

# The Clitoris in the Song of Solomon

## It Is Even More Erotic Than We Realized!

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*This article makes explicit references to female anatomy and sexual function, and sexual acts between a husband and wife. If you are offended by such things, please stop reading.*

No other book in the Bible has caused more consternation than the Song of Solomon (also known as the Song of Songs, or simply Songs.) Christian response has ranged from flatly denying its sexual and erotic content, to embracing it. Even Judaism, which has not been as influenced by pagan asceticism as has Christianity, has had a long love-hate relationship with it.

Arnold Fruchtenbaum, a Messianic Jew, in his book *Biblical Lovemaking – a study of the Song of Solomon*, Ariel Ministries, 1983, summarizes the historical reaction to Songs, beginning on page 1.

He starts out by quoting Rabbi Akiva, a leading scholar who lived 100 years before Christ. Akiva wrote: “No day in the whole history of the world is worth so much as that in which the *Song of Songs* was given: for all the writings are holy, but the Song of Songs is the Holy of Holies.” (Mesilla 7a) Yet, in spite of the high regard with which Judaism holds this book, some rabbis forbade anyone under the age of thirty from reading it, due to its erotic content.

### Three Stages of Denial

Fruchtenbaum goes on to summarize the three major ways *Songs* has been interpreted.

The most common theory among Jews and Evangelical Christians is the Allegorical approach. The book is not taken as a historical account of two lovers, but as being symbolic of something else, most often God’s love for Israel, or Christ’s love for the church.

Very similar is the Typical approach, which accepts the historical base of the story, but makes the base a type of God’s love for Israel or the church. Most commentary from this school deals mostly with the antitype, and largely ignore the historical account itself. The allegorical approach allows one to ignore the erotic passages altogether, while the Typical approach only needs to admit that the erotic passages are there, but only pursue the antitype itself.

Finally, we have the Literal approach. This school sees Songs as a literal erotic song extolling God’s view of sexual love in marriage.

## It's All Squeaky-Clean, or is it?

One can understand how the early Roman church, who thought of sex as a necessary evil, would not embrace a literal translation of so erotic a book. Fortunately, things have changed. While *Songs* is still almost universally ignored from the pulpit, many Christian marriage leaders delight in using it to show how enthusiastically God endorses His creation of married love. However, the whole gamut of views can still be found among contemporary Christian writing. This source denies any erotic content in *Songs*:

<https://www.findingtruthmatters.org/articles/commentaries/song-of-solomon-controversy/>

Even those who recognize the sexual references in *Songs* (indeed, they are hard to deny) attempt to desexualize them.

“It gets more explicit, of course: there are descriptions of her breasts (4:5; 7:3, 7-8; 8:10), her hips (7:1), her naked belly (7:2), the allure of her “garden” (4:12-5:1), and the blossoming of her “orchard” (6:11). At least some would interpret the metaphor of 5:14, ‘his abdomen is carved ivory,’ as thinly veiled phallic imagery. But when these unashamedly erotic descriptions are taken along with the rest of the imagery presented in the Song, the overall effect is not inordinate fixation on any one or two body parts. We delight in the human body as a whole, both male and female. To put it another way, **Solomon is enraptured with beauty, not sexuality.**” (Emphasis mine.)

<https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/whats-the-difference-between-erotica-and-song-of-solomon/>

Among authors who accept the literal approach and extol *Songs* as an erotic writing that is beneficial to modern married couples, there is still an attempt to desexualize it a bit. You can hardly pick up any Christian source introducing the layman to *Songs* that doesn't claim that flowery language was used, in part at least, to obscure the true erotic meaning of the text. The latest addition to my library, *Married Sex* by Gary Thomas and Debra Fileta, dives right into *Songs* in Chapter 1. Thomas beautifully explains how the Bible's referring to sex as the Song of Songs “... doesn't call this physical union merely the most powerful experience, the most pleasurable human experience, or the most celebrated human experience – it's called the experience beyond all others.”

But then he says, “Modern readers may not understand how explicit this Song of Songs is because it's an ‘idyll’ – a stylized, romantic form of poetry that brilliantly conveys a clear erotic truth to any adult who picks it up and ‘can read between the lines,’ while not scandalizing any ten-year-old who comes across it....”

I doubt God was concerned about scandalizing ten-year-olds in an ancient agrarian society. Furthermore, a ten-year-old who is knowledgeable about the basics of married love could read *Songs* and get an idea of what is going on. In fact, the ten-year-old will understand the literal meaning better than adult Christians who refuse to see what it there. On the other hand, a ten-year-old who is not aware of intercourse is probably not going to understand an overheard conversation about sex using modern anatomical terms.

May I suggest that the flowery language of *Songs* is not to obscure the eroticism of the narrative, but to make it *more* erotic? *Songs* is not a how-to marriage manual or medical book. In modern non-clinical

writing you rarely come across anatomical terms like “vulva,” “pudenda,” or “labia.” Even words such as “penis” or “vagina” that are in popular usage may be referred to using poetic words, not because the author is trying to spare anyone’s sensitivities, but to make the writing less clinical and more erotic. Indeed, I wouldn’t be surprised if the majority of married couples use non-clinical slang terms or private pet names for their sexual organs during their pillow talk.

Why do some find it unthinkable that the God who created sex would hesitate to describe, in detail, the beauty of it? What might we find if we actually look for erotic content in Songs, as opposed to trying to explain away the undeniably-erotic passages?

## **Eureka!**

I have found a reference to the clitoris in the Song of Solomon! In retrospect, it isn’t difficult to find. If no one has found this before, it is because no one was looking for it.

## **Going Down . . .**

There is a repeated theme in Songs of the protagonist working his way up or down his wife’s body, praising the beauty of her various parts as he goes. In Chapter 4, Solomon starts praising her hair (verse 1), then her face and mouth -- teeth, lips, and cheeks or temples (verses 2 & 3), then her neck (verse 4), then her breasts (verse 5), then her "mountain of myrrh and hill of frankincense" or mons pubis (verse 6).

Having gotten so close to the heart of her femininity, he takes a refrain in verses 7 – 9 for general praise and to express his desire for her:

(7) Thou art all fair, my love; there is no spot in thee. (8) Come with me from Lebanon, my spouse, with me from Lebanon: look from the top of Amana, from the top of Shenir and Hermon, from the lions' dens, from the mountains of the leopards. (9) Thou hast ravished my heart, my sister, my spouse; thou hast ravished my heart with one of thine eyes, with one chain of thy neck.

Note the continued mountain imagery.

(10) How delightful is your love, my sister, my bride! How much better is your love than wine; the fragrance of your perfume is better than any spice! (11) Thy lips, O my spouse, drop as the honeycomb: honey and milk are under thy tongue; and the smell of thy garments is like the smell of Lebanon.

Let's skip discussion of verses 10 and 11 for now. It appears that Solomon has jumped back up to her mouth, but as we will see, he has not.

In verses 4:12 thru 5:1 he describes the sexual act. In verse 12, he praises her virgin state, and perhaps her lubrication as he arouses her. (A garden enclosed is my sister, my spouse; a spring shut up, a fountain sealed.") Verse 13-14 refers to the pleasant taste and fragrance of her vulva. (Thy plants are an orchard of pomegranates, with pleasant fruits; camphire, with spikenard and saffron; calamus and

cinnamon, with all trees of frankincense; myrrh and aloes, with all the chief spices.) The New Living Translation says "Your thighs shelter a paradise of pomegranates with rare spices...." This is an obvious reference to Solomon enjoying cunnilingus.

In verse 15 we are back to a "fountain, a well of water that streams down the mountains." Perhaps his attention to her has caused her to orgasm.

In verse 16, she invites him to enter her "garden", the climax of this chapter. Verse 1 of chapter 5 should really be the last verse of Chapter 4. Here Solomon reflects on their lovemaking, stating that he has entered his garden, and has eaten honeycomb and drunk wine and milk.

### **. . . and Working His Way Back Up**

Now let's flip over to chapter 7. The purpose of reviewing chapter 7 is just to show how praising the wife's body parts in order is a theme of Song of Solomon. But in 7:1, he starts at her feet and works his way up. She is apparently dancing nude or nearly so. (See the previous verse, 6:13. The dance reference is not obvious from the KJV, but is explicit in most other translations.) Given that she is dancing, starting with her feet makes sense.

Verse 2 refers to her navel. Several commentators believe that "navel" in verse 2 is a mistranslation – it should be translated as "vulva" or "vestibule." (Brown-Driver-Briggs Lexicon. <https://www.blueletterbible.org/lexicon/h8326/net/wlc/0-1/>) That word only appears once in scripture. Given the obvious unashamed references to her vulva in Chapter 4, it seems unlikely that Solomon would skip over it in chapter 7.

In verse 3, we are up to her breasts. Then her neck, then her head. Regardless of whether verse 2 refers to her navel or vulva, Solomon is unquestionably praising her body parts in order, from toe to head.

Now let's go back to the verse in question: chapter 4 verse 11. As we have seen, if we omit verse 11, he is unquestionably working his way down her body. In verse 6 - 9 he gets to her mons pubis. Immediately following in verse 12, he makes an obvious reference to her virgin vagina (A garden enclosed is my sister, my spouse; a spring shut up, a fountain sealed.). He then proceeds to have oral and vaginal sex with her.

### **He found it!**

I propose that verse 11 (Thy lips, O my spouse, drop as the honeycomb: honey and milk are under thy tongue; and the smell of thy garments is like the smell of Lebanon) is a reference to her labia and clitoris, not to her mouth. It certainly fits the order of things. Verse 11 is sandwiched between her mons pubis (verse 8) and her vagina (verse 12). It seems awkward for him to jump back up to her mouth in this one verse.

The use of "tongue" is not a stretch. How do we get "clitoris" from the word "tongue?" The word for "tongue" in Hebrew is much like the English word for tongue. It does not necessarily refer to an actual tongue. It can refer to language, or to the tongue of a wagon, or a flame. It is translated as "wedge" of gold in Joshua 7:21 & 24. In Joshua 15:5 & 19 it is translated as "bay". It is translated "flame" in Isaiah 5:24.

Given that there is no known ancient Hebrew word for clitoris and that the language of the Song of Solomon is poetic and not scientific in nature, it is not a stretch that Solomon could have used the word "tongue" for her clitoris. Indeed, it would be hard to think of a better word. He says milk and honey are "under" her tongue. If he were referring to her mouth and how he enjoys the taste or moisture of it, why under her tongue? Would not placing his tongue on top of hers taste the same and have the same amount of moisture as under it? However, referring to the milk and honey being "under" her clitoris makes sense. If she were reclining, lying on her back, the sources of her delightful liquid, her urethra/Skene's glands and vagina, would be below her "tongue".

The reference to honey "dropping" from her lips in verse 11 also supports the idea that he is referring to her labia, not her mouth. Solomon is most likely saying that honey is *dripping* from her lips. The New English Translation renders it as such (Your lips drip sweetness like the honeycomb). Honey dripping from a honeycomb is an apt allusion to her natural lubrication dripping from her labia. Saliva dripping from her mouth, i.e. slobbering on her groom, is not as pleasant a picture! Also, the mention of lips serves as an *allusion* to her mouth, cementing the idea that her vulva is also a delightful place to kiss.

Verse 10 deserves further discussion (How delightful is your love, my sister, my bride! How much better is your love than wine; the fragrance of your perfume is better than any spice!). It does not explicitly mention any particular body part. However, it is most likely referring to the taste and fragrance of her vulva, supporting the premise that verse 11 is referring to her clitoris and not her actual tongue.

One could argue that Solomon may not be making a reference to her literal taste in verse 10, and is simply saying that her love in general is better than wine. However, the second half of the verse specifically mentions the sense of smell: "The fragrance of your perfume is better than any spice!" This has to be a reference to her natural fragrance, not actual perfume, because he says it is "**better** than any spice." This makes the reference to wine likely to refer to actual taste as well. Given the placement in the narrative, it seems a likely reference to her vulva. Also, after he has entered her, Solomon makes explicit reference to having tasted her wine in verse 5:1.

Regardless, one would be hard-pressed to make a case that verse 10 is referring to her mouth. Taken together, verses 6 – 12 are praise of the various details of her vulva.

## God Invented Sex

In the *Song of Songs*, God paints a beautiful description of love as expressed through the act of marriage. God shows how important the pleasure aspect of marriage is by including the woman's most sensitive organ in His description of the couple being one in the most physically and emotionally-intense way.

Since marriage is used as a symbol for His love for His people throughout scripture, applying *Songs* as an allegory for His love for the church is valid. But you would miss so much of its beauty if that is all you see.