

# Reflections

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reading notes

FEBRUARY 2005—*The Song of Solomon*

C. S. Lewis begins his book, *A Preface to Paradise Lost*, writing,

The first qualification for judging any piece of workmanship from a corkscrew to a cathedral is to know what it is—what it was intended to do and how it is meant to be used. After that has been discovered the temperance reformer may decide that the corkscrew was made for a bad purpose, and the communist may think the same about the cathedral. But such questions come later. The first thing is to understand the object before you: as long as you think the corkscrew was meant for opening tins or the cathedral for entertaining tourists you can say nothing to the purpose about them. The first thing the reader needs to know about *Paradise Lost* is what Milton meant it to be.

The same can be said with reference to *The Song of Solomon*. The first thing the reader needs to know about *The Song* is what Solomon meant it to be? It is primarily a collection of love songs that explore the idea of ideal wedded romantic love. It is not a collection set in chronological order, which makes it tricky to read.

Many students of the book have argued that it can be divided into six cycles of songs: 1:2-2:7; 2:8-3:5; 3:6-5:1; 5:2-6:3; 6:4-8:4; 8:5-14. Leland Ryken suggests:

...that the book is structured on the principle that biblical scholars call chiasmatic (“crossing”)... The first and last chapters (approximately) portray sentiments appropriate to falling in love—early phases of a romance. They are also the most crowded with a variety of people. In the very middle is the wedding. Between those two points is a collection of love lyrics that generally could occur at any stage of a courtship or marriage” (*Words of Delight*, p. 279, 280).

Chapter 5:1 is the center point of the book. It also marks the consummation of the relationship. There are 111 verses preceding it and 111 verses that follow. Chapter 1:1 can be excluded from the count because it simply carries the title of the Book.

Check it out to see if this helps you in your personal study of the finest of Solomon’s songs.

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