

The New Structure Of The Song Of Songs And Its Implications For Interpretation

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I. Introduction

In his recent work, *The Literary Structure of the Old Testament*, David A. Dorsey points out that three steps are involved in studying literary structure: (1) identifying the composition's constituent parts ("units"), (2) analyzing the arrangement of those parts, and (3) considering the relationship of the composition's structure to its meaning (i.e., identifying the structure's role in conveying the composition's message).¹ The study of the literary structure of the Song of Songs has been inundated with questions about the identification of its constituent parts, or micro-structural² units, and the arrangement of those parts into larger sections, or macro-structural units, as well as the implications of the composition's macro-structural units for interpretation. The problem of interpretation is further exacerbated by the fact that one cannot rightly ascertain the meaning of the parts without a proper grasp of the structural whole and vice versa. Scholars differ as to the coherence of the collection as a whole. Some believe that the Song has an "overarching macrostructure" and they have divided the Song into five to nine poems.³ Others argue that there is no substantial connection between the micro-structural units, and they usually divide the Song into a large number of poems,⁴ and the collection of these semantically unrelated poems is called an anthology.

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Scholars who believe in the macrostructure have attempted to find chiasmic structures in the Song. Such analyses regularly yield five to eight macro-structural units, but the scholars have yet to reach a consensus. In this paper, I will propose another chiasmic structure for consideration. It differs from all other proposals, as it is made up of nine macro-structural units. Scholars usually use formal criteria such as linguistic and rhetorical features to uncover any possible schema that embraces all parts of the Song. I wish to take into consideration another important poetic feature as one of the keys to unlock the schematic design set within the Song: parallelism. In the past few decades, much work has been done on the nature of parallelism.⁵ Kugel's view that parallelism is marked by development rather than equivalence will be used as a...

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