

## Dr. Lloyd Carr, Song of Songs, Session 4 of 4, Resources from NotebookLM

1) Abstract, 2) Audio podcast, 3) Briefing Document, 4) Study Guide and 5) FAQs

### 1. Abstract of Carr, Song of Songs, Session 4 of 4, Biblicalelearning.org, BeL

**Dr. Lloyd Carr's final lecture** on the Song of Songs analyzes a specific passage (Song of Songs 6:13-7:10), focusing on its interpretation as a wedding celebration. **He explores multiple interpretations** of the text's imagery and its potential symbolic meanings, considering perspectives from various commentators and referencing similar imagery in ancient Near Eastern literature. **Carr discusses the explicit descriptions** of the bride's physical beauty, and debates whether they represent the lover's perspective or that of the wedding guests. Finally, **he considers the overall purpose of the Song of Songs**, offering different interpretations, including its potential as a celebration of marital love and its place within the biblical canon. The lecture also includes a brief bibliography of relevant works and a poem reflecting on marriage.

**2. 12 - minute Audio Podcast Created on the basis of  
Dr. Carr, Song of Songs, Session 4 of 4 – Double click icon to  
play in Windows media player or go to the  
Biblicalelearning.org [BeL] Site and click the audio podcast link  
there (Old Testament → Psalms and Wisdom → Song of  
Songs).**



**Carr\_Song\_Session  
04.mp3**

### 3. Briefing Document: Carr, Song of Songs, Session 4 of 4

Okay, here is a detailed briefing document summarizing the main themes and important ideas from Dr. Lloyd Carr's fourth lecture on the Song of Songs.

#### Briefing Document: Dr. Lloyd Carr's Lecture 4 on the Song of Songs

##### I. Introduction

- This is the final lecture in a series on the Song of Songs. It focuses on a specific passage considered to be a wedding celebration description (6:13-7:10), and delves into the book's overall purpose and meaning.

##### II. Analysis of Song of Songs 6:13-7:10 (Wedding Celebration Description)

- **The Scene:** This passage is generally interpreted as depicting the wedding festivities, specifically a dance, and a subsequent intimate description of the bride.
- **Interpretive Challenges: Who is Speaking?** The text alternates between a group request/question, the woman's response, and then a detailed description which could be either wedding guests or the lover himself. The speaker of the intimate descriptions in chapter 7 is debated.
- **The Dance:** The phrase "dance before two armies" (6:13) is ambiguous. It may refer to a dance between two groups or a singular dance where the Shulamite is the central focus. Carr favors the latter, suggesting she is at the center.
- **Key Moments: The Request (6:13):** "Return, return, O Shulamite, return, return, that we may look on you." This suggests a desire to observe the bride, possibly as she dances. The term "return" could mean to turn and twist in a dance.
- **The Response (6:13):** The Shulamite asks, "Why should you look upon the Shulamite as upon a dance before two armies?" She questions why she is the center of attention.
- **The Detailed Description (7:1-10):** This is an explicitly physical description of the woman, from her feet to her hair:
- **Feet & Thighs:** "How graceful are your feet in sandals, O queenly maiden! Your rounded thighs are like jewels..." (7:1). The focus is on beauty and grace, possibly referencing fertility rituals where jewels were placed on the hips and legs. The

thighs are described as the work of a master craftsman, possibly alluding to the creation of God.

- **Navel & Belly:** "Your navel is a rounded bowl that never lacks mixed wine. Your belly is a heap of wheat encircled with lilies." (7:2). The "navel" is interpreted as a reference to the female sexual organ (vulva) and the "belly" as the reproductive area. Carr dismisses allegorical interpretations that equate these with the church or communion.
- **Breasts, Neck, Eyes, & Nose:** "Your two breasts are like two fawns, twins of a gazelle... Your neck is like an ivory tower... Your eyes are like pools of Heshbon... Your nose is like a tower of Lebanon." (7:3-4). This section uses vivid imagery to emphasize the woman's beauty and physical attributes.
- **Hair:** "Your head crowns you like Carmel, and the flowing locks of your head are like purple. A king is held captive in your tresses." (7:5). The imagery continues to paint a picture of a captivating and beautiful woman.
- **The Lover's Words:** "How fair and pleasant you are, O loved one, delectable maiden! You are stately as a palm tree, and your breasts are like its clusters." (7:6-7). The tone shifts to the lover's desire and admiration.
- **The Invitation (7:10):** The woman responds, "I am my beloved's, and his desire is for me," and invites him to go into the fields, further establishing the sexual nature of the poem.
- **Comparison to Egyptian Love Poetry:** Carr makes parallels between the Song of Songs and Egyptian love poetry, specifically citing the imagery and invitation found in them.

### III. The Garden Motif

- **Repetition of "Bride" and "Garden":** The middle section (3:6-5:1) uses the words "bride" and "garden" frequently. The repetition reinforces the consummation of the marriage.
- Examples: "Come with me from Lebanon, my bride," (4:8), "a garden locked is my sister, my bride." (4:12) and, "I come to my garden, my sister, my bride," (5:1).
- **Biblical Significance of the Garden: Garden of Eden:** The garden serves as a reference to the beginning, before the fall.

- **Cult Center/Retreat:** Gardens were places for retreat, royalty, and even pagan worship.
- **Erotic Symbolism:** In the Song of Songs, the garden carries explicit erotic overtones, symbolizing the bride as a "locked garden" and a place for cultivation (often a euphemism for sexual union). The lover taking possession of the garden is a symbol for sexual consummation.

#### IV. Purpose and Interpretation of the Song of Songs

- **Rabbinic Views:** Rabbi Akiba called it the "holiest of the holies," while also noting its misuses in taverns. This highlights a historical tension about its interpretation.
- **Allegorical Interpretations:** The book has been interpreted as an allegory for:
  - God's love for Israel.
  - Christ's relationship with the church.
  - Carr is wary of allegory as it obfuscates the plain meaning of the text.
- **Rejection of Other Theories:**
- **Fertility Ritual:** While there are similarities to pagan rituals, Carr dismisses the idea that the Song is an expurgated ritual.
- **Death Ritual:** Carr disagrees with Marvin Pope's suggestion that the book is a death cult ritual. Carr acknowledges love and death have a connection, but not in this instance. Love is as powerful and insistent as death.
- **Critique of Solomon:** Carr suggests that while the book may be critical of the Old Testament establishment, it's more likely a celebration of marriage.
- **Carr's Interpretation:**
- **Celebration of Married Love:** Carr argues that the Song is primarily a celebration of God's intention for marriage. It is a reestablishment of the oneness that was lost in the fall.
- **Celebration of Humanity:** The book celebrates maleness, femaleness, and sexuality within the context of marriage. It is God's commentary on Genesis 1.
- **Moral Limits:** The book should not be interpreted as encouraging premarital or extramarital sex. Its central theme lies in the marriage celebration at 4:16 and 5:1. God's ideal is one man and one woman in marriage until death.

## V. Conclusion

- **The Song as Commentary on Genesis:** The book serves as a commentary on Genesis 1, specifically the creation of male and female, and the words, "at last, the flesh of my flesh, bone of my bone" which emphasize the unity and love between man and woman.
- **Focus on Humanity:** The Song emphasizes the need to recognize our humanity and who we are in light of God's creation, that is, a sexual being within a marital relationship.
- **Importance of the Torah:** The Torah serves as a basis for the rest of the Old Testament, and the wisdom literature (like the Song of Songs) comments on it.
- **Additional Resources:** Carr provides a bibliography of extra-biblical texts (Egyptian, Babylonian, and Canaanite), and various commentaries on the Song of Songs including his own commentary, for further exploration. He also mentions some journal articles he has written.
- **Poem by Gwen:** Dr. Carr's sister, Gwen, concludes the lecture by reciting her poem, "Wedding Ring," which echoes themes of enduring love and commitment.

### Key Quotes:

- "Your navel is a rounded bowl that never lacks mixed wine...The most common understanding of the passage is that this is the female sexual organ, the vulva, and that this is a very clear description of her at this point."
- "The garden was a place of retreat for royalty...The garden in the Old Testament also becomes a kind of cult center, a worship center."
- "This is the book of celebration. It's a celebration of married love...that God intended us as human beings to enter into this marital relationship."
- "This is a celebration of our humanity."
- "If the Song of Solomon is anything in a kind of a summary, it's the idea that we have a book here, which is God's own commentary on Genesis 1."

**Overall, Carr presents the Song of Songs as a powerful affirmation of the beauty and sacredness of human sexuality within the context of marriage, and a return to the original intention of God's creation of man and woman.**

### 3. Study Guide: Carr, Song of Songs, Session 4 of 4

#### Song of Songs Study Guide

#### Quiz

**Instructions:** Answer each question in 2-3 sentences.

1. According to Carr, what is the primary interpretive issue in Song of Songs 6:13-7:5?
2. What does the phrase "dance before two armies" in 6:13 suggest, and why is it difficult to interpret?
3. How does Carr interpret the description of the Shulamite's thighs in 7:1, and what possible ritualistic connection is mentioned?
4. What are some of the allegorical interpretations of the navel in 7:2, and why does Carr reject them?
5. What does Carr say the "garden" motif represents in the Song of Songs, especially in the context of 4:16-5:1?
6. How did Rabbi Akiba view the Song of Songs and its potential misuse?
7. What are some of the cultic ritual interpretations of the Song of Songs that Carr addresses and ultimately rejects?
8. What is Carr's main argument concerning the purpose of the Song of Songs?
9. According to Carr, what is the significance of the first recorded words in Genesis in relation to the Song of Songs?
10. Why does Carr suggest interpreting the Song of Songs as having a chiastic structure?

#### Answer Key

1. The main interpretive issue is determining who is speaking at different points: is it the wedding party or the lover? And determining who is speaking during the intimate descriptions that follow. There is no easy way to distinguish.
2. The phrase suggests a dance between two groups with the Shulamite as the focal point, possibly a counter dance, with the interpretation is difficult because its exact meaning and purpose are unclear.

3. Carr interprets the description of the Shulamite's thighs as referring to the upper part of the leg, which are beautiful ornaments that can be compared to jewels, and he suggests a possible connection to fertility rituals.
4. Allegorical interpretations consider the navel as the center of the church with the rounded bowl symbolizing the communion wine, but Carr rejects this because the term is not really navel, and because the context implies an obvious reference to the vulva.
5. The "garden" motif represents the bride's exclusive place of intimacy and love, and the consummation of marriage, which aligns with the imagery in verses 4:16-5:1, where it becomes a place of invitation for the lover.
6. Rabbi Akiba viewed it as the most sacred of books, but warned against singing it in taverns or pubs, suggesting its potential misuse as a simple collection of love songs rather than sacred literature.
7. Carr addresses and rejects interpretations that link the Song of Songs to fertility or death rituals, arguing that while those themes appear, they do not serve as the book's overall purpose.
8. Carr argues that the Song of Songs is primarily a celebration of married love, human sexuality within the bounds of marriage, and a affirmation of humanity as created by God.
9. The first recorded words in Genesis, "at last, the flesh of my flesh, bone of my bone," are significant because they are the first recorded love song and, Carr suggests, set the stage for the Song of Songs as a commentary on this initial union.
10. Carr suggests a chiastic structure with the marriage celebration in the center, which resolves some moral issues regarding the sequence of events and reaffirms the text's purpose in celebrating married love.

## Essay Questions

1. Discuss the various interpretations of the Song of Songs, including allegorical, cultic, and literal, and explain why Carr favors the interpretation that views the text as a celebration of married love and human sexuality.
2. Explore the significance of the "garden" motif in the Song of Songs, and its connection to themes of intimacy, exclusivity, and the consummation of marriage.
3. Analyze Carr's argument that the Song of Songs is a commentary on Genesis 1, and describe how this perspective impacts the way we understand the purpose of the book.
4. Describe the problems that Carr sees with other interpretations, including the cultic and allegorical, and justify his position with references to the source material.
5. Consider the literary devices and imagery used in the Song of Songs, and discuss how these contribute to the understanding of the book's meaning and message.

## Glossary of Key Terms

**Allegorical Interpretation:** A method of interpreting a text by understanding its symbolic or figurative meaning rather than its literal one, often used in religious texts to find deeper spiritual or moral significance.

**Chiastic Structure:** A literary device where sections are arranged in a pattern that mirrors itself, often used to emphasize the central point of a text. The pattern typically follows an A-B-C-B'-A' format.

**Cultic Ritual:** Religious rites and ceremonies associated with specific practices of a particular faith or group, often involving sacrifices, dances, and other symbolic acts.

**Fertility Ritual:** Religious practices aimed at ensuring agricultural productivity, human reproduction, and the overall well-being of the community.

**Horus:** An Egyptian god, often depicted as a falcon, associated with kingship and the sky. In this context, used to describe Egyptian fertility rites.

**Inanna-Dumuzi Cult:** A Mesopotamian religious practice centering around the goddess Inanna and her consort Dumuzi, often linked to fertility and seasonal cycles.

**Mandrakes:** A plant with roots that are forked and can resemble a human form. In the ancient world, these plants are associated with fertility and love potions.

**Sacred Marriage Ritual:** A religious ceremony in ancient cultures where a king or a high priestess symbolically marries a god or goddess, often seen as a way to ensure fertility and prosperity.

**Shulamite:** The female protagonist in the Song of Songs, whose beauty and love are celebrated in the text.

**Torah:** The first five books of the Hebrew Bible, traditionally attributed to Moses and including the foundation of Jewish law and tradition.

## 5. FAQs on Carr, Song of Songs, Session 4 of 4, Biblicalelearning.org (BeL)

### FAQ on the Song of Songs

1. **What is the common interpretation of Song of Songs 6:13-7:9, and what are some of the interpretive challenges in this passage?** This passage is often interpreted as a description of a wedding celebration, where the Shulamite woman is the center of attention. The passage presents interpretive challenges because it includes a request from a group for the Shulamite to return and dance, her questioning response about being the center of attention, and a detailed, explicit description of her physical beauty. It's unclear whether this description is from the wedding guests or the lover. The meaning of the phrase "dance before two armies" is also ambiguous, and the descriptions are quite explicit, making them difficult to interpret allegorically.
2. **How is the woman's physical beauty described in Song of Songs 7, and why are these descriptions significant?** The woman's physical beauty is described in detail, including her graceful feet in sandals, rounded thighs like jewels, navel like a rounded bowl, belly like a heap of wheat encircled by lilies, breasts like fawns, neck like an ivory tower, and eyes like pools of water. Her nose is likened to the tower of Lebanon and her head is crowned like Carmel. These descriptions are significant because they emphasize the physical beauty of the woman and celebrate her body, highlighting the erotic nature of love within the context of marriage. The descriptions challenge allegorical interpretations that attempt to spiritualize or avoid the explicit sexual content of the book.
3. **What is the significance of the "garden" motif in the Song of Songs, and how does it relate to the themes of love and sexuality?** The garden motif appears frequently in the Song of Songs and has erotic overtones. It symbolizes a place of retreat, cultivation, and intimacy. The woman is referred to as a "locked garden," signifying exclusivity and virginity, which is then "entered" by the lover, suggesting the consummation of the marriage. The garden's cultivation is used as a metaphor for sexual union. The garden also alludes to the Garden of Eden and the original creation of male and female, celebrating the union of the sexes as a divine intention.

4. **What are some of the major historical interpretations of the Song of Songs, and how do they differ?** Historically, the Song of Songs has been interpreted in various ways: as a simple collection of love songs, as an allegory for God's love for Israel, as a representation of Christ's love for the church, and even as a ritual text related to fertility or death cults. These interpretations differ significantly. The allegorical approaches tend to spiritualize the text, finding hidden meanings beyond the literal. The ritual interpretations tie the book to ancient pagan practices, while others view it as a celebration of human love. There is disagreement about whether it's a critique of Solomon or the Old Testament establishment.
5. **What is the primary purpose of the Song of Songs, according to the speaker?** The speaker argues that the primary purpose of the Song of Songs is to celebrate married love and humanity, particularly the union of male and female as intended by God. It is not primarily about the relationship of God to Israel or Christ to the church, nor is it a critique of Solomon or a leftover pagan fertility ritual. Rather, it focuses on the beauty and significance of human sexuality within the boundaries of marriage. It is, at its core, a commentary on the initial human relationship in Genesis.
6. **What is the significance of the chiastic structure in interpreting the Song of Songs, and how does it affect our understanding of its themes?** The chiastic structure, where the central point of the book is the marriage consummation in 4:16 and 5:1, affects interpretation by framing the narrative. Viewing the book this way helps address questions about whether the text is encouraging premarital or extramarital sex. Instead, it focuses on marital love as God's ideal and the culmination of the relationship. The surrounding text before and after this central point leads towards and away from this marital apex.
7. **How does the Song of Songs compare to other ancient Near Eastern literature, particularly Egyptian and Babylonian love poetry?** The Song of Songs has parallels with ancient Near Eastern love poetry, particularly Egyptian and Babylonian texts. These parallels are seen in the themes of love, longing, and the sensual descriptions of the lovers' bodies. While similarities exist, the Song of Songs stands out for its explicit emphasis on the beauty of marital love and the celebration of humanity. Unlike some of the other texts, it does not focus on the ritualistic aspects of love, such as the sacred marriage ritual or cultic practices.

**8. What is the main takeaway regarding the Song of Songs and human sexuality?**

The main takeaway is that the Song of Songs celebrates human sexuality as a beautiful and integral part of God's creation. It acknowledges the physical and emotional aspects of love, especially within the context of marriage. It emphasizes that God created male and female to be in union and that this relationship is part of God's plan and is to be honored, enjoyed, and celebrated, as it is a reflection of His own creative work. It views the intimate human connection as a positive and divinely sanctioned experience.