PHAM BIBLE STUDY — STUDY GUIDE

# BIBLE & SEXUALITY PT. 1: SODOM

**Reclaiming the clobber passages, one at a time.**

Session taught by **Dr. Rev. Nicole McDonald**

Sunday, September 27, 2026 · Zoom

**BEFORE SUNDAY, OCTOBER 11**

1. Watch the two assigned videos
2. Read Genesis 18–20
3. Bring one question

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01 — QUICK RECAP

# WHERE WE ARE IN THE SERIES

Pastor Revv's first three sessions introduced what Public House believes and why, and how to read Scripture for yourself. Two questions from those sessions travel with us into this series:

**"Who decided this — and when?"**

**"Does it look like Jesus?"**

Dr. McDonald's series takes the verses most often used against LGBTQIA+ people — the "clobber passages" — one at a time, and reads them again with the lens Public House brings. She opened with Sodom. Sessions run every other Sunday on Zoom through December 6.

02 — BIG IDEAS FROM THE SESSION

# FIVE THINGS TO CARRY WITH YOU

1. **All theology is contextual.** Nobody reads the Bible from nowhere. The theology that calls itself neutral is often rooted in white supremacy's ideas about power and capitalism. Her example: during the enslavement of Africans in America, churches preached Ephesians 6:5 — "Slaves, obey your masters."

2. **Your lens decides what you see.** A literal lens reads Matthew 5:30 ("if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off") as an instruction. Nobody actually does that — which tells you even literalists are choosing what to read literally.

3. **"There is no right way to read the Bible."** Dr. McDonald's words. We read through who we are and where we're from. Conservative and liberal are both lenses; neither one is simply "the Bible."

4. **The clobber passages are apologetics, not neutral reporting.** Seven texts get cited over and over to defend a belief people already hold. Naming them — and knowing what they actually say — is the first step to reclaiming them.

5. **Sodom is a story about violence and inhospitality, not consensual love.** The mob wants to dominate and humiliate strangers. The liberal reading says God's judgment falls on a society that is arrogant, violent, and indifferent to the vulnerable.

03 — GLOSSARY

# WORDS TO KNOW

These are the terms Dr. McDonald used, in the order she introduced them. Keep this handy while you watch the assigned videos.

### THEOLOGY
The study of the nature of God and religious belief.

### CONTEXTUAL THEOLOGY
Theology shaped by the lived experience and social location of the people doing it. In the academy, Black liberation and womanist theologies get labeled "contextual" while Euro-American theology is just called "theology." Dr. McDonald's point: **all** theology is contextual, whether it admits it or not.

### LENS
The way you read the Bible — shaped by who you are, where you come from, and what you were taught. Everyone has one.

### CONSERVATIVE READING
Often (not always) literal. Tends to be patriarchal. May name LGBTQIA+ people as sinful and take anti-abortion positions. Examples she named: evangelicals, the Church of God in Christ (COGIC).

### LIBERAL READING
Justice-oriented. Includes Black Liberation theology, womanist theology, and Black feminist theology.

### WOMANIST THEOLOGY
"A response to sexism in black theology and racism in feminist theology" (Monica Coleman). Critical reflection on Black women's place in the world God created, taking Black women's experience seriously as people made in God's image, and naming the triple oppression of racism, sexism, and classism (Linda Thomas).

### QUEER THEOLOGY
A theological approach that applies queer theory to religion — challenging traditional norms of gender and sexuality while centering LGBTQIA+ experience. A relatively new field.

### QUEER THEORY
A critical approach that treats sexuality and gender as social constructs — built differently across times and places, so fluid rather than fixed — and constructed through social power, including the power to name (Patrick Cheng).

### CLOBBER PASSAGES
The handful of Bible verses most often cited to argue against consensual same-sex relationships — used to "clobber" (strike down) the other side of the debate.

### APOLOGETICS
The reasoned defense of a religious belief, using argument, history, philosophy, and interpretation. The clobber passages function as apologetics for the belief that homosexuality is sin.

### YADA'
The Hebrew word in Genesis 19:5 usually translated "to know." It can mean sexual intercourse — but it can also mean to interrogate or to dominate.

04 — THE SEVEN TEXTS

# THE CLOBBER PASSAGES

Dr. McDonald listed the seven passages most often cited. We took up the first one on September 27; the rest are ahead of us.

| PASSAGE | HOW IT IS USUALLY QUOTED | IN THIS SERIES |
|---|---|---|
| **Genesis 19:1–38** Old Testament | The narrative of Sodom and Gomorrah, where the men of Sodom attempt to assault the angels | **Covered Sept 27** |
| **Leviticus 18:22** | "You shall not lie with a male as with a woman; it is an abomination" | Coming up |
| **Leviticus 20:13** | "If a man lies with a male as with a woman, both of them have committed an abomination; they shall surely be put to death" | Coming up |
| **Romans 1:26–27** New Testament | Men and women exchanging "natural relations" for "unnatural" ones | Coming up |
| **1 Corinthians 6:9–11** | Lists "the sexually immoral … men who practice homosexuality" among those who will not inherit the kingdom of God | Coming up |
| **1 Timothy 1:9–10** | The law is for the lawless and disobedient, including "men who practice homosexuality" | Coming up |
| **Jude 6–7** | Angels who abandoned their proper place, and Sodom and Gomorrah, held up as examples of judgment | Coming up |

### PASTOR REVV'S STANDING RULE

It applies to every one of these: **never pluck a single verse.** Read the whole chapter it lives in, plus the chapter before and the chapter after.

05 — TWO LENSES, SAME CHAPTER

# A DEEPER LOOK AT GENESIS 19

Dr. McDonald laid the two readings side by side so you can see what each one notices — and what each one skips.

| CONSERVATIVE READING | LIBERAL READING |
|---|---|
| **WHAT SODOM'S SIN WAS** | |
| Rejecting God's moral law — in sexual ethics, justice, or hospitality. The sins were "so extreme" they warranted total judgment. | Inhospitality, violence, arrogance, and systemic injustice — a society that abandoned compassion and moral responsibility. |
| **WHAT THE DESTRUCTION MEANS** | |
| A model of divine retribution, often backed by Jude 1:7. | God's judgment on a culture that violated the sacred, covenantal duty of hospitality. |
| **THE KEY WORD: YADA' (19:5)** | |
| "To know" = sexual intercourse; the mob's demand is read as same-sex desire. | "To know" can also mean to interrogate or to dominate. The mob wants to humiliate, dominate, and violate the dignity of guests — not simply to have sex. |
| **THE SETTING** | |
| Hospitality is named as one part of God's moral law that Sodom rejected, alongside sexual ethics and justice. | Ancient Near Eastern hospitality was a sacred duty. Lot refuses to let the visitors sleep in the square and offers food and shelter; the mob's aggression is the direct opposite. |
| **WHAT IT WARNS AGAINST TODAY** | |
| Rejecting God's moral law. | Social injustice, cruelty, and the erosion of community ethics. Less about same-sex relationships; more about a society indifferent to the vulnerable. |

**ONE THING TO SIT WITH**

In 19:8, Lot offers his two daughters to the mob. Traditional readings rarely name that as the horror of the text. Rev. Tisha Dixon-Williams's womanist sermon on this chapter, linked in the homework, takes its title from that moment.

06 — REFLECT AND DISCUSS

# QUESTIONS TO SIT WITH

Pick two or three. Write a few lines on each, or just think them through — we'll open with some of these on October 11.

1. **Name your lens.** Who taught you to read the Bible? What tradition, family, or place shaped how you hear it — and what did that lens make easy to see, or hard to see?

2. Dr. McDonald used Ephesians 6:5 as an example of "neutral" theology that was actually serving the people preaching it. Where have you seen a Bible verse used to protect the person quoting it?

3. Read Genesis 19:4–9 slowly. If yada' means "to dominate" rather than simply "to have sex," what changes about the story? What stays the same?

4. Lot offers his daughters to the mob. What does it tell you that the most common reading of this chapter rarely mentions them?

5. Run Public House's two questions on each reading: **Who decided this — and when?** and **Does it look like Jesus?** Where does each reading land?

6. Dr. McDonald said, "There is no right way to read the Bible." Does that feel freeing, unsettling, or both? Why?

**NOTES**

07 — HOMEWORK BEFORE SUNDAY, OCTOBER 11

# WATCH, READ, WRITE

**1** **WATCH** — ASSIGNED BY DR. MCDONALD

Two episodes of Rev. Dr. Howard-John Wesley's Bible study, from Alfred Street Baptist Church in Alexandria, Virginia. Watch them in order.

- ☐ **S2 Ep1 — "Sexuality, Spirituality, and Scripture" Pt. 1 — Can I Push It?**
  youtube.com/watch?v=gwP_9hgItxE
- ☐ **S2 Ep2 — "Sexuality, Spirituality, and Scripture" Pt. 2 — Can I Push It?**
  youtube.com/watch?v=C-YrW58Wtvc

While you watch, jot down three things for each episode: one thing that surprised you, one thing you want to push back on, and one question you'd ask Pastor Wesley if he were in the room. Bring your notes.

**2** **READ**

Genesis 18, 19, and 20 — the whole chapters, not just the famous verses. Chapter 18 is the visit to Abraham that sets Sodom up; chapter 20 is what Abraham does next. If you have a study Bible, read the chapter-opening notes too.

☐ **Genesis 18** ☐ **Genesis 19** ☐ **Genesis 20**

**3** **WRITE** — ONE PAGE, FOR YOU

Answer the first discussion question: name your lens. Where did you learn to read the Bible, who taught you, and what did that lens train you to see or skip? You won't be asked to share it, but you may want to.

**NOTES FROM THE VIDEOS — ONE SURPRISE, ONE PUSHBACK, ONE QUESTION**

08 — HOMEWORK, CONTINUED

# GO DEEPER (OPTIONAL)

## 4 GO DEEPER

How the rest of the Bible talks about Sodom — three short passages. Notice what each one names as Sodom's sin.

- ☐ **Ezekiel 16:49–50** — the prophet names Sodom's guilt outright.
- ☐ **Luke 10:10–12** — Jesus mentions Sodom when sending out the disciples; notice what the towns in question have done.
- ☐ **Judges 19** — a story built almost exactly like Genesis 19, with a different ending. *Content note: this chapter includes sexual violence.*

## 5 LISTEN

Dr. McDonald recommended this sermon on Genesis 19, which centers womanist theology:

- ☐ **Dr. Tisha Dixon-Williams — "The Girls Are NOT Up For Grabs!" (Sodom & Gomorrah)**
  youtube.com/watch?v=gOcFhj31p50

In the recording Dr. McDonald shared, the scripture reading begins around the 53-minute mark; this YouTube upload may be cut differently.

## 6 BRING ONE QUESTION

Anything the session, the videos, or the reading left you with. We'll start there.

**MY QUESTION FOR OCTOBER 11**

NEXT SESSION · DR. MCDONALD CONTINUES THE SERIES

# SUNDAY, OCTOBER 11

## 8:00 PM EASTERN • ZOOM

Join: **us06web.zoom.us/j/83718427640**

Meeting ID: **837 1842 7640**

The series meets every other Sunday at 8:00 PM through December 6.

### NEED A STUDY BIBLE?

Public House has ministry funds set aside to sponsor one for anyone who can't afford it. Just ask.

### QUESTIONS BETWEEN SESSIONS

Text Pastor Revv at **352-328-4562**, email **revv.carter@wearepublichouse.org**, or find her after service on Thursday. The goal is understanding — no question is too basic.

### SOURCES

Dr. McDonald's session notes cite the following. Scripture quotations follow her notes; Matthew 5:30 is quoted from the ESV.


- Oluwatomisin Olayinka Oredein and Lakisha R. Lockhart-Rusch, eds., *Theopoetics in Color: Embodied Approaches in Theological Discourse* (Eerdmans, 2024), 32 — on "theology" vs. "contextual theology."
- Monica A. Coleman, *Making a Way Out of No Way*, introduction — the definition of womanist theology, including Linda Thomas's.
- Patrick S. Cheng, "Contributions from Queer Theory," in *The Oxford Handbook of Theology, Sexuality, and Gender*, ed. Adrian Thatcher (Oxford University Press, 2015), 153–69 — the definition of queer theory.
- Rev. Dr. Howard-John Wesley, Alfred Street Baptist Church Bible Study, Season 2, Episodes 1–2: "Sexuality, Spirituality, and Scripture" — Can I Push It? (YouTube).
- Dr. Tisha Dixon-Williams, "The Girls Are NOT Up For Grabs!" (Sodom & Gomorrah), via The Theology Network on YouTube.


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