

Sunday Message Notes – Better Bible Reading in 2026

Song of Songs: Passion and Piety

Fun Facts:

1-The first person to speak is a woman (Song 1:2-8). And, the woman's voice is the dominant voice in the book (Most scholars estimate that the woman speaks approximately 55–60% of the lines, while the man speaks considerably less).

2-Authorship and Date. Song 1:1 — “The Song of Songs, which is Solomon's” — contains the Hebrew superscription “which is *lě-Solomon*.” The **lamed** can indicate authorship, but it can also signal dedication, possession, association, or subject matter. In other words, “of Solomon” may mean “by Solomon,” but it may also mean “for Solomon,” “belonging to Solomon,” “concerning Solomon,” or “in the Solomonic tradition.” For that reason, the title does not by itself prove that Solomon wrote the book. Given the poem's likely **post-Solomonic linguistic features**, many scholars understand “of Solomon” as an attribution to the Solomonic tradition rather than evidence of direct Solomonic authorship. A later date is often argued from vocabulary that appears to reflect Persian or broader late/post-exilic influence. **Pardēs** (“garden/orchard,” **Song 4:13**) is commonly identified as a Persian loanword, related to the idea of an enclosed royal garden or “paradise.” **'Appiryôn** (“palanquin,” “litter,” or “carriage,” **Song 3:9**) is a rare word of debated origin, often discussed as a possible foreign loanword. **Pīlegeš** (“concubine,” cf. **Song 6:8–9**) belongs to the poem's royal-harem vocabulary, though by itself it is less decisive for dating. **Together, these terms support the possibility that the Song reached its final form long after Solomon**, perhaps in the Persian or early Hellenistic period; some scholars therefore place it as late as the **third or second century BCE**.

3-Significance of the Title: “Song of Songs” is a Hebrew superlative, like “King of kings,” “Lord of lords,” and “Holy of holies.” This phrase means “**the greatest song**” or “the supreme song.” This elevates the poem from ordinary love poetry to a composition of exceptional beauty and importance—perhaps the Bible's own “holy of holies” of human love, desire, and poetic imagination.

“All the writings are holy, but the Song of Songs is the holy of holies”
– Rabbi Akiva's defense of the *Song's* canonicity.

I. Introduction / Overview - The *Song of Songs* (or *Song of Solomon*) occupies one of the most enigmatic places in the biblical canon – because of its unabashed **celebration of erotic desire**, mutual longing, beauty, and embodied love between two human lovers.

A. What's Missing? Absent from *Song* are references to covenant, law, sin, or even God.

B. The Precedent - Jewish and Christian interpreters, often uncomfortable with its sensuality, developed **elaborate allegorical readings** in which the lovers represent God and Israel, Christ and the Church, or the soul's union with the Divine. While these interpretations produced a rich mystical tradition, they also established a **hermeneutical precedent: if the Bible's most overtly erotic text does not mean what it plainly appears to say, then virtually any biblical passage becomes available for symbolic reinterpretation**.

C. Domesticating the Text - From a historical-critical perspective, this raises important questions about whether allegory sometimes functions less as a discovery of deeper meaning

Sunday Message Notes – Better Bible Reading in 2026

than as a strategy for domesticating texts that challenge prevailing religious sensibilities.

D. Attitudes toward Sexuality - The history of interpreting the *Song* may therefore reveal as much about Judaism's and Christianity's evolving attitudes toward sexuality as it does about the poem itself. The impulse to spiritualize its eroticism reflects broader traditions of sexual piety that have often regarded bodily desire with suspicion, preferring transcendent symbolism to physical intimacy.

E. Solomon? Significant Poetry? Whether the *Song* was preserved because it was attributed to Solomon, acquired liturgical significance, was understood allegorically, or simply because ancient Israel recognized it as extraordinary love poetry remains a matter of scholarly debate.

F. Piety or Passion? Its inclusion in the canon may ultimately invite **a deeper question: are readers called to transcend the poem's eroticism through allegory, or to rediscover that human love itself can be worthy of sacred scripture?**

II. Steamy

A. Descriptions of the Woman's Body.

1. Face, eyes, hair, and adornment — **Song 1:9–11, 1:15**
2. Hair, teeth, lips, cheeks, neck, and breasts — **Song 4:1–7**
3. Lips, mouth, tongue, garments, fragrance, and body as a garden — **Song 4:10–16**
4. Feet, thighs, navel, belly, breasts, neck, eyes, nose, head, hair, and mouth — **Song 7:1–9**

B. Descriptions of the Man's Body

1. Overall beauty and desirability — **Song 1:16**
2. Head, locks, eyes, cheeks, lips, arms, body, legs, appearance, and mouth — **Song 5:10–16**

C. Mutual / Embodied Desire

1. Embrace and physical closeness, touch — **Song 1:2, 2:6; 8:3, 7:10-13**
2. Love as bodily and emotional intensity — **Song 8:6–7**

D. *Song of Songs* does not treat the body as shameful or merely symbolic. It uses the human body as a site of beauty, delight, longing.

III. Why Insist On Allegory? An allegorical reading made the *Song of Songs* “safe” to read within pious Jewish and Christian cultures by transforming its erotic language into sacred symbolism. For interpreters like **Origen**, the book could not be merely human love poetry; if it belonged in Scripture, then its deepest meaning had to be spiritual—ultimately about Christ and the Church, God and Israel, or the soul's longing for union with the Divine.

IV. Black is Beautiful. **Song 1:5-6** ⁵I am black and beautiful, O daughters of Jerusalem, like the tents of Kedar, like the curtains of Solomon. ⁶Do not gaze at me because I am dark, because the sun has gazed on me. **Song 5:11** ¹¹His head is the finest gold; his locks are wavy, black as a raven. These verses can be read as part of the *Song's* broader affirmation of dark bodies, dark hair, and embodied beauty.

V. Womanist Voice. **Song 5:7** Making their rounds in the city the sentinels found me; they beat me; they wounded me; they took away my mantle, those sentinels of the walls.

⁸I charge you, O daughters of Jerusalem, if you find my beloved, tell him this: I am faint with

Sunday Message Notes – Better Bible Reading in 2026

love.

Womanist biblical scholar **Renita J. Weems** treats the scene where “the watchmen found me... they struck me, they wounded me; the sentinels of the walls took away my mantle from me” - as one of the clearest moments where the poem’s romance is interrupted by **public violence against a woman’s body**. For Weems, **Song 5:7** disrupts any simple celebration of erotic freedom. A womanist reading attends to this violence as gendered and social, asking **what it means for a woman’s bodily longing to be met by surveillance, punishment, and public humiliation**.

This is important because it complicates the *Song*. The book celebrates mutual desire, but **Song 5:7 reminds readers that women’s bodies are not equally safe in public or communal spaces**. Weems draws attention to the fact that the beloved’s voice remains central even after violence—she keeps speaking, desiring, and searching—rather than disappearing into victimhood.

VI. Premarital Sex is not a sin. A flat claim that “premarital sex is sin” can be bad theology when it imports later purity culture back into the Bible **without attending to ancient patriarchy**. In the biblical world, **a daughter’s virginity was often tied to family honor, bride-price, inheritance, and a father’s property interests**; therefore, sexual regulation frequently protected male-controlled social order as much as personal morality. The New Testament word *porneia*, often translated “fornication” or “sexual immorality,” is broader than the modern phrase “premarital sex” and can refer to illicit sexual relations, prostitution, incest, exploitative sex, or other forms of sexual disorder depending on context. A better theology asks not merely, “Was sex before marriage technically forbidden?” but “Does this relationship embody consent, mutuality, covenantal care, justice, and non-exploitation?”

A. Song 2:7; 3:5; 8:4 — “Do not arouse or awaken love until it pleases” is a wisdom warning about timing and readiness for love, not a proof-text that the *Song* forbids premarital sex.

VII. *The Ecstasy of Saint Teresa* (of Avila) by **Gian Lorenzo Bernini**.



(The physical and spiritual pain was so sharp that it caused her to “moan,” yet the underlying sweetness was so profound that she never wanted the pain to end).

