

## *Uppity Women of the Bible: The Song of Songs*

### **Bible Study Instructions**

(Pause your DVD player to read each screen. Go to [www.biblenerdproductions.com](http://www.biblenerdproductions.com) to download these Bible Study instructions.)

- 1) For best results, read the Song of Songs in your Bible first! Even better, read it more than once, in more than one translation.
- 2) Keep a Bible in front of you as you begin. If you are studying with a group, a variety of translations will be helpful, but I primarily use the New Revised Standard Version (The Division of Christian Education of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the U.S.A., 1989). Look up biblical references as you see them on the screen. Use the pause button freely, if you need time to find a verse or to discuss something.
- 3) Start with "Introducing Biblenerd" (to meet your teacher), and then move through the sessions in order. Each session is 10-15 minutes in length.
- 4) At the end of each segment you will find discussion questions. Discuss them for as much or as little time as you like, using the pause button on your DVD player. Here are a few guidelines for good discussion:
  - Keep a Bible handy as you discuss. Check and re-check the biblical text to answer questions, or even to determine that the Bible cannot answer a particular question. Other helpful reference books include Bible dictionaries, Bible commentaries (especially the ones that I cite in the DVD), Bible atlases and annotated Bibles (rather than devotional Bibles).
  - Everyone should take responsibility for making sure everyone else gets an equal amount of time to talk.
  - Listen to others first; evaluate later. Make sure you understand a comment, then ask questions or pose other options.
  - The better your group knows one another, the better discussions you will have. Start with snacks and end with prayers (or vice versa)!
  - Do not be afraid to ask questions of the Bible, the Bible study, or your other resources! Throughout the centuries, people of faith have struggled with the Bible. You are joining the rich tradition of those spiritual thinkers.
- 4) If you have time remaining in your Bible Study meeting, move on to the next session of *Uppity Women of the Bible: The Song of Songs*. Otherwise, save the remaining sessions for your next gathering.
- 5) I invite your feedback! Send it to [biblenerdproductions@gmail.com](mailto:biblenerdproductions@gmail.com). Go to [www.biblenerdproductions.com](http://www.biblenerdproductions.com) for additional resources on The Song of Songs, such as an outline of the book, and downloadable study questions. Keep checking [www.biblenerdproductions.com](http://www.biblenerdproductions.com) for newly-released Bible Study resources!

## Song of Songs Outline

*dodi*, "my beloved"=her pet name for him

*ra'yati*, "my love"=his pet name for her

- 1) 1:1 Superscription
- 2) 1:2-3:11 We meet *ra'yati* and *dodi*: songs of flirtation and fantasy
  - a) 1:2-8 *ra'yati* and her girlfriends sing about *dodi*
    - i) 1:2-4 *ra'yati* sings to and about *dodi*
      - (1) 1:2a *ra'yati* sings about *dodi* to her girlfriends
      - (2) 1:2b-4a *ra'yati* sings (as though?) to *dodi*
      - (3) 1:4b *ra'yati* and her friends sing about *dodi*
    - ii) 1:5-6 *ra'yati* defends herself to the daughters of Jerusalem (or to her brothers)
    - iii) 1:7 *ra'yati* sings to *dodi*
    - iv) 1:8: *dodi* responds (this could be the daughters)
  - b) 1:9-11 *dodi* sings *ra'yati's* praises and promises her gifts
  - c) 1:12-14 *ra'yati* sings about their attractive smells
  - d) 1:15-2:3 *ra'yati* and *dodi* sing compliments to one another
    - i) 1:15 *dodi* sings
    - ii) 1:16a *ra'yati* responds
    - iii) 1:16b-17 *ra'yati* compliments (or fantasizes about) the setting of their love affair
    - iv) 2:1 *ra'yati* sings of herself, alluring him
    - v) 2:2 *dodi* responds
    - vi) 2:3 *ra'yati* responds
  - e) 2:4-6 *ra'yati* reminisces and fantasizes about *dodi*
  - f) 2:7 Refrain to daughters of Jerusalem
  - g) 2:8-3:5 *ra'yati* sings about *dodi*
    - i) 2:8-17 *ra'yati* fantasizes about and longs for *dodi's* love song to her
      - (1) 2:8-10a *ra'yati* sees *dodi* approaching
      - (2) 2:10b-15 *dodi's* love song, quoted by *ra'yati*; he longs for her
        - (a) 2:10b-13b he sings, "come away with me in springtime" (section marked by *inclusio*)
        - (b) 2:14 he sings of finding her
        - (c) 2:15 something foils their love (uncertain which of them is speaking)
      - (3) 2:16-17 *ra'yati* claims him; longs for him [2:16 refrain to *dodi*]
    - ii) 3:1-4 *ra'yati* seeking the love of her life
    - iii) 3:5 Refrain to daughters of Jerusalem
  - h) 3:6-11 *ra'yati's* dream wedding fantasy told to the daughters of Jerusalem
- 3) 4:1-8:7 *dodi* and *ra'yati*: songs of longing for one another

- a) 4:1-5:1 *dodi* sings to *ra'yati*: how precious you are
  - i) 4:1-7 *dodi* sings a *wasf* to *ra'yati*: you are as precious as the land of milk and honey
  - ii) 4:8-5:1a *dodi* sings to *ra'yati*: come away with me, for you are the destination
    - (1) 4:8 The invitation
    - (2) 4:9-15 *dodi*: you are as a treasure
      - (a) 4:9-11 how precious you are: emotions, tastes, smells
      - (b) 4:12-15 you are as precious as a garden
      - (c) 4:16 *ra'yati* responds: calls on creation, that her garden would be his garden
      - (d) 5:1a *dodi* accepts her invitation and basks in her garden
    - (3) 5:1b *ra'yati* invites her girlfriends to share the joy (uncertain who this is)
- b) 5:2-8 *ra'yati* sings about *dodi*—he is out of reach (fantasy?)
  - i) 5:2a *ra'yati* sings of hearing *dodi* at the door
  - ii) 5:2b *dodi* asks to be invited in
  - iii) 5:3-6 *ra'yati* can't get to him soon enough (or can she?—vv. 4-5)
  - iv) 5:7 *ra'yati* laments about the sentinels
  - v) 5:8 *ra'yati* calls on her girlfriends for help (variation on the refrain)
- c) 5:9-8:3 *ra'yati* and *dodi* long for each other; her girlfriends join in
  - i) 5:9-6:3 *ra'yati* sings to her girlfriends about *dodi*
    - (1) 5:9 her girlfriends respond (to v. 8), encouraging her to sing about *dodi*
    - (2) 5:10-16a *ra'yati* responds, singing a *wasf* for *dodi*
    - (3) 5:16b-6:3 *ra'yati* continues to sing about longing for *dodi*
      - (a) 5:16b *ra'yati* claims *dodi*
      - (b) 6:1 her girlfriends offer to help find *dodi*
      - (c) 6:2 *ra'yati* responds, she knows where he is after all: in his garden
      - (d) 6:3 *ra'yati* summarizes: refrain to *dodi*
  - ii) 6:4-10 *dodi* sings a *wasf* for *ra'yati* (note repeated phrases from ch. 4  $\omega\alpha\sigma\equiv\phi$ )
  - iii) 6:11-12 *ra'yati* sings of *dodi* (fantasy?)
  - iv) 6:13-7:9 *dodi*'s songs about *ra'yati*
    - (1) 6:13a song about *ra'yati* (unclear who is singing this)
    - (2) 6:13b *dodi* responds, defending *ra'yati*
    - (3) 7:1-9 *dodi* sings another *wasf* for *ra'yati*
  - v) 7:10-8:4 *ra'yati* invites (cf. 4:16) and longs for *dodi*
    - (1) 7:10-13 *ra'yati* invites him [7:10 refrain to *dodi*]
    - (2) 8:1-3 *ra'yati* wishes for him
    - (3) 8:4 *ra'yati*'s refrain to the daughters of Jerusalem
  - vi) 8:5-7 song about *dodi*

- (1) 8:5a her girlfriends are watching them
- (2) 8:5b-7 *ra'yati* asks for *dodi's* pledge of love; sings to the power of love
- 4) 8:8-12 *ra'yati* sings of her brothers
  - a) 8:8-9 *ra'yati* quotes her brothers taunting her
  - b) 8:10-12 *ra'yati* comes back at them
- 5) 8:13-14 Parting songs of longing
  - a) 8:13 *dodi*
  - b) 8:14 *ra'yati*

### **Session 1 Discussion Questions:**

What do you think the Song of Songs is about? Steamy love songs? God? If you're not sure, or if your Bible Study group disagrees about this, read it again, and answer the question again!

Do you think the Song is about the same two lovers throughout, or is the Song made up of many poems about a variety of couples? Why or why not?

How would you characterize *ra'yati* and *dodi*? If you were making the Song into a film, who would you cast for these parts?

The "Daughters of Jerusalem" appear in 1:5; 2:7; 3:5, 10, 11; 5:8, 16; 8:4. Read those passages and then discuss how you think they function in the book. What is their role?

### **Session 2 Discussion Questions:**

Do you think the Song has a plot of any kind? If so, what is it? Can you summarize it?

What do you think the Song was about originally?

For many centuries, a popular interpretation of the Song was as an allegory of the love of God for Israel, or of Christ for the church. Does this interpretation fit with your reading of the book, and why?

Do you think the presence of the Song in the Bible changes its original meaning, and why? What do you think it means today?

Do you think it matters when the Song was written? Why or why not?

Do you think it matters if we fully understand the meaning of all the Hebrew words in the Song? Why or why not?

Check all the places where *ra'yati* calls or refers to *dodi* with a royal pet name: 1:4, 5, 12; 3:7, 9, 11; 8:11, 12. Do you think she is actually speaking to *THE* King Solomon or not, and why?

Look up Song 1:1, 4, 12; 3:7-11; 7:5. How do you think these "king" references function in the book?

Who do you think might have written the book?  
How much does it matter if King Solomon wrote the book or not?

Can you think of other types of writing attributed to someone other than the actual author? What are some possible reasons for this?

For a longer Bible study project, go through and make note of all the places in the Song that have footnotes “meaning of Heb uncertain.” (The New Revised Standard Version is probably the most helpful translation to use for this exercise).

### **Session 3 Discussion Questions**

NOTE: You may have noticed a discrepancy in the way I wrote and pronounced *wasf*. The Arabic pronunciation *wasf* is most appropriate in discussions about the Song of Songs. In some cases however, I erroneously represented the Persian pronunciation *vatsf*.

What are your favorite pieces of poetry in the Song? What do you find beautiful about those passages?

Read all the refrains to the “daughters of Jerusalem”: 2:7; 3:5; 5:8; 8:4. What do you think these mean? How do you think they function in the book? Why do you think this phrase (or some variation of it) repeats so often?

Look up 1:7 and 2:16. Remember that in these cases, “pasture” (which can also be translated “graze,” or “feed”) does not have an object in the Hebrew. “Flocks,” or “sheep” have been added in most English translations. What do you think the poet(s) might mean by this imagery?

How do you think the poet(s) in the Song uses “lily” imagery? Look up 2:1-2; 4:5; 5:13; 6:2-3; and 7:3 to decide.

What are some ways that we compliment someone’s body that make no sense literally? (If you’re having trouble coming up with ideas about this, ask some teenagers!)

### **Session 4 Discussion Questions**

Look at Song 1:5 and the surrounding verses in a variety of translations. Do you think it should read “black and beautiful” or “black but beautiful,” since the Hebrew conjunction can mean both “and” and “but?” What do you think *ra’yati* intends to say here?

Who do you think is speaking in 1:8, and why do you think so?

What do you think *ra’yati* is saying in the refrain in 2:7, 3:5 and 8:4?

If the Song of Songs is about a couple “in love,” how does that compare to other stories in the Hebrew Bible about love, courtship and marital relationships? You may want to have your Bible Study members work in pairs studying some of the following stories to answer that question. They can then report back to the whole group:

- Ruth; Isaac and Rebekah (Genesis 24:1-67; 26:1-11)
- Jacob and Leah and Rachel and Bilhah and Zilpah (Genesis 29:1-30:24)

- Abram and Sarai (Genesis 12:10-20; 20:1-18) and Hagar (Genesis 16:1-16; 21:1-21), and Keturah (25:1-6)
- Tamar and Judah Genesis 38:1-30; Moses and Zipporah (Exodus 2:11-22)
- David and Michal (1 Samuel 18:17-29; 19:8-17) and Abigail (and others, 1 Samuel 25:2-44) and Bathsheba (2 Samuel 11:1-12:25)
- Esther 1:1-2:18
- Proverbs 31:10-31
- Ecclesiastes 7:27-28; 9:9
- Hosea 1:2-9

Have individuals or pairs in your group draw a picture of the scene in 3:6-11. They should be able to explain how it illustrates the biblical passage. In light of these drawings, what do you think is going on in that scene?

### **Session 5 Discussion Questions**

Talk about some ways in which standards of beauty have changed in the lifetimes of your group members. When you look at a much longer time period, going back at least several hundred years B.C.E., how might different standards of beauty affect our understanding of the imagery in the Song of Songs?

Read more on goat's hair: see Exodus 25:4 and 35:26, and the verses surrounding those. In light of these passages, what do you now think about Song 4:1 and 6:5?

Look up Ezekiel 27:11, and read the surrounding verses as well. Does this make more sense of Song of Songs 4:4 and 7:4?

Besides my suggestion of cars, what are some examples of architecture or technology that people in our own time pair with physical beauty? Other than selling expensive items, what do you think is the motivation for this?

Read Song of Songs 5:1-8. What do you think is going on in this passage? Make a list of the possibilities, and discuss the textual evidence for each option.

Read Song of Songs 8:5-14. In what ways do you think this ending is appropriate to the rest of the book? Are there ways in which it is unique, or even ill-fitting as an ending to this book?

### **Session 6 Discussion Questions**

"UPPITY: ... 2) Rebelliously self-assertive; not inclined to be tractable or deferential" (*Random House Dictionary of the English Language, 2nd Ed.*, 1987)  
Do you think *ra'yati* and the other women in the Song of Songs are "uppity?" Why or why not? Cite specific passages to make your point, if possible.

Do you think that the Song of Songs is a helpful model—or not—for contemporary women? Why?

Read 4:8-12 and 5:1. *Dodi* repeatedly calls *ra'yati* "sister" and "bride" here. Do you think he uses these literally, or as terms of endearment? What can you find elsewhere in the Song to back up each point of view?

Do you think the Song presents *ra'yati* and *dodi* as married in the book, or not? What do you find in the book to support your point of view?

Read Genesis 2:4b-3:24. Do you think the Song of Songs “repairs” the ending of the Garden of Eden story? Why or why not?

What have you learned from the Song of Songs? What do you think is the main point of the Song of Songs?

Why do you think the Song of Songs is in the Bible? If it had been up to you, would you have included or excluded the Song of Songs from the Bible? Why?

Now that you have completed this study, what have you learned new about the Song of Songs? What do you think the book means for contemporary readers? What does it mean to you?