

## CHIASTIC OUTLINE OF THE SONG OF SOLOMON

### A. PROLOGUE 1:2-2:7

Scene: Solomon's Palace 1:12, 17, 2:4  
Pattern: Lovers Apart - 1:2  
 Longing - 1:7  
 Lovers Together - 1:9, 15, 16  
Motifs: Vineyard - 1:6, 14  
 Apple Tree - 2:3

### B. INVITATION 2:8-17

Scene Shift: Her home (inside) - 2:9  
 Come to the countryside (outside) - 2:10ff.  
Pattern: Lovers Apart - 2:8  
 Longing - 2:10, 13, 14  
 Lovers Together - 2:16, 17  
Motifs: Flowers, grapevines, blooming vineyards - 2:12, 13, 15  
 Spring has sprung - 2:11ff.  
 Possession: "my lover is mine" - 2:16

### C. NIGHT 3:1-5

Scene Shift: Night-time - 3:1  
Pattern: Lovers Apart - 3:1  
 Longing - 3:1, 2  
 Lovers Together - 3:4  
Motifs: Dream (?) on her bed - 3:1  
 Searches streets - 3:1, 2  
 Watchmen - 3:3

### D. WEDDING 3:6-5:1

Scene Shift: Day-time at the edge of the wilderness - 3:6  
Pattern: Lovers Apart - 4:16-5:1  
 Longing - 4:7-9  
 Lovers Together - 4:16-5:1  
Motifs: Wasf - 4:1-5  
 Palanquin of Solomon - 3:7  
 Geographical imagery - 4:8

### C'. NIGHT 5:2-7:10

Scene Shift: Night-time - 5:2  
Pattern: Lovers Apart - 5:2  
 Longing - 5:6  
 Lovers Together - 7:10  
Motifs: Dream (?) on her bed - 5:2  
 Searches streets - 5:6  
 Watchmen - 5:7  
 Wasf - 5:10-16; 6:4-9; 7:1-5

### B'. INVITATION 7:11-8:4

Scene Shift: Day (inside) - 7:11  
 Come to the countryside (outside) - 7:11  
Pattern: Lovers Apart - 7:11  
 Longing - 8:1, 2  
 Lovers Together - 8:3  
Motifs: Flowers, grapevines, blooming vineyards - 7:12  
 Spring has sprung - 7:12, 13  
 Possession: "I am my beloved's" - cf. 7:10

### A'. EPILOGUE 8:5-14

Scene Shift: Day-time at the edge of the wilderness - 8:5  
Pattern: Lovers Apart - 8:5  
 Longing - 8:6, 7  
 Lovers Together - 8:14  
Motifs: Vineyard - 8:12  
 Apple Tree - 8:5

## SOLOMON'S SUBLIME SONG

James T. Dennison, Jr.

Sebastian Castellio departed John Calvin's Geneva in June 1544. Though he left the city with a letter of reference from Calvin, Castellio departed in bitterness. The rift between Calvin and the first rector of the College of Geneva is traceable, in part, to the canonicity of the Song of Solomon. Castellio had described the book as an obscene love poem, unfit for inclusion in the Word of God. Calvin defended the inspiration of the Song as well as its suitability for the church.

This incident merely reminds us that the struggle over the nature of the Song of Solomon is not new. Others before us have faced the challenge of this small book and we are called once more to address its meaning for the church today.

This Song which is Solomon's—Song of Songs—Canticle of Canticles (as it was called in the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries)—this sensuous love song beckons us to a wedding. The wedding to which we are invited is situated at the climax of an elaborate courting ritual. But this wedding is also anticipatory of the everyday sameness—the humdrum routine—when the honeymoon is over. Solomon's Song beckons us to sense marital love as God intended it. Not crude, vulgar sex with its contemporary pornographic overtones. Not sex as an idol of pleasure through which the High Priest of the Playboy cult, Hugh Hefner, has become a millionaire, as well as the cause of the suicides of several foolish women who sold their bodies to him. No, Solomon's Song beckons us to marvel at the beauty, the grace, the loveliness of marital love. Love which begins in the yearning affection of courtship (chapter 1); love which ripens in the joyous exhilaration of the wedding night (5:1); love which deepens in the maturing passion of two becoming one (chapters 7 and 8).

All of our senses are aroused by the world of Solomon's Song. Our eyes are witnesses in this love poem. Our ears are eager channels at the audition of these two lovers. Our noses are receptacles for the aromas of the drama. Our mouths are sated with the tastes of love. Our hands—yes, even our bodies—are touched with the feelings of love. This biblical love poem is a sensuous love poem. All our senses are aroused by the world of Solomon's Song.

We behold the physical beauty of the bride (4:1-5; 7:1-7) and gaze upon the handsome virility of the groom (5:10-16). We hear the cooing of the birds (2:12) and the gentle bleating of sheep, goats, kids and lambs (1:8; 4:1, 2). Our noses are alive with perfumes (1:12; 3:6) and spices (4:14, 16)—there is a swirl of aromas from trees and flowers (2:13; 4:13-16). Our mouths are filled with luscious sweets: raisins (2:5), grapes (2:15), figs (2:13), pomegranates (6:11; 7:12). Our hands fondle exquisite jewels (1:10, 11; 4:9); our fingers explore graceful bodies—bodies bathed in shimmering liquids, bodies clothed with elegant shoes, robes, gowns (7:1; 5:3; 3:6-11)—bodies which caress one another (2:6; 8:3).

All these rich sensations occur in the experience of two persons—a man and a woman. A man and a woman sensuously tasting, seeing, smelling, hearing, feeling love. Was it not so in the beginning? Was it not so when the first man and woman sensuously experienced love. Love which tasted very good; love which felt very good; love which ear and eye and nose sensed was supremely, superlatively, *very* good! Did not God himself make it so? Did not God himself make this love very good? Sensuous love, sensuous male-female love—very good, sensuous man-woman love. “And God saw all that he had made and behold it was very good” (Gen. 1:31).

Solomon's Song takes us back—back to that first garden where God introduced woman to man as his complement. Solomon's sublime song enables us to sense how it was when the Lord God himself brought Eve to Adam. For, you see, the Lord God knew—yes, God knew that it was not good for the man to be alone—incomplete, without a helpmate. So the Lord God fashioned the man's other self—his perfect mate—his other half—his one and only—and behold *she* was very good!

Solomon's Song is set, for the most part, in the springtime of the year (2:10-13; 7:12). The flowers are bursting their blossoms; the fruit trees are green and fragrant; the birds are singing over their nests; kids and lambs are frolicking with the flock. New life is breaking forth—the fruit of the union of male and female is springing to life (7:11-13). The whole world expresses the exuberance, the vigor, the companionship which the man and the woman share in the stages of love: courtship, wedding, consummation, life-long marital union.

Solomon's sensuous drama set against the newly created springtime of the year occurs in a garden location (6:11; 8:13). In a garden, Solomon and his Shulamite (as she is called in 6:13) court, wed, grow to profoundly fathom love which is as strong as death (8:6). Our lovers walk in a garden—a paradise of trees and animals and streams of water. Their sense of love projects them back to another garden—a garden paradise in which the first man and the first woman were united. Solomon's Song is a poem of ecstasy—a celebration of what that first couple tasted, naked and unashamed (Gen. 2:25).

But Solomon's Song is in the Bible *after* the Fall of man and woman into sin. The Song of Solomon comes *after* Genesis 3. This after-the-Fall love poem cannot ignore the fact that the first marriage with its sensuous delights and paradise garden has been marred, tarnished, corrupted by the Fall. Sin has sullied man and woman's sensuality. The Shulamite pursues Solomon through the streets (3:1-5), pursues him whom her soul loves; frantically seeks him, actively pursues him, but cannot find him. Love's estrangement comes home in a fallen world; love's loneliness overpowers her as she lays upon her bed in the night watches. But him whom her souls loves—him whom *she* cannot find—is replaced by the watchmen who do *find* her. Her loneliness is expressed in the phrase, “Have you seen him?” (3:3). There is a happy ending to the separation and lonely pursuit in chapter 3! She does find him whom her soul loves and they are joyously reunited (3:4, 5).

But the pattern of estrangement and separation will be repeated in chapter 5. Following the intimate wedding scene of 4:16 and 5:1 (and I should note as an aside that these two verses are the center of the book; the hinge on which the two sections 1:1-4:15 and 5:2-8:14 swing—the place where God himself places his benediction upon the two lovers on their wedding night when he says, “Drink and imbibe deeply, O lovers”)—following this intimate wedding scene, the Shulamite once again seeks her lover who has withdrawn at her rebuff (5:2-8). As he comes home late from work one night, she says, “I have put off my robe; I have washed my feet” (5:3), do I have to get up and open the door? You see, she falls into the trap of the humdrum which occurs in every marriage. She has become presumptuous—complacent. In her now post-married estate, she has forgotten that she does not belong to herself, but that she and he belong to one another as one flesh. Her weariness—her exasperation—her selfishness—is a rebellion against the oneness of marriage. When she finally gives in because he keeps on knocking, she gets up to find him gone (5:6). *He* has become exasperated! And so he has withdrawn, absented himself. He has become distant and remote. Once again, she frantically pursues him, but this time (unlike chapter 3), the watchmen find her and beat her, striking and abusing her as if she were a common street prostitute (5:7).

**The effects of a fallen world penetrate even the marriage bond: frustration, loneliness, exasperation. Solomon and his Shulamite taste love and marriage outside the garden of Eden. Now, outside the garden, love and marriage are affected by tension, alienation, isolation, even manipulation.**

And yet, precisely that condition is the reason Solomon's love song is in the Bible. After the garden, from this side of the Fall, men and women need a revelation of what love ought to be—of what it once was—of how God made it—of how that first marriage remains a model even after the Fall. That model is now realized only through the eschatological marriage—the marriage of Solomon's Lord and the Shulamite's antitype. Christ Jesus has a Bride—that Bride is his best beloved by the intimacy of oneness—union of Bride and Groom. In that mystical union, the garden returns; the sensuous is restored; the springtime love is made new. Christ Jesus and his Bride behold one another in passionate affection. Christ Jesus and his Bride possess one another in the expression of love, “My beloved is mine and I am his.” Christ Jesus and his Bride sense the sweet aromas of love, “My beloved is to me as the trees of frankincense, myrrh and aloes.” Christ Jesus and his Bride taste the sweet fruits of love, “Let him kiss me with the kisses of his lips.” Christ Jesus and his Bride plumb the depths of this divine love—feeling the touch of their mutual passion.

**The eschatological Solomon, Jesus Christ, sings a poem of love to his Bride; she reciprocates with a poem of ecstasy to her divine Lover. Together they possess and caress one another in the bonds of love in the paradise garden of God. And it is to that eschatological wedding—that eschatological marriage—that eschatological union—that Solomon's Song and the Marriage Supper of the Lamb beckon the sons and daughters of God. This sublime song of the king in Jerusalem invites Christian men and women, Christian husbands and wives, to taste and see that what was in the beginning, though**

corrupted by the curse, nevertheless in its eschatological relation transforms the union between a man and a woman to a heavenly ecstasy—a divine intimacy.

The new order invades the old; the eternal penetrates the temporal; the protological returns in the eschatological; the horizontal is invaded by the vertical. Only this redemptive-historical approach allows the believer to fully comprehend Solomon's sublime Song. Only the eschatological perspective—the Christ-centered approach—makes sense of the Song of Solomon.

The Song of Solomon is a revelation to believing men and believing women that sexual love within marriage—even marriage in a fallen world—sexual love in marriage can express the intimacy of the world to come. Even now, that heavenly ecstasy may be tasted in part. But when our mystical union is fully consummated in glory, how sweet that will be! How ecstatically sweet that will be! How perfectly passionate will be the affection of our divine Lover for us.

In the marital union, God declares through Solomon's Song, “I am revealing to you something of the sense of what it was like in the garden of Eden—something of what it will be like in the garden of glory—something of what it is like even now for those whom I have taken into intimate, personal union with myself through my Son by the power of the in-dwelling Holy Spirit.”

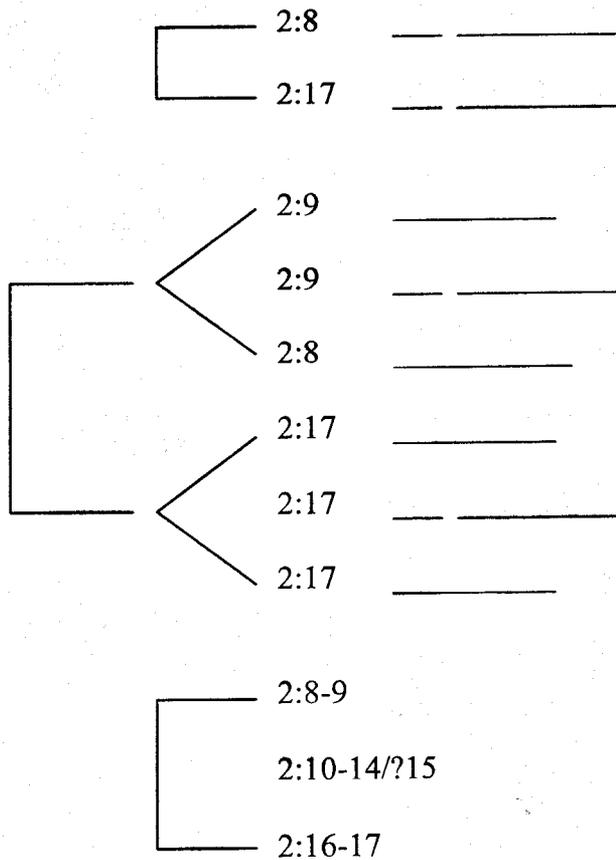
The church needs the Song of Solomon! We need the Song of Solomon! Christian husbands and wives need the Song of Solomon! It directs our attention to the sensuous, so that all our senses may be ravished in the divine ecstasy of union with Christ. May that sweetness enrich your faith—your precious union with your heavenly Lover, the Lord Jesus Christ.

# Structural Poetics: Subsections of the Song of Solomon (Microstructure)

## Dialogic Chiasm (1:2-2:7)

- A. 1:2-7 \_\_\_\_\_ speaks
- B. 1:8?/9-11 \_\_\_\_\_ speaks
- C. 1:12-14 \_\_\_\_\_ speaks
- D. 1:15 \_\_\_\_\_ speaks
- C'. 1:16-2:1 \_\_\_\_\_ speaks
- B'. 2:2 \_\_\_\_\_ speaks
- A'. 2:3-7 \_\_\_\_\_ speaks

## Multiple Inclusio (2:8-17)



**Narrative Chiasm (3:1-5)**

A. 3:1

B. 3:2

C. 3:3a

D. 3:3b

C'. 3:4a

B'. 3:4b

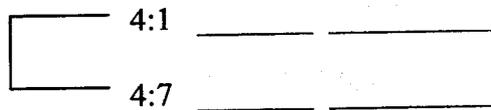
A'. 3:5

**Journey Motif (Moving Towards the Wedding Night) Interleaved with Physical Description (3:6-5:1)**

Journey of \_\_\_\_\_ (3:6-11)

Physical Description (4:1-7)

Inclusio



Journey from \_\_\_\_\_ (4:8-15)

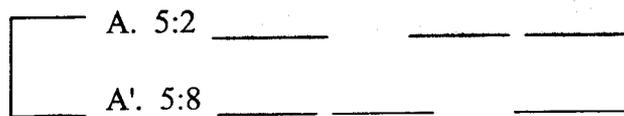
Physical Description (4:11)

Mirror 4:16 \_\_\_\_\_

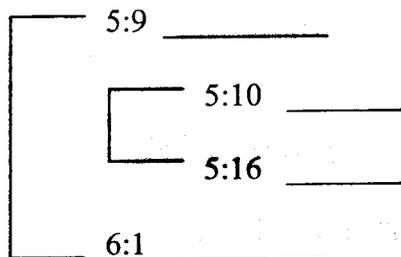
5:1 \_\_\_\_\_

## Multiple Inclusio (5:7-7:10)

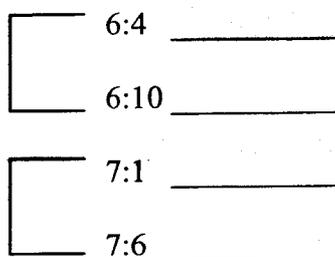
### Chiastic Inclusio (5:2-8)



### Framed Inclusio (5:9-6:3)



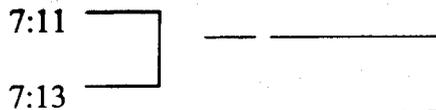
### Inclusio



**Mirror Parallelism (7:11-8:4; cf. 2:8-17)**

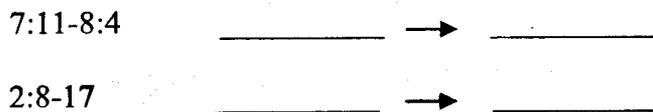
my beloved 7:11,13 with 2:8,9,10,16,17

inclusio

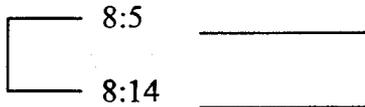


vineyards/vine 7:12 with 2:13,15  
blossoms 7:12 with 2:13  
fragrance 7:13 with 2:13

Who invites whom?



**Inclusio (8:5-14)**



## SELECT ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHY—SONG OF SOLOMON

Compiled by James T. Dennison, Jr.

James T. Dennison, Jr., "What Should I Read on the Song of Solomon?" *Kerux: A Journal of Biblical Theological Preaching* 8/2 (September 1993): 35-41. (Survey of commentaries and special studies; may be downloaded free of charge from kerux.com)

David A. Dorsey, "Literary Structuring in the Song of Songs." *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 46 (February 1990): 81-96. (My outline is deeply indebted to this work)

\_\_\_\_\_. *The Literary Structure of the Old Testament. A Commentary on Genesis-Malachi*. Grand Rapids: Baker, 1999. (Stimulating, but sometimes forced, discussion of structural outline book by book through the Old Testament)

M. Timothea Elliot, *The Literary Unity of the Canticle*. New York: Peter Lang, 1989. (Finest detailed study, but very expensive)

S. Craig Glickman, *A Song for Lovers*. Downers Grove: IVP, 1977. (Unfortunately out of print, but excellent insights)

Roland E. Murphy, *The Song of Songs*. Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1990. (Standard liberal commentary)

G. Lloyd Carr, *The Song of Solomon*. Downers Grove: IVP, 1984. (Standard conservative commentary)

Wilfred G. E. Watson, *Classical Hebrew Poetry*. Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1984. (Essential to the study of all Hebrew poetry)

Shimon Bar-Efrat, *Narrative Art in the Bible*. Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1989. (The finest introduction and application of narrative study in print)

## Terms and Definitions

### **Biblical-theological or Redemptive-historical Method**

Approach to Scripture which positions the text in relation to the organic, unfolding history of redemption (see the works of Geerhardus Vos and Kerux.com). A passage is then retrospectively and prospectively related. That is, it is organically united to what precedes it (retrospectively) in the history of redemption and it is organically united to what succeeds it (prospectively) in the history of redemption. The Song of Solomon, in biblical-theological perspective, is studied retrospectively and prospectively.

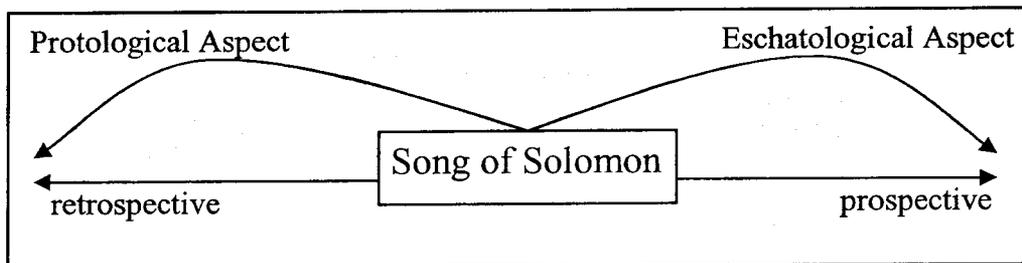
### **Protological** (Greek *protos* = "first"; *logos* = "word")

Study of the "first things" or "beginning things" in Scripture. Example: protological Adam = first Adam (of Gen. 1-3).

### **Eschatological** (Greek *eschatos* = "last"; *logos* = "word")

Study of the "last things" in Scripture. Example: eschatological Adam = last Adam (Jesus Christ). For the pattern protological and eschatological Adam, see 1 Cor. 15:45ff. ("first man, Adam [Greek, *protos Adam*]...last Adam [*eschatos Adam*]") (Compare also Rom. 5:12-21).

**A Biblical-theological or Redemptive-historical approach to the Song of Solomon** examines the book retrospectively and prospectively, protologically and eschatologically.



**Genre** – a "kind" of literature; for example, poetry, history, speech, parable, etc.

**Poetics** – term for analyzing the way a poem, story, text, etc. works—its artistic construction/structure/arrangement.

***Dramatis Personae*** (Latin, "persons of the drama") – characters in a story.

**Plot** – unfolding of a narrative through conflict and resolution. Traditionally described as: opening, rising action, climax, falling action, conclusion. I am suggesting a plot diagram of: sequence, causality, unity and affective power.

**Characterization** – how the persons in the story interact via dialogue and action.

**Setting** – where the story takes place.

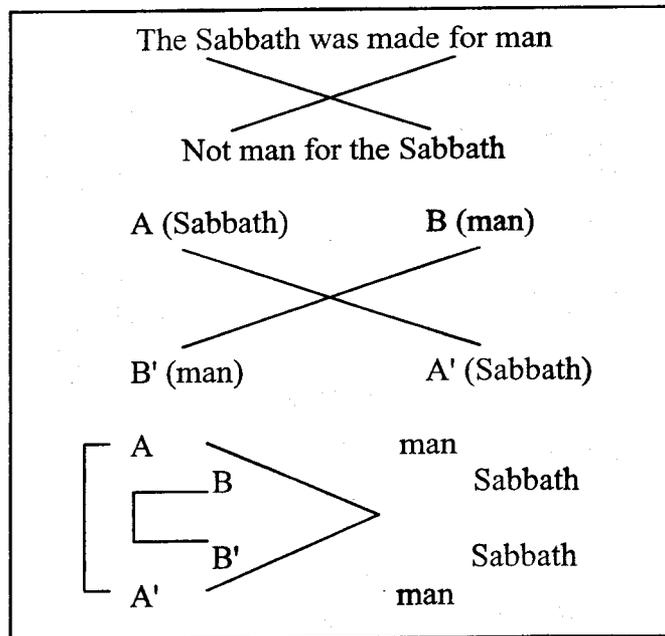
**Leitwörter** (German) – "key word"; a word used frequently in a work so as to be central to the drama.

**Leitmotif** (German) – "key theme/motif"; a theme around which the work, or portion of the work, is organized.

**Inclusio** – a literary envelope; a device in which a poem or story is the same at the beginning and end, leaving the middle sandwiched. Often called a "framing" device. Example: Psalms 146, 147, 148, 149, 150.

**Chiasm** – reverse parallelism; often called a "mirroring" device. The center (or hinge) forms a criss-cross pattern resembling the Greek letter *chi* (X); hence the name "chiasm".

Example: Mark 2:27



**Simile** – a descriptive term comparing one thing to another using "like" or "as".

**Metaphor** – a descriptive term comparing one thing to another without "like" or "as".

**Onomatopoeia** – a word or phrase which imitates the sound(s) it represents.  
Example: buzz, swish.

**Macrostructure** – broad/overall structure; the work as a whole.

**Microstructure** – structure of a portion (smaller part) of the whole work.

**Pericope** – section or portion of a written unit. Example: the "pericope" of the Fall (Gen. 3) is part of the story of Adam and Eve (Gen. 2-5).