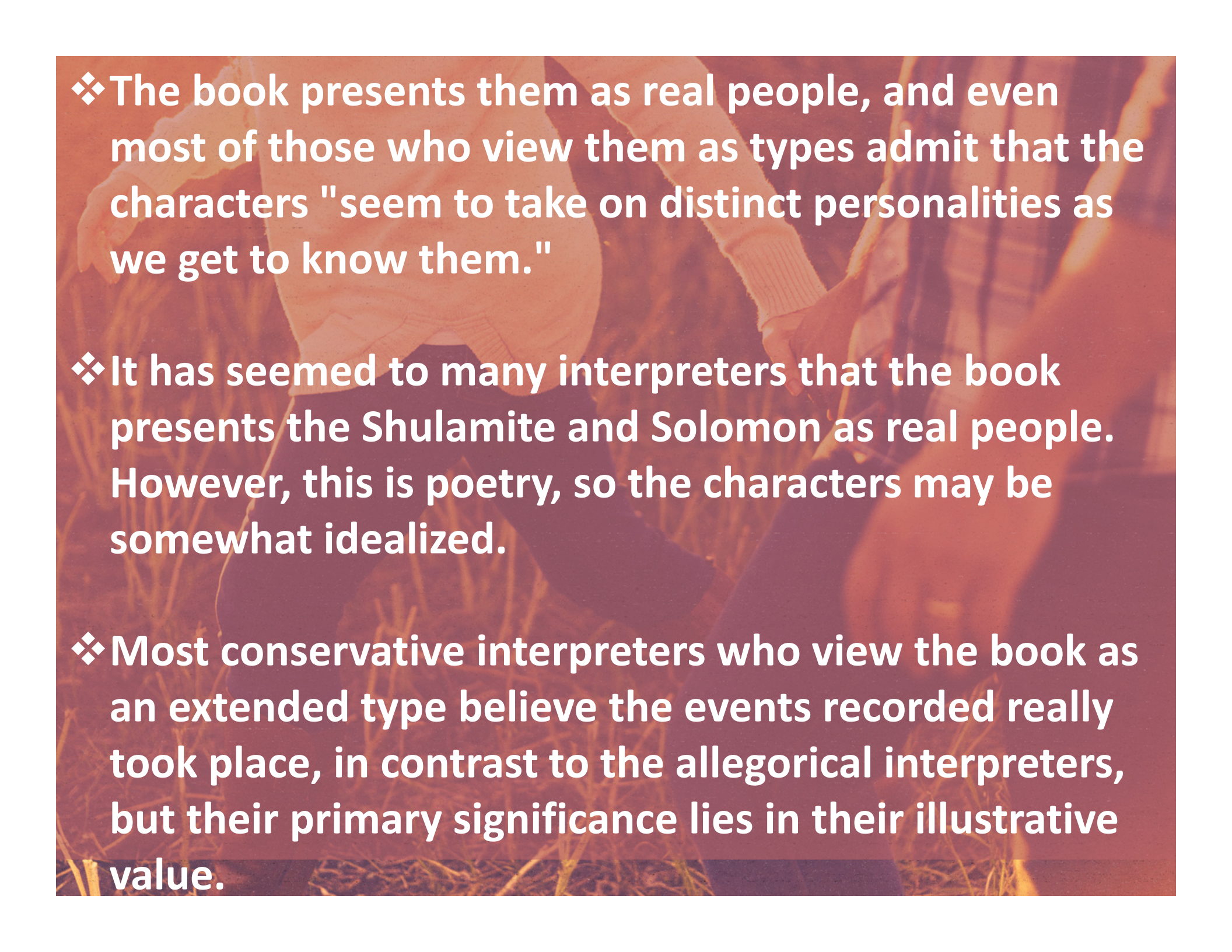
- ❖ This book has received more varied interpretations than perhaps any other book in the Bible.
- ❖ Some writers believed it presents the reader with the "greatest hermeneutical challenge" in the Old Testament. One excellent exegete called it "the most obscure book of the Old Testament."

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- ❖ Among the books of the Bible, the Song of Solomon is one of the smallest, most difficult, yet one of the most popular with both Jews and Christians. Over the centuries hundreds of books and commentaries have been written and unnumbered sermons preached on these 117 verses.
 - ❖ Bible students have understood the Song of Solomon as an allegory, an extended type, a drama with either two or three main characters, or a collection of wedding songs.
 - ❖ Others have thought it is a collection of pagan fertility cult liturgies or an anthology of songs extolling love, to name only the most common interpretations. Quite clearly it is at least a love poem or a collection of love poems.

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- ❖ J. Sidlow Baxter, following Richard G. Moulton's *Modern Reader's Bible*, believed that there are seven "idyls" that make up the book (1:1—2:7; 2:8—3:5; 3:6—5:1; 5:2—6:3; 6:4—7:10; 7:11—8:4; and 8:5-14).
 - ❖ Baxter defined an idyl as: "a short pictorial poem on some pastoral or homely subject; a short descriptive or narrative poem, especially one which gives to familiar or everyday scenes a tinge of romance."
 - ❖ The discovery of love poetry from ancient Mesopotamia and Egypt has revolutionized the study of Song of Songs. At the very minimum, this poetry has demonstrated once and for all that Song of Songs is not some literary oddity or orphan but is part of a lengthy history of ancient poetry of love.

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- ❖ Although the Song is not an allegory, it may be admitted that it lends itself to allegorical interpretation.
 - ❖ Those who interpret the book allegorically—the majority of interpreters do—believe that what the writer said is only a symbolic husk for a deeper spiritual meaning that the reader must discover.
 - ❖ Jewish interpreters took this deeper revelation to be God's love for Israel, as did some Christian interpreters.

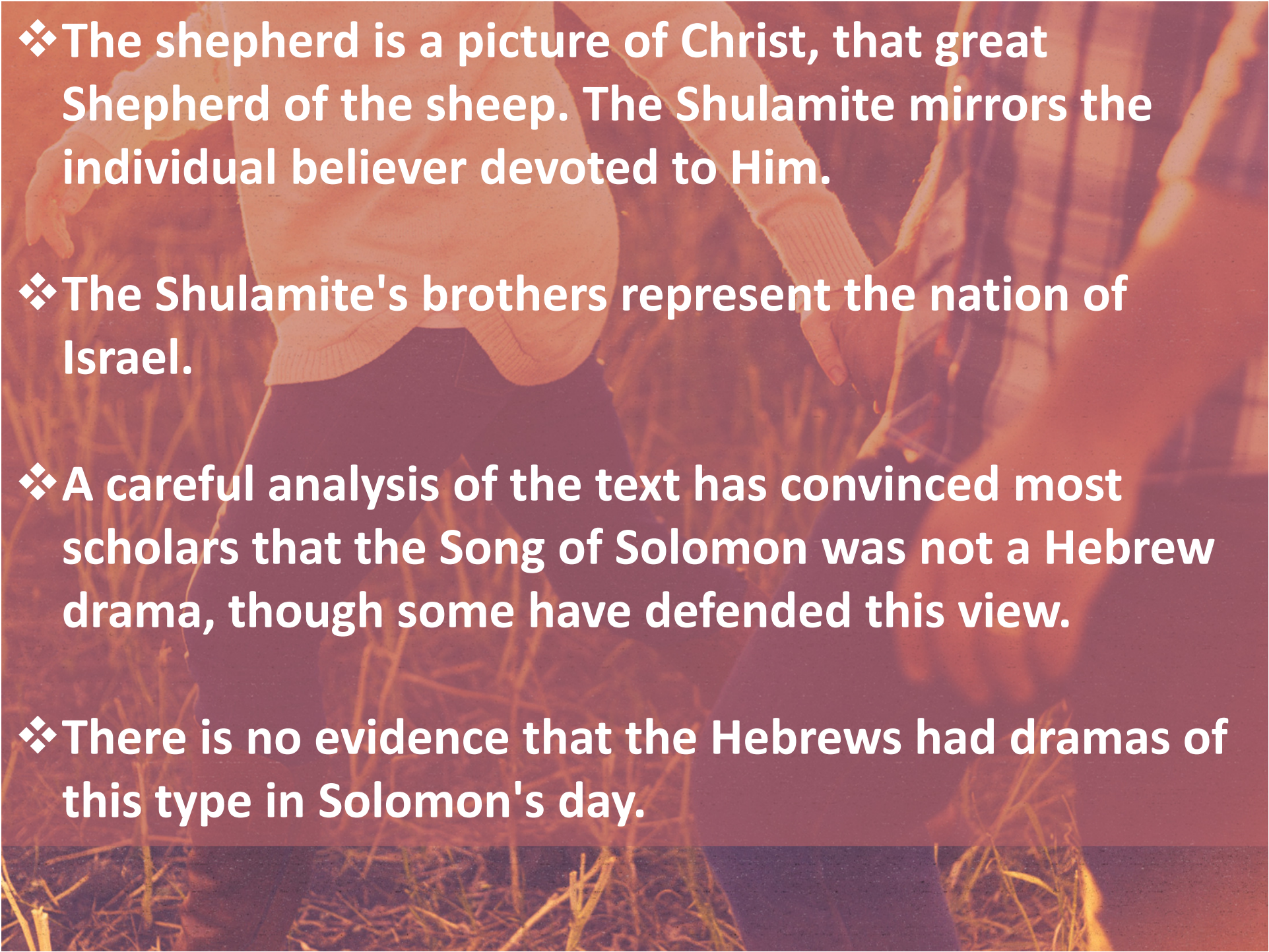
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- ❖ Christian scholars have frequently seen it as Christ's love for the universal church or of Christ's relationship with believers—sometimes in Israel and sometimes in the church.
 - ❖ However, the text itself does not indicate that we should interpret this book differently than any other Bible book.
 - ❖ "All things are possible to those who allegorize—and what they come up with is usually heretical."
 - ❖ Another interpretive issue is whether the main characters were real people or composite figures, types of lovers rather than specific individuals.

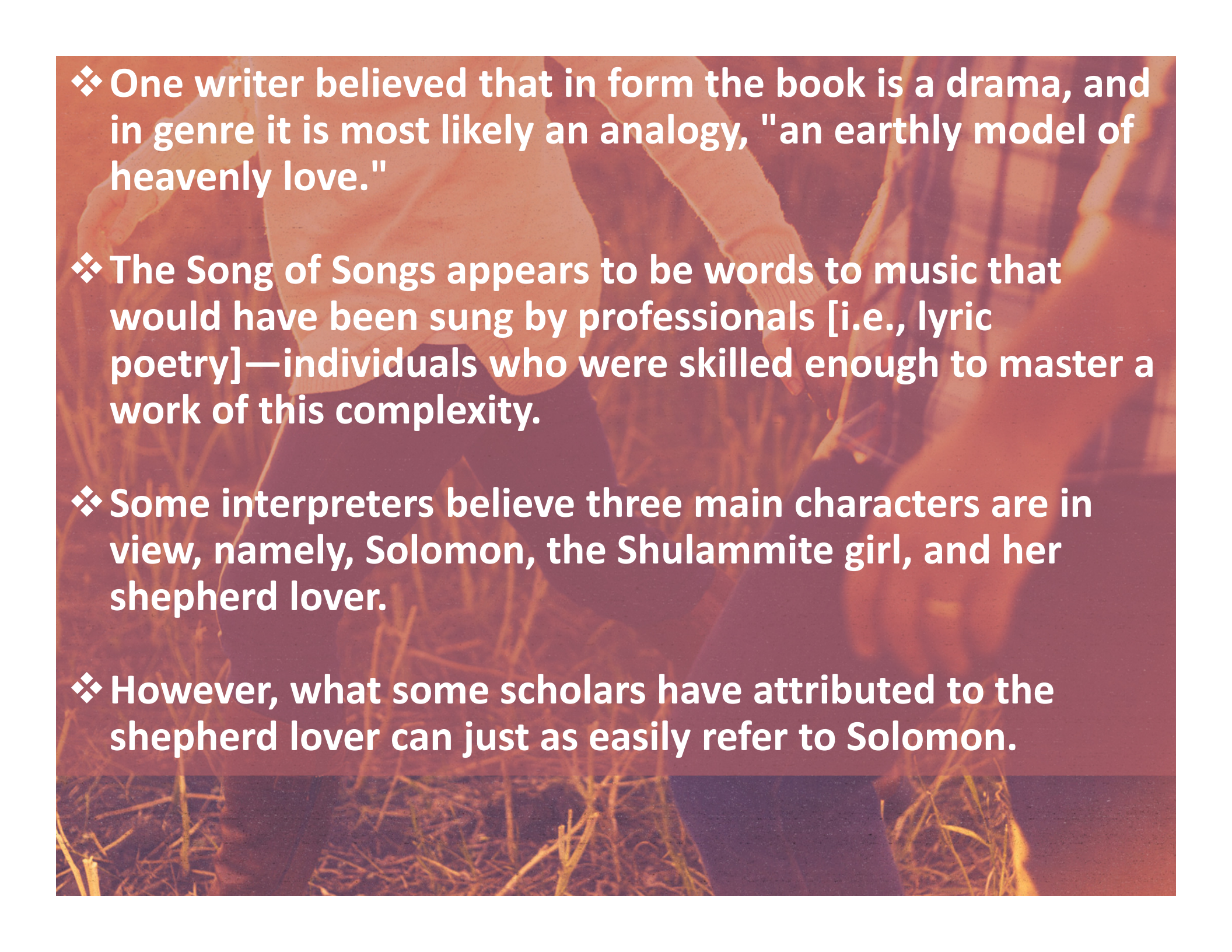
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- ❖ The book presents them as real people, and even most of those who view them as types admit that the characters "seem to take on distinct personalities as we get to know them."
 - ❖ It has seemed to many interpreters that the book presents the Shulamite and Solomon as real people. However, this is poetry, so the characters may be somewhat idealized.
 - ❖ Most conservative interpreters who view the book as an extended type believe the events recorded really took place, in contrast to the allegorical interpreters, but their primary significance lies in their illustrative value.

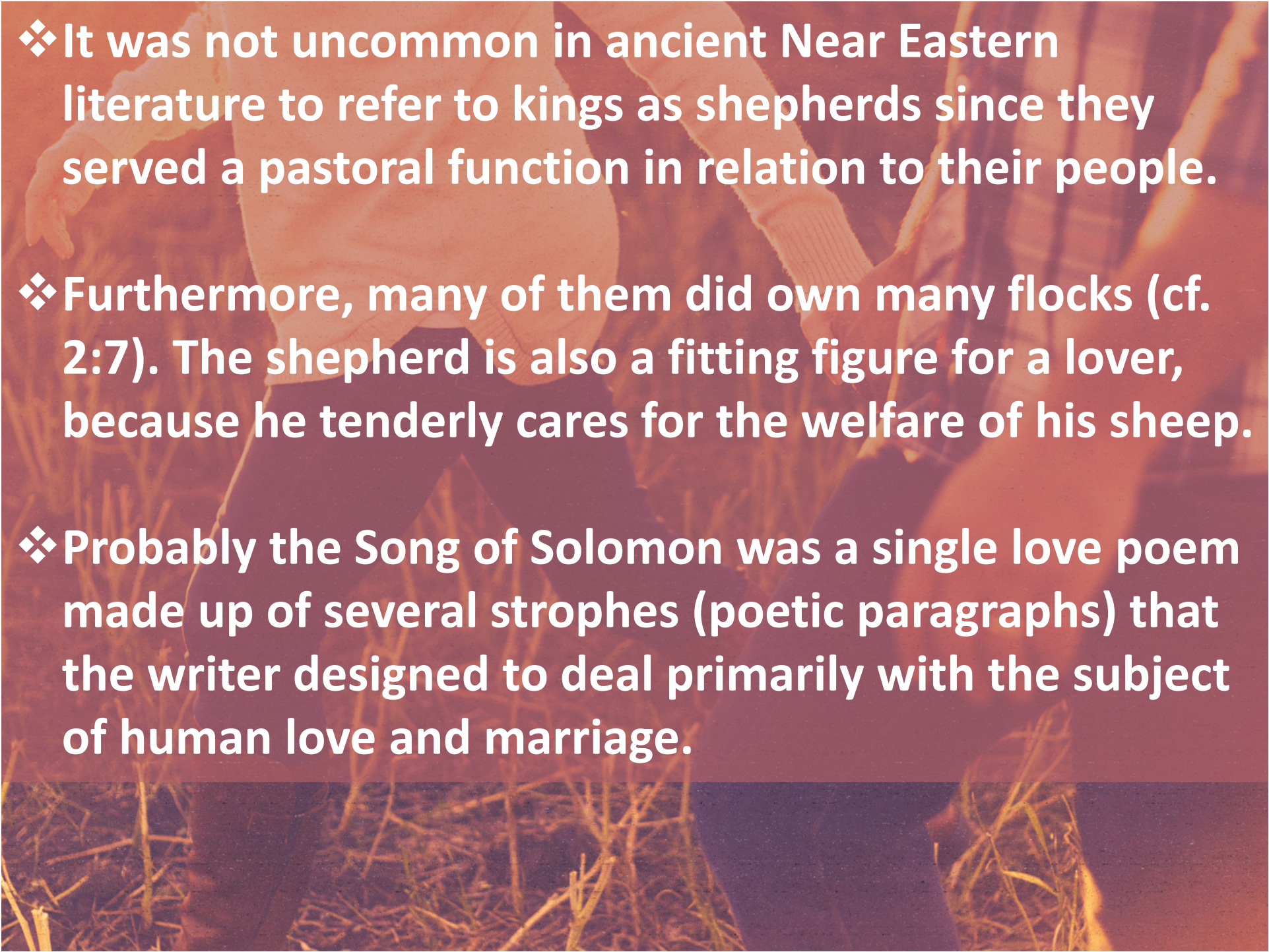
❖ Personally, I believe the characters are Solomon and a “Shulamite” woman, perhaps Rehoboam’s mother, Naamah, whose name means “loveliness.”

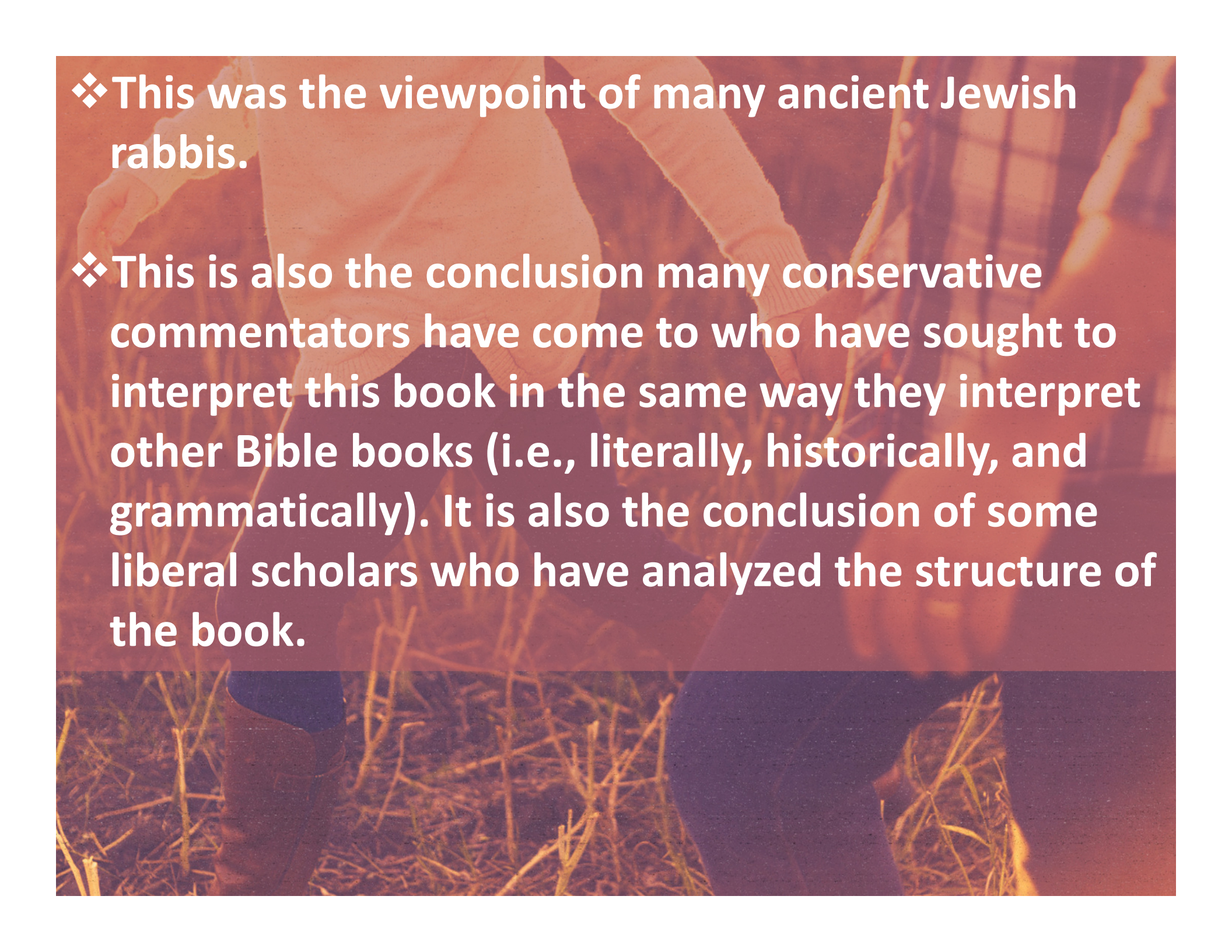
2 Chron. 9:30 And **Solomon reigned** in Jerusalem over all Israel **forty years**.

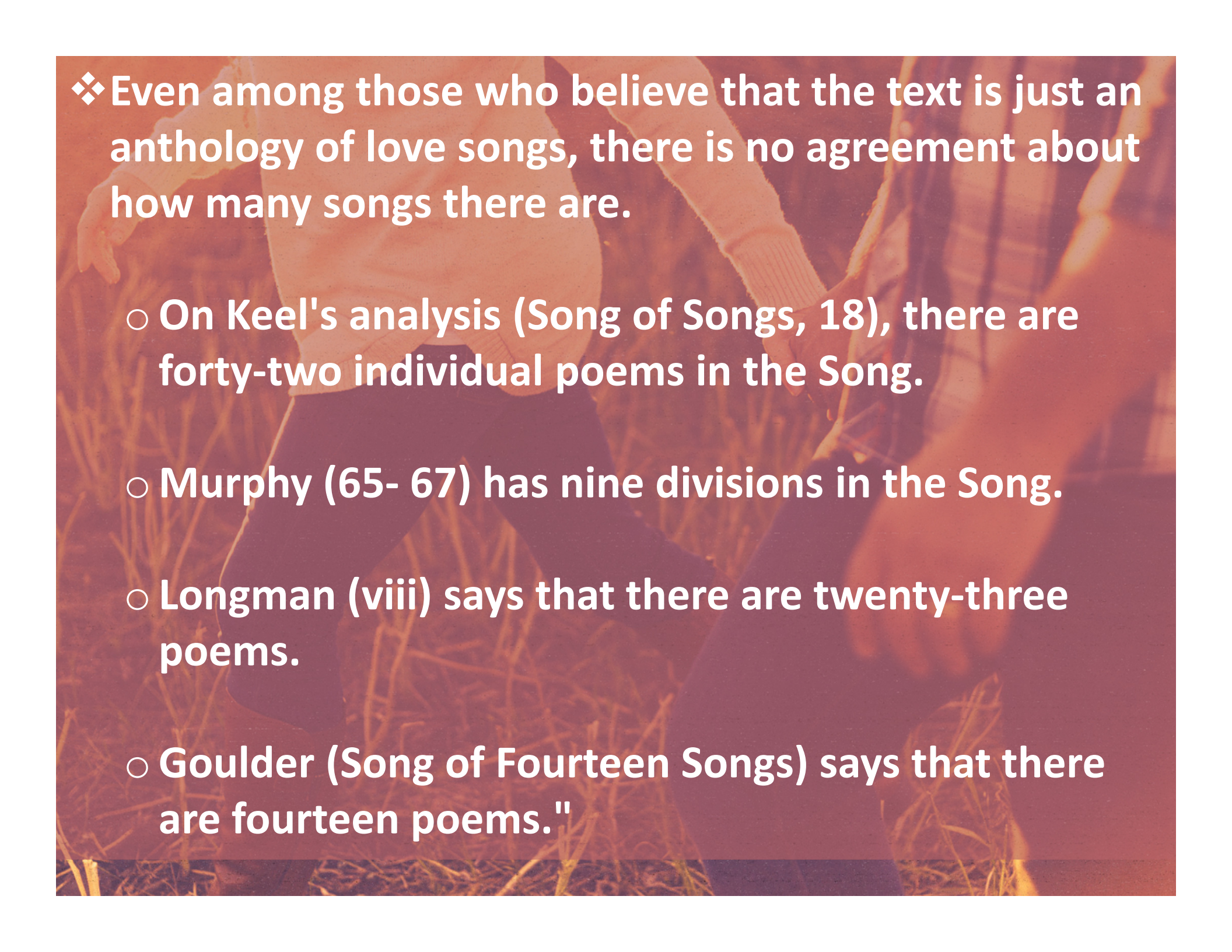
2 Chron. 12:13 So king Rehoboam strengthened himself in Jerusalem, and reigned: for **Rehoboam was one and forty years old when he began to reign**, and he reigned seventeen years in Jerusalem, the city which the LORD had chosen out of all the tribes of Israel, to put his name there. And **his mother's name was Naamah an Ammonitess**.

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- ❖ The shepherd is a picture of Christ, that great Shepherd of the sheep. The Shulamite mirrors the individual believer devoted to Him.
 - ❖ The Shulamite's brothers represent the nation of Israel.
 - ❖ A careful analysis of the text has convinced most scholars that the Song of Solomon was not a Hebrew drama, though some have defended this view.
 - ❖ There is no evidence that the Hebrews had dramas of this type in Solomon's day.

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- ❖ One writer believed that in form the book is a drama, and in genre it is most likely an analogy, "an earthly model of heavenly love."
 - ❖ The Song of Songs appears to be words to music that would have been sung by professionals [i.e., lyric poetry]—individuals who were skilled enough to master a work of this complexity.
 - ❖ Some interpreters believe three main characters are in view, namely, Solomon, the Shulammite girl, and her shepherd lover.
 - ❖ However, what some scholars have attributed to the shepherd lover can just as easily refer to Solomon.

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- ❖ It was not uncommon in ancient Near Eastern literature to refer to kings as shepherds since they served a pastoral function in relation to their people.
 - ❖ Furthermore, many of them did own many flocks (cf. 2:7). The shepherd is also a fitting figure for a lover, because he tenderly cares for the welfare of his sheep.
 - ❖ Probably the Song of Solomon was a single love poem made up of several strophes (poetic paragraphs) that the writer designed to deal primarily with the subject of human love and marriage.

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- ❖ This was the viewpoint of many ancient Jewish rabbis.
 - ❖ This is also the conclusion many conservative commentators have come to who have sought to interpret this book in the same way they interpret other Bible books (i.e., literally, historically, and grammatically). It is also the conclusion of some liberal scholars who have analyzed the structure of the book.



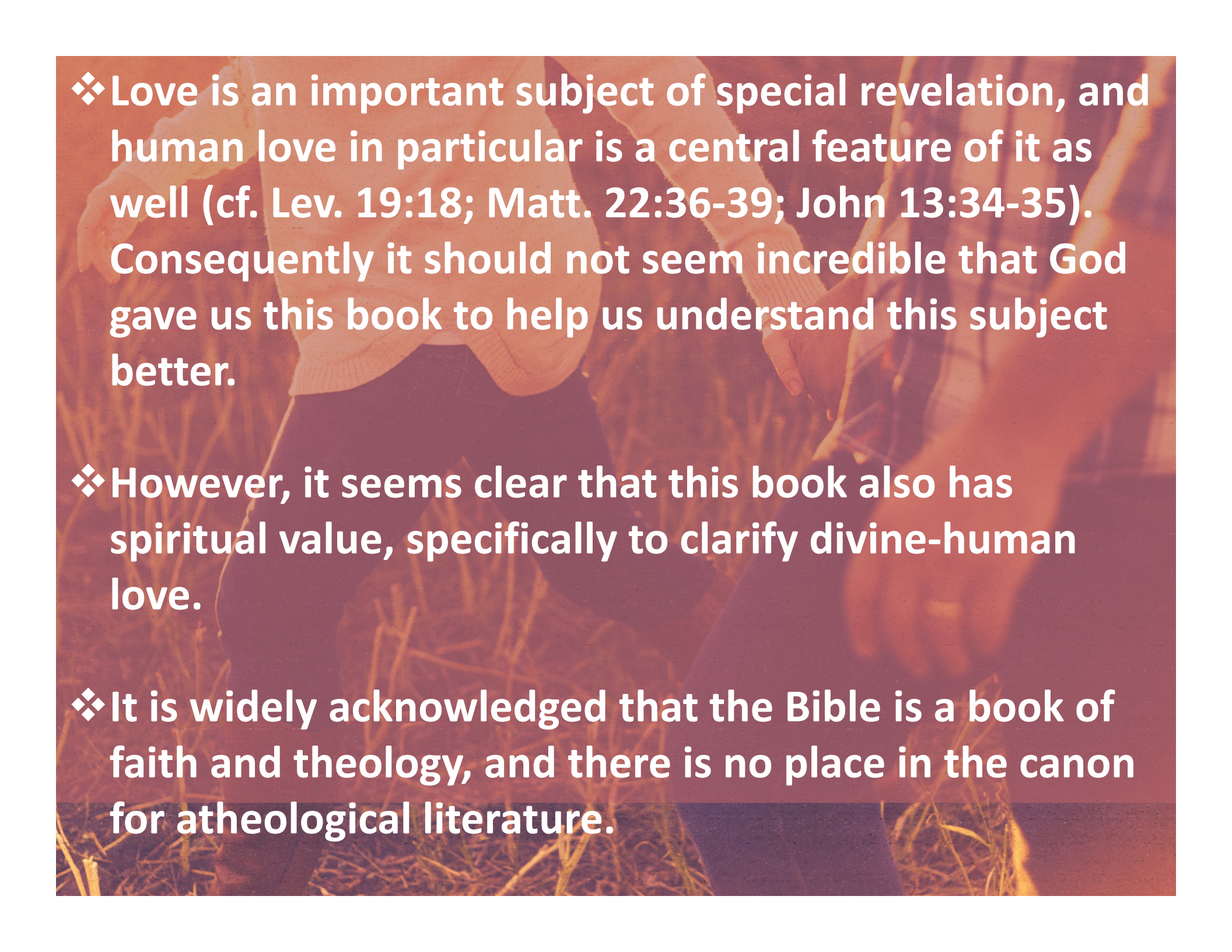
❖ Even among those who believe that the text is just an anthology of love songs, there is no agreement about how many songs there are.

- On Keel's analysis (Song of Songs, 18), there are forty-two individual poems in the Song.

- Murphy (65- 67) has nine divisions in the Song.

- Longman (viii) says that there are twenty-three poems.

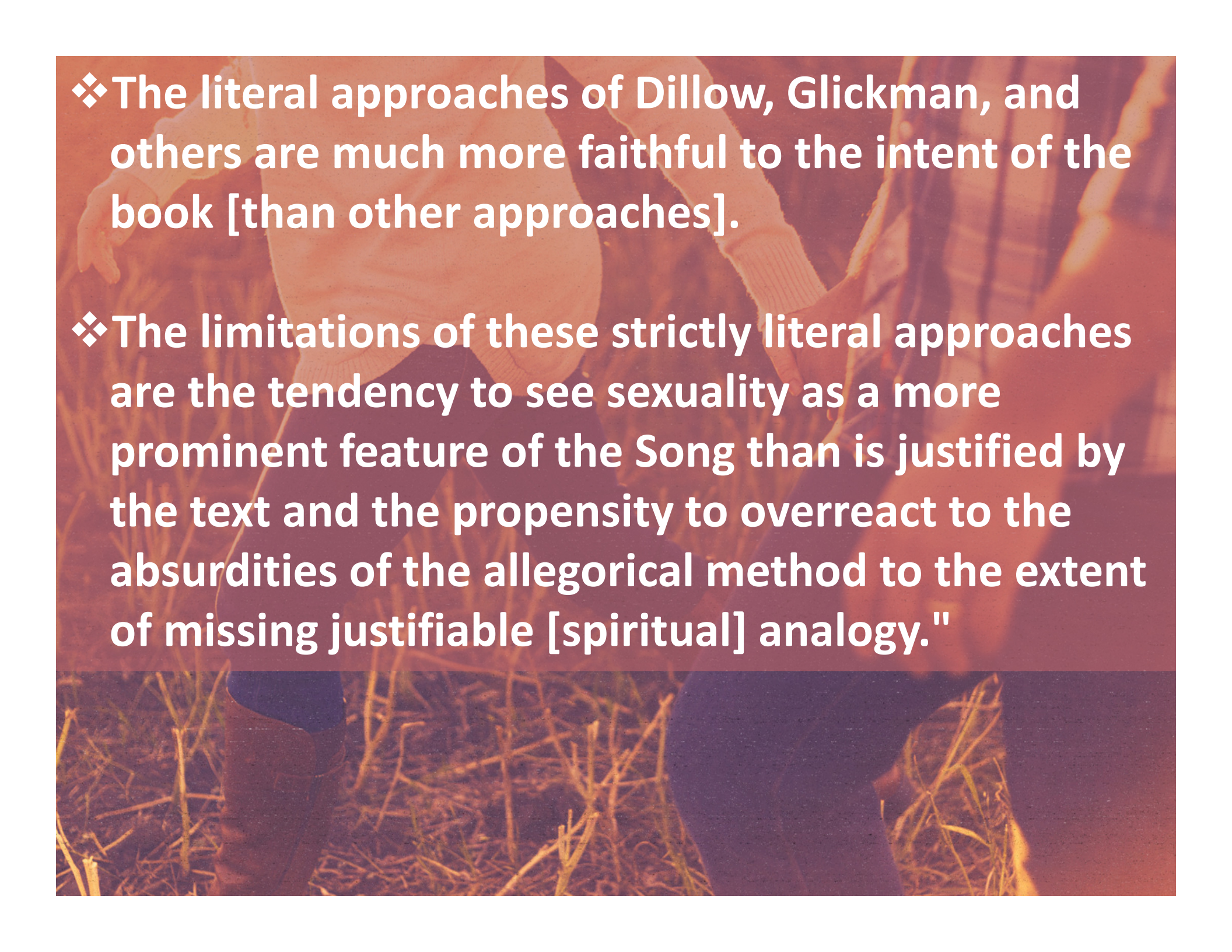
- Goulder (Song of Fourteen Songs) says that there are fourteen poems."

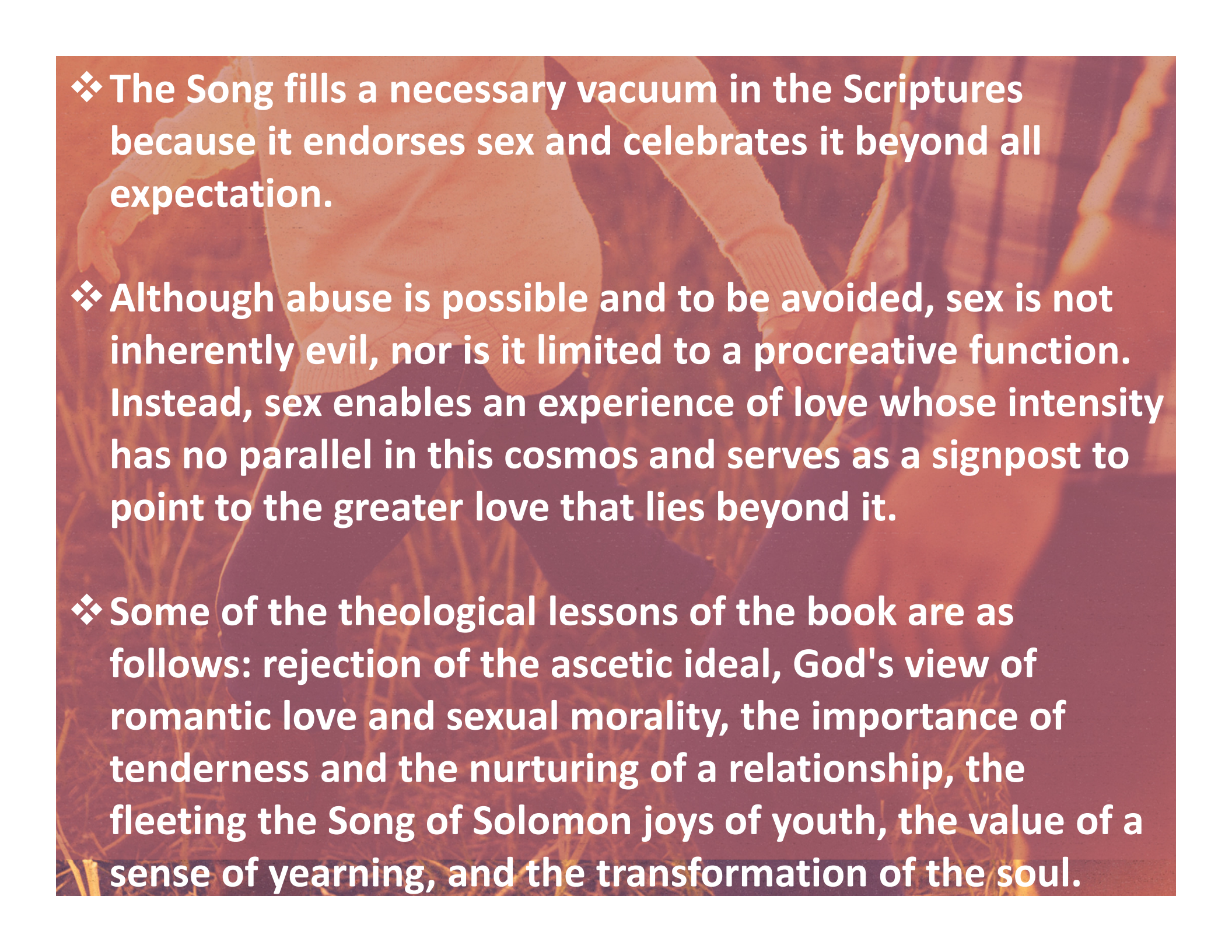


❖ Love is an important subject of special revelation, and human love in particular is a central feature of it as well (cf. Lev. 19:18; Matt. 22:36-39; John 13:34-35). Consequently it should not seem incredible that God gave us this book to help us understand this subject better.

❖ However, it seems clear that this book also has spiritual value, specifically to clarify divine-human love.

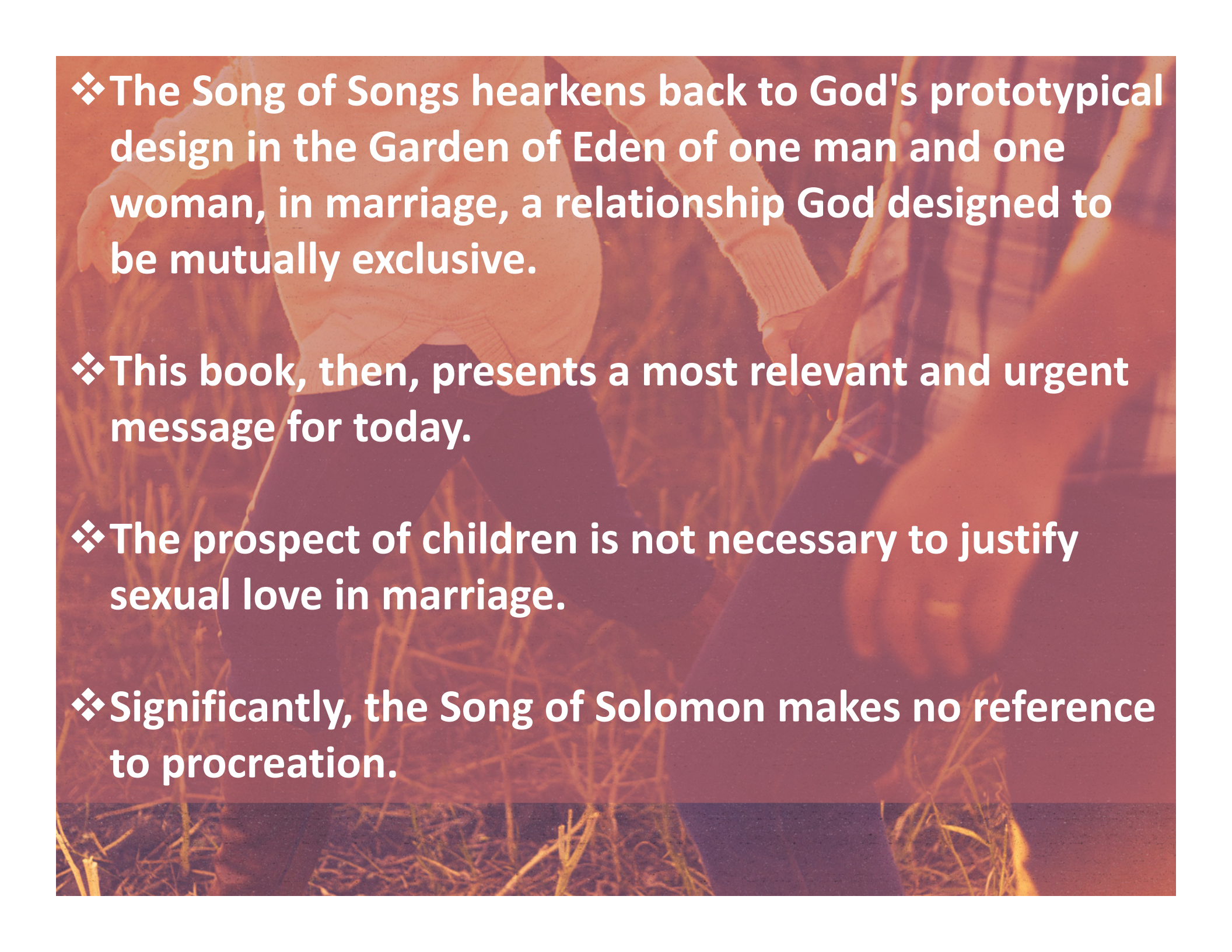
❖ It is widely acknowledged that the Bible is a book of faith and theology, and there is no place in the canon for atheological literature.

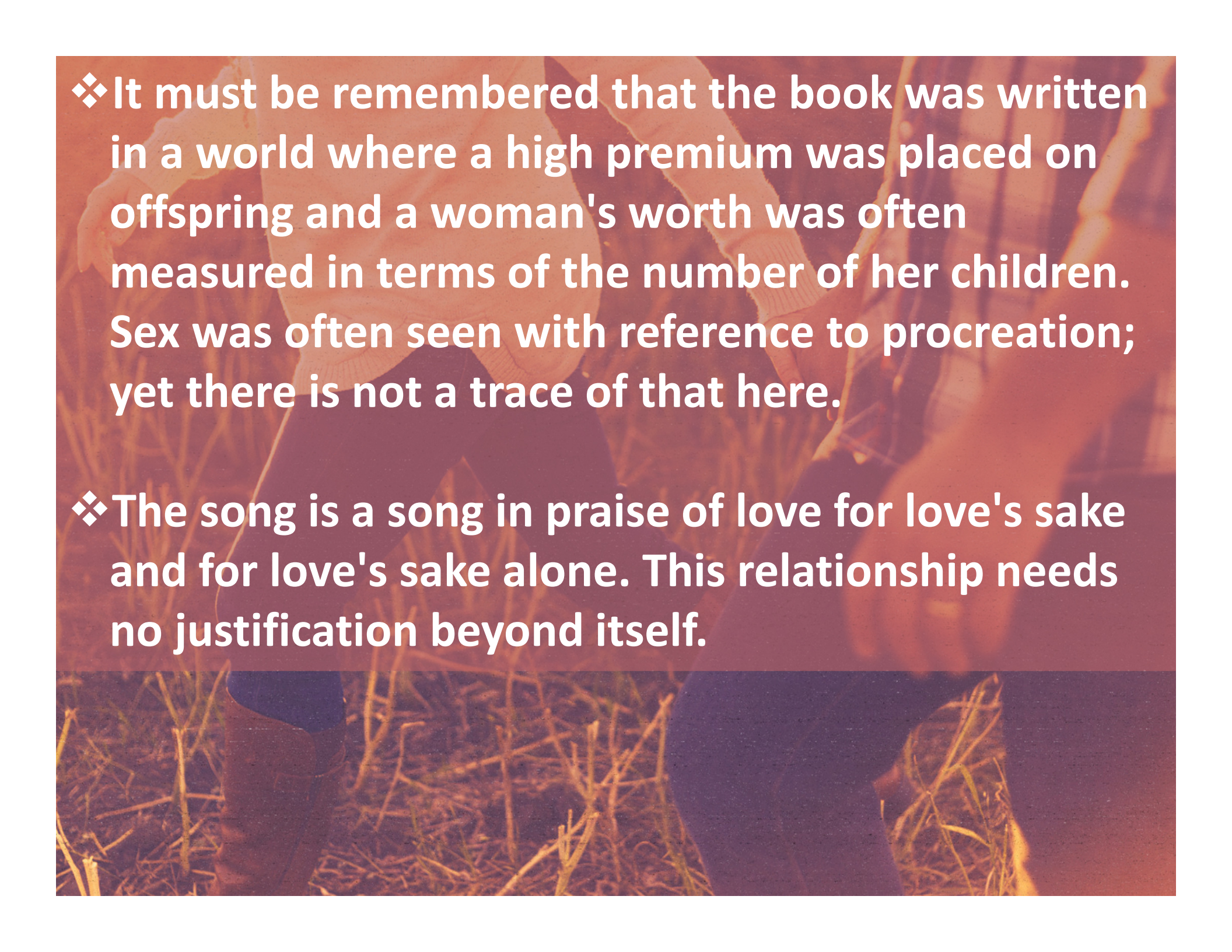
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- ❖ The literal approaches of Dillow, Glickman, and others are much more faithful to the intent of the book [than other approaches].
 - ❖ The limitations of these strictly literal approaches are the tendency to see sexuality as a more prominent feature of the Song than is justified by the text and the propensity to overreact to the absurdities of the allegorical method to the extent of missing justifiable [spiritual] analogy."

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- ❖ The Song fills a necessary vacuum in the Scriptures because it endorses sex and celebrates it beyond all expectation.
 - ❖ Although abuse is possible and to be avoided, sex is not inherently evil, nor is it limited to a procreative function. Instead, sex enables an experience of love whose intensity has no parallel in this cosmos and serves as a signpost to point to the greater love that lies beyond it.
 - ❖ Some of the theological lessons of the book are as follows: rejection of the ascetic ideal, God's view of romantic love and sexual morality, the importance of tenderness and the nurturing of a relationship, the fleeting the Song of Solomon joys of youth, the value of a sense of yearning, and the transformation of the soul.

PURPOSE

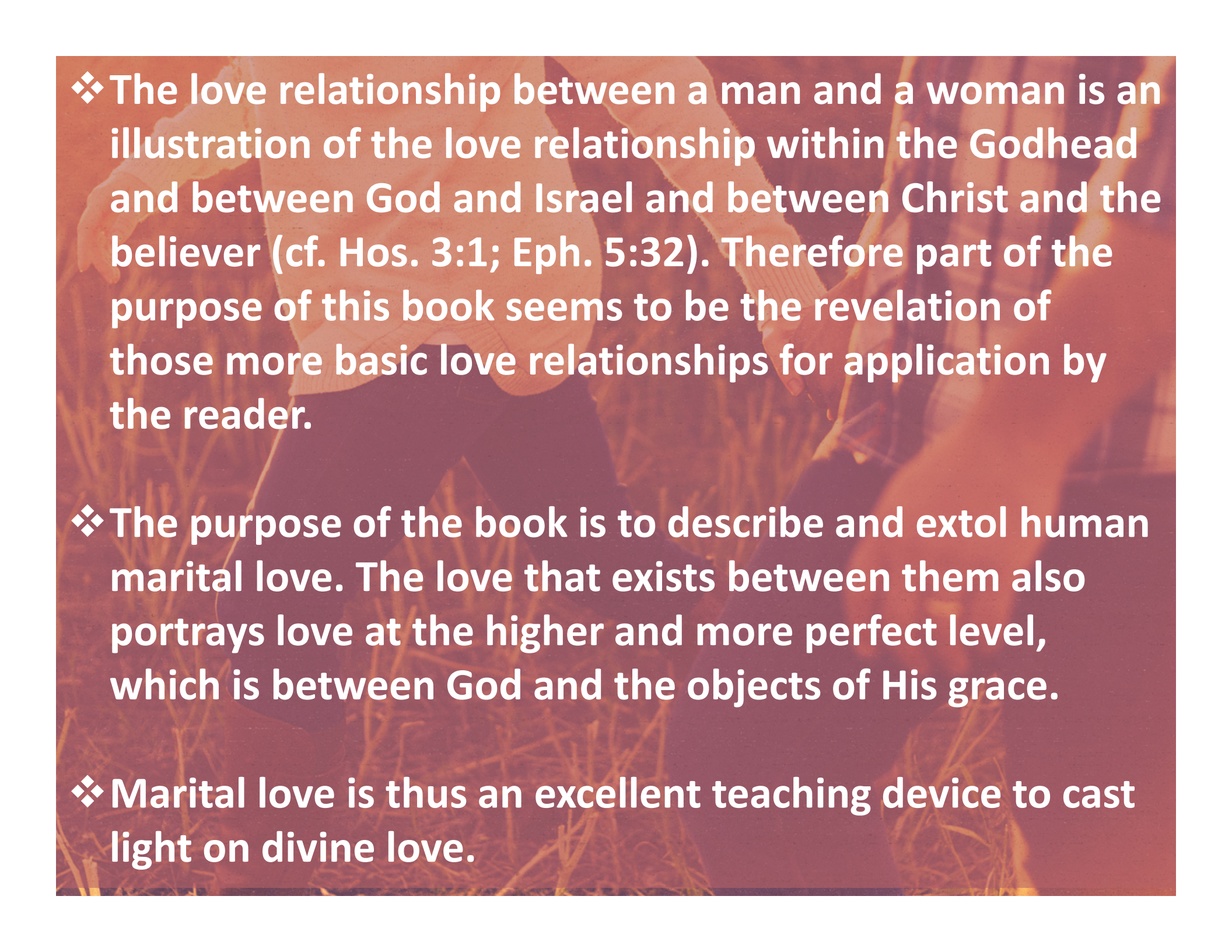
- ❖ Probably God's primary purpose in inspiring this book of the Bible was to give us revelation concerning the way love between a husband and a wife should look.
- ❖ This book gave the practical directions for marital bliss, was ignored by Solomon, and by the consensus of the world since.
- ❖ Had this book become implemented, marriages around the world would have been stronger.
- ❖ The characters in the book usually behave toward one another the way men and women in love should conduct themselves in attitudes and activities.

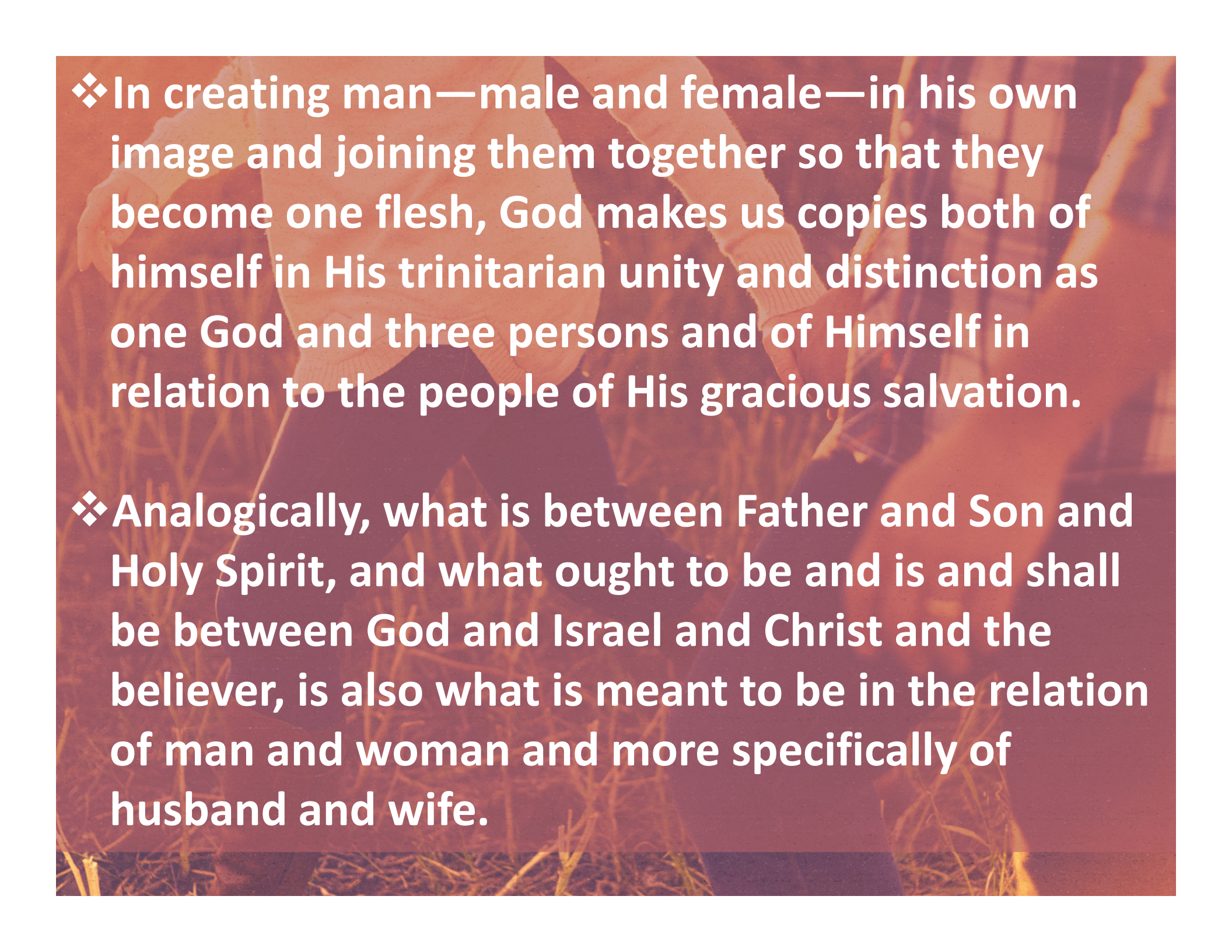
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- ❖ The Song of Songs harkens back to God's prototypical design in the Garden of Eden of one man and one woman, in marriage, a relationship God designed to be mutually exclusive.
 - ❖ This book, then, presents a most relevant and urgent message for today.
 - ❖ The prospect of children is not necessary to justify sexual love in marriage.
 - ❖ Significantly, the Song of Solomon makes no reference to procreation.

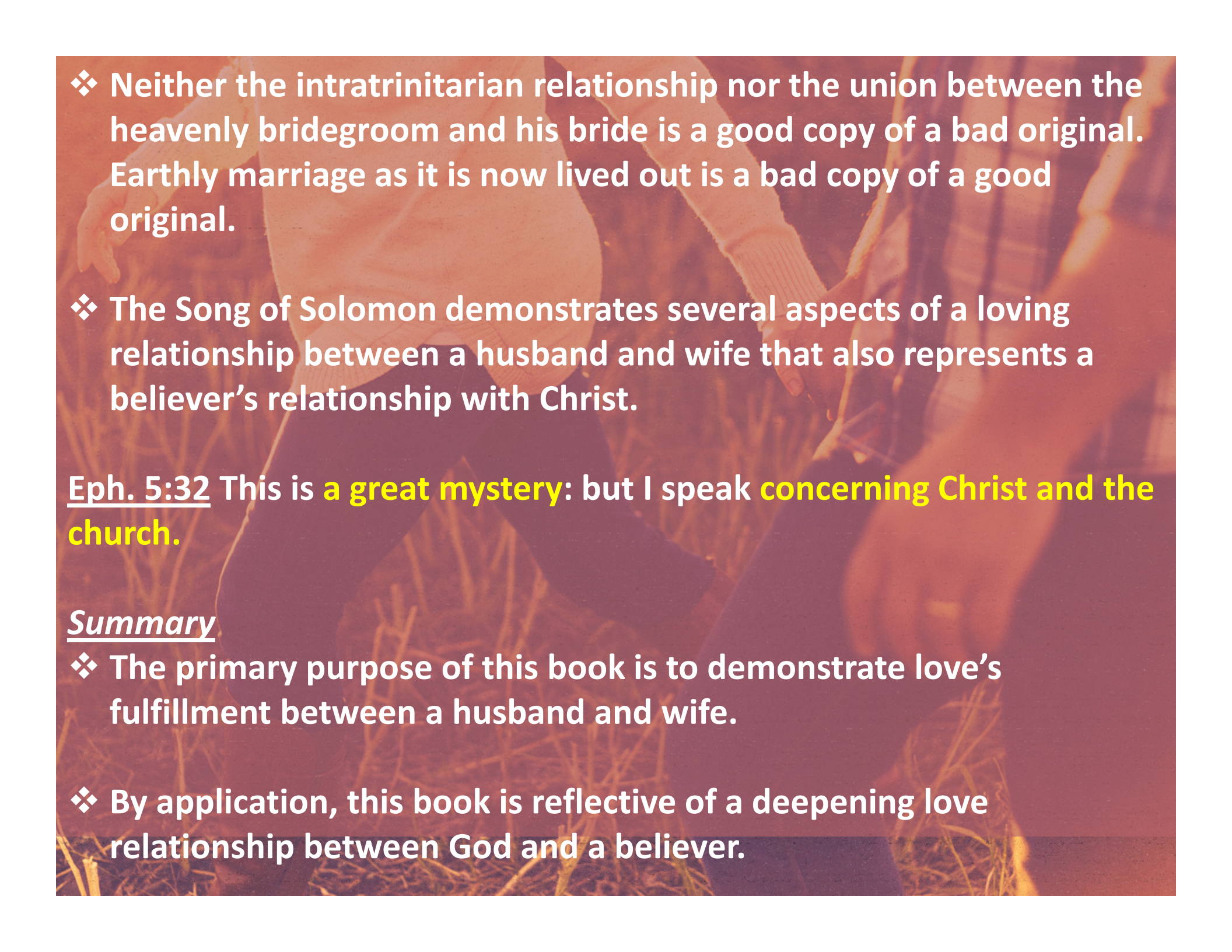


❖ It must be remembered that the book was written in a world where a high premium was placed on offspring and a woman's worth was often measured in terms of the number of her children. Sex was often seen with reference to procreation; yet there is not a trace of that here.

❖ The song is a song in praise of love for love's sake and for love's sake alone. This relationship needs no justification beyond itself.

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- ❖ The love relationship between a man and a woman is an illustration of the love relationship within the Godhead and between God and Israel and between Christ and the believer (cf. Hos. 3:1; Eph. 5:32). Therefore part of the purpose of this book seems to be the revelation of those more basic love relationships for application by the reader.
 - ❖ The purpose of the book is to describe and extol human marital love. The love that exists between them also portrays love at the higher and more perfect level, which is between God and the objects of His grace.
 - ❖ Marital love is thus an excellent teaching device to cast light on divine love.

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- ❖ In creating man—male and female—in his own image and joining them together so that they become one flesh, God makes us copies both of himself in His trinitarian unity and distinction as one God and three persons and of Himself in relation to the people of His gracious salvation.
 - ❖ Analogically, what is between Father and Son and Holy Spirit, and what ought to be and is and shall be between God and Israel and Christ and the believer, is also what is meant to be in the relation of man and woman and more specifically of husband and wife.

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- ❖ Neither the intratrinitarian relationship nor the union between the heavenly bridegroom and his bride is a good copy of a bad original. Earthly marriage as it is now lived out is a bad copy of a good original.
 - ❖ The Song of Solomon demonstrates several aspects of a loving relationship between a husband and wife that also represents a believer's relationship with Christ.

Eph. 5:32 This is **a great mystery**: but I speak **concerning Christ and the church**.

Summary

- ❖ The primary purpose of this book is to demonstrate love's fulfillment between a husband and wife.
- ❖ By application, this book is reflective of a deepening love relationship between God and a believer.

Conclusion

1 Jn. 2:1 My little children, these things write I unto you, that ye **sin not**. And if any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous:

2 And he is the propitiation for our sins: and not for ours only, but also for *the sins of the whole world*.

3 And hereby we do know that we know him, if we keep **his commandments**.

4 He that saith, I know him, and keepeth not his commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him.

5 But **whoso keepeth his word, in him verily is the love of God perfected**: hereby know we that we are in him.

6 He that saith he abideth in him **ought himself also so to walk, even as he walked**.