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Towards a Structural Analysis of the Whole Sermon—Thematic Aspects

In Chapter 10 it was suggested that it *might* be possible to analyse the whole sermon as a structure which has as its thematic centre the sections labelled as X and X' in Figure 10.4 with their heavenly, prophetic description of the on-going work of Christ, and both at the start and end of Chapter 11 it was suggested that an analysis of the opening section of Peter's sermon (the one shown in Figure 11.5) might be incorporated into this analysis. Well, let's start from here, and see where it leads us!

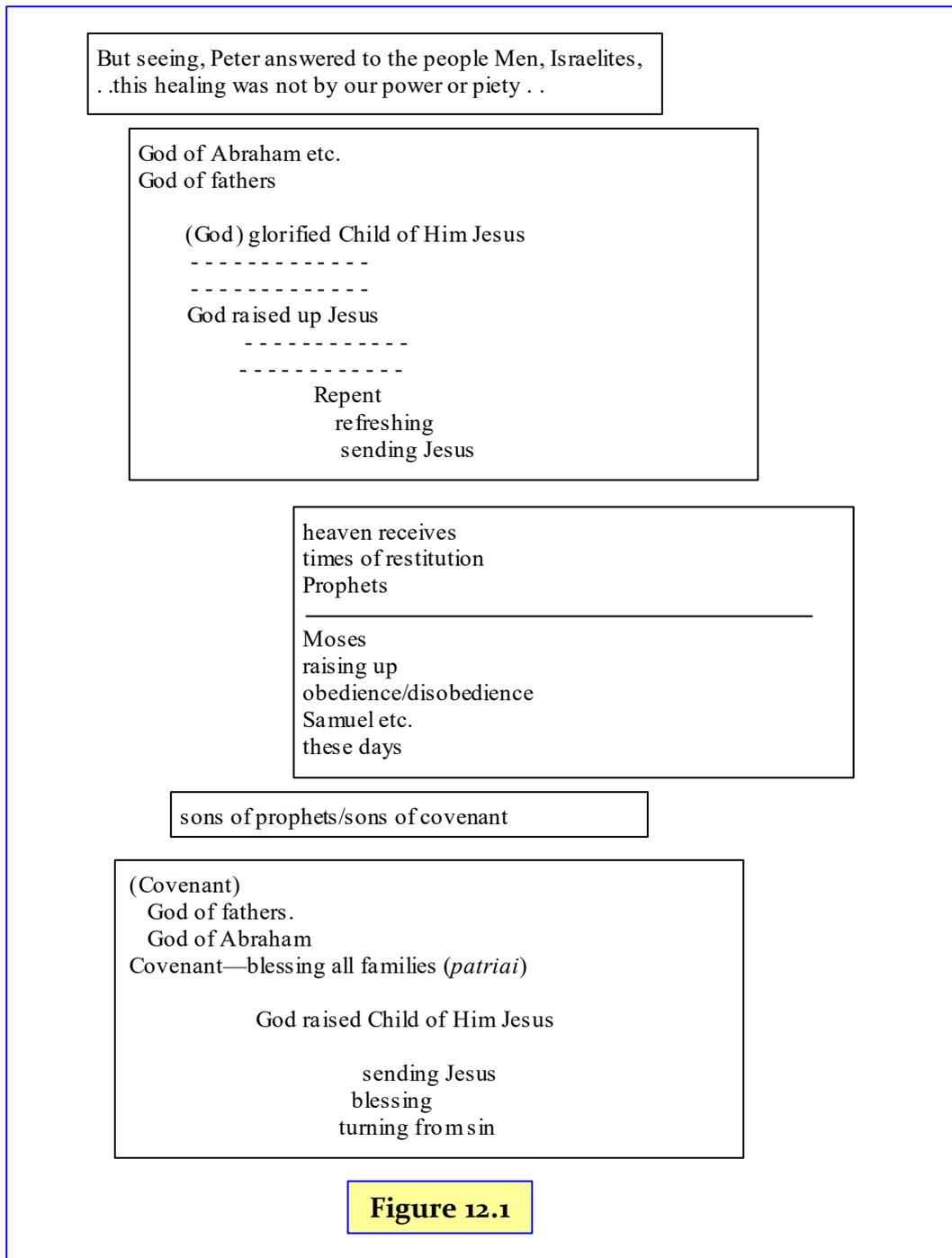
We note that both sections that lie on either side of the central section (i.e. X-X' in Figure 10.4) have references to Abraham and "the fathers" either at or near the beginning.

We also note that both sections end with very similar "triad" of repentance, blessing/refreshing and the sending of Jesus. As already noted in earlier chapters, these triads are presented chiastically and also complement one another since the first shows the prior action of men in repentance as the "starting point" which ends with the sending of Jesus, whereas the second starts with the sending of Jesus and ends with Him turning men from sin. An interesting (and important) contrast is that God is the active agent throughout in the second of these, whereas in the first, both men and God act.

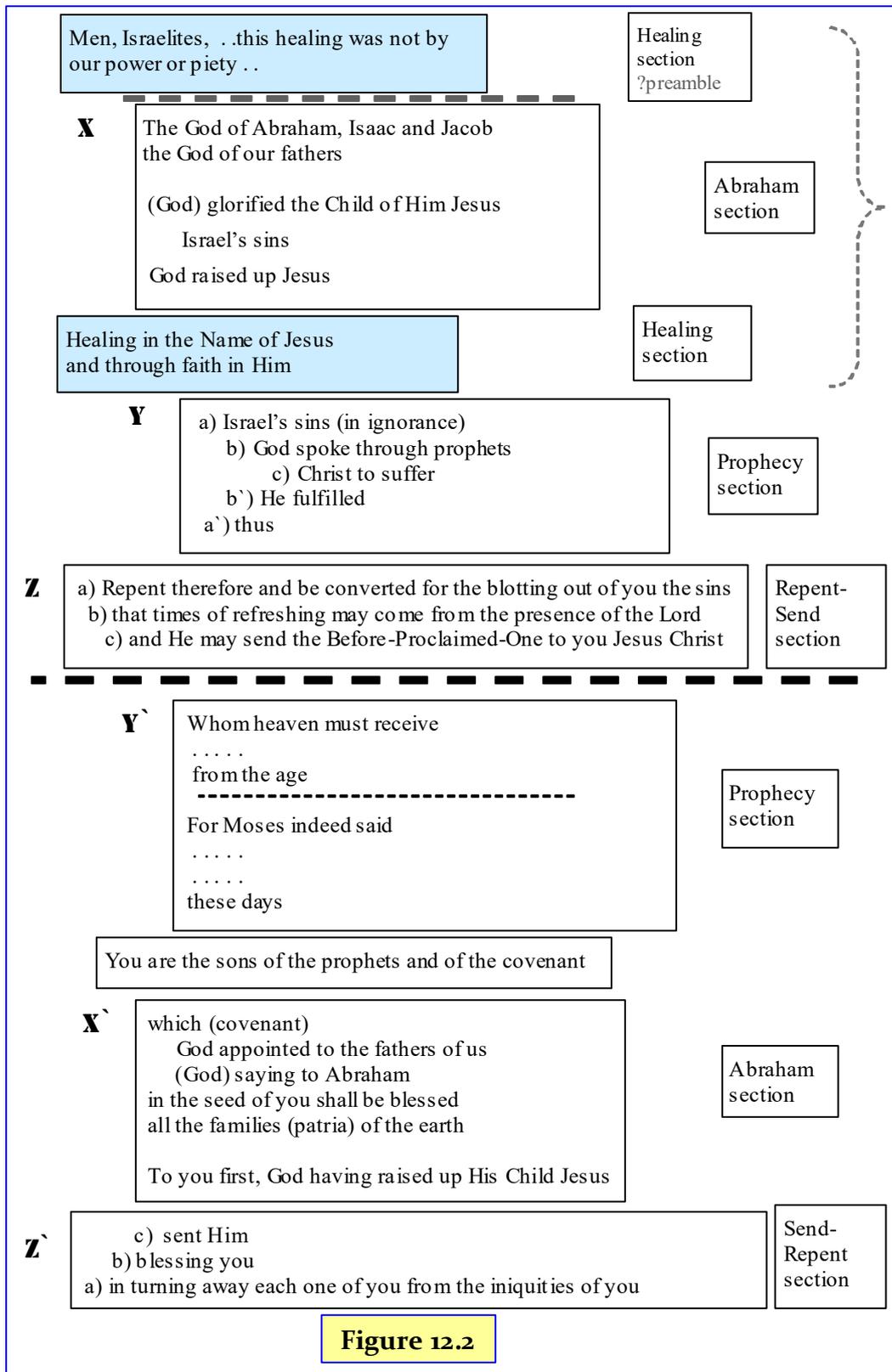
Let's provisionally expand our analysis to include the above two features—please see Figure 12.1 on the next page.

This diagram gives the impression that there is a strict "division of labour" with prophecy references in the centre, and "Abraham" references above and below. However, that is misleading since, as noted, and discussed extensively, towards the end of chapter 11, the upper section includes a "prophecy" sub-section. If we pursue this idea, and divide the upper section into "Abrahamic" and "prophecy" subsections, as was done in Figure 11.5 of Chapter 11, a different pattern emerges as shown in Figure 12.2 on the next page but one.

Notes on Figure 12.2



1) The pattern as a whole is a combination of chiasmic and panel structures (X-Y -Z // Y' -X' -Z'). The X's and Y's are chiasmic, but each pairing of an X and a Y is followed by a “concluding” Z i.e. an A, B //A', B' -type parallel structure). The two-part explanation of the healing (negative and positive) in the upper part is not replicated or developed in the lower section (perhaps because it had served its purpose or because Peter had to finish the sermon quickly (c.f. Acts 4:1), and just concentrated on the main



points regarding the salvation of his hearers?) However, the remaining

sub-sections in the upper part have corresponding sub-sections in the lower part.

2) In the two sections X and X', we see two different aspects of the "Abrahamic legacy". In the upper section, X, we see God reversing the sinful acts of Abraham's descendants in order to raise and glorify Jesus: the emphasis is on Jesus being "looked after" and honoured by God. The section does not deal directly with the welfare of the people who sinned, but it does show that in acting to "reverse" their sinful actions God has made the restitution that they themselves were not capable of making - which is indirectly a sign of hope.

However, in the lower section, X', where the Covenant with Abraham is introduced into the sermon, we see that God had Israel's welfare in mind all along: we see that God had unconditionally promised that in the Seed of Abraham, all the "patria" - families or lineages—of the world would be blessed, and that includes Israel! Therefore, one of the reasons why God raised and glorified Jesus was to put Him in a position whereby He could be that blessing to all—including Israel. Thus, where X *appears* to present an "unpromising" stance with regard to Israel, X' shows that the opposite is the case. Part of the reason why X' is shorter than X may be that, in X', God is acting unilaterally, and so, unlike in X, Israel's behaviour does not need to be included.

3) When we look at Y and Y' (the "prophecy" sections) in relation to Israel we see that they have, in part, the same sort of "reciprocal" relationship as X and X', except that the "positive" aspect is presented first, in Y, and then the negative aspect is included in Y'. But, alongside this "positive-negative" contrast, Y' also continues the "positive" view of God's purposes regarding Israel.

Let us look at the positive aspect first:

In Y, we see, and have already discussed, the way in which Peter preaches that Israel's sins are to some extent "mitigated" - in particular by showing that God had proclaimed beforehand, (and fulfilled this prior proclamation) regarding the sufferings of Christ through Israel's sins.

This positive view of the situation is continued in Y' - in the promise/command that the people will hear (and obey) everything that Jesus, as the Prophet, says to them.

However, negatively, in Y', there is also the certainty of utter destruction

for those who will not hear (and obey) the Prophet.

Perhaps we could also say that in X and X' the "fault line" of the positive-negative contrast in X initially lay between Jesus Christ and Israel, but was resolved in X'. However, in Y and Y', the "fault line" in relation to Jesus Christ is initially absent in Y, but develops in Y' - not this time between the people and Jesus, but within the people themselves—between those who hear/obey Christ and those who refuse to hear and who disobey.

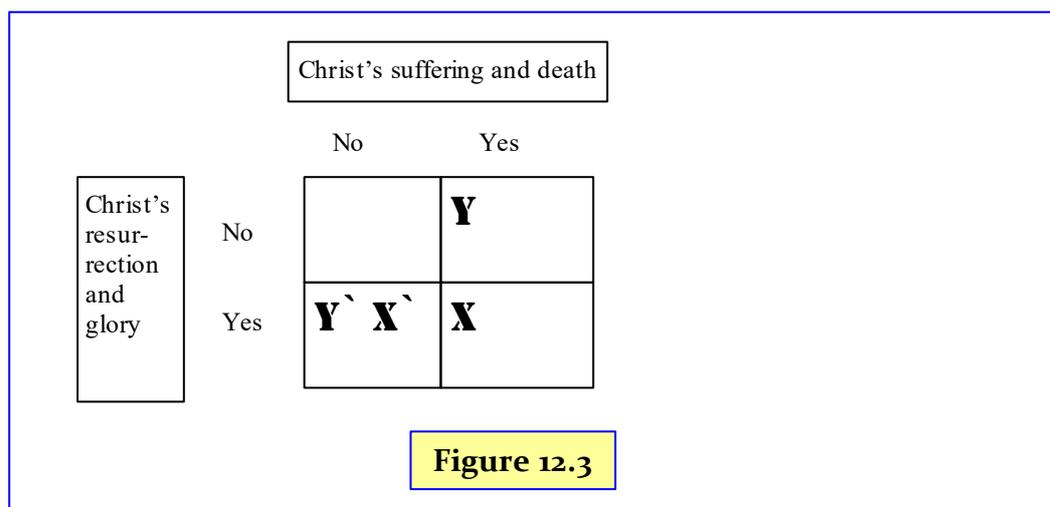
God interacts with the descendants of Abraham to keep and maintain His relationship with them—indeed to bless them - despite their terrible sins in relation to Christ. At the end of the section, it becomes clear that God was in control all along since He had spoken through the mouths of the prophets concerning the suffering of Christ, and fulfilled this prophecy through Israel's sinful actions, and that God will forgive those who repent, blessing them with times of refreshing and even sending to them His Child Jesus Whom they had so badly treated.

4) The "repent" section in the upper part, Z, is inked with the "prophetic" aspect, and the corresponding section in the lower half, Z, is linked with the Abrahamic aspect. There is a contrast between these two "repent" sections as regards the tenses of the verbs used. In Z, the command to repent is present tense, and the coming of times of refreshing and the sending of Jesus Christ are conditional upon this—and therefore in the immediate future—once the repentance has occurred. Z therefore involves actions by two parties—God and men. In Z' however, the sending of Jesus is in the past tense, and the blessing and turning from sin appear to be happening at the same time as the sending: they appear to be "part and parcel" of the sending itself, and involve actions only by God. These temporal aspects fit in with our earlier discussion since the blessings and sending in Z are conditional upon repentance, but the sending in Z' is unilateral on God's part—perhaps we can account for the past tense by saying that it has already been fixed and determined by God (and also because God's sending, blessing and turning from sin have already started in Acts by the time of Peter's Acts 3 sermon— in accordance with God's sovereign will (e.g. Acts 2:47 where it is the Lord who "added to the church daily such as should be saved").

Z is linked to the "prophetic" section that precedes it by the word "therefore". What precedes the "therefore" (i.e. Y) also has the "double aspect" of God's actions and men's actions—God in announcing Christ's sufferings beforehand through the prophets and fulfilling what was prophesied by means of the actions of wicked men—and men in actually carrying

aspect, God works against, and despite, people's sins and then raises Jesus and presents people with the promise of Jesus, blessing and obedience. Thus in fulfilling the Abrahamic promise God acts unilaterally throughout. (Part of the New Perspective on Paul (at least in the N.T. Wright version) sees God's righteousness as His faithfulness to the covenant.) In the prophetic aspect, God works with and through the people's sins (in connection with Christ's suffering and death), and then, having unilaterally raised Jesus from the dead, again "cooperates" with men in the sequence of repentance (which men do) and the blotting out of sins, blessing and the sending of Jesus (which God does).

7) A comparison between X, Y, Y' and X' is given in the little table below (Figure 12.3) which shows the presence or absence of references to Christ's suffering and death and to his resurrection and glorification in the different sub-sections. Each square in the diagram shows a different pattern of representations between the X's and the Y's. Thus for example, the combination of Christ's suffering/death but not His resurrection/glorification is found in a prophetic section, but not in either Abrahamic section (indicated by the Y in the upper right box).



8) X and X' are connected in that they both start and end in a similar way with references to God, Abraham and the fathers and end with references to the raising of Jesus. Israel's sins in X are (broadly) however replaced by God's blessings in X'. These aspects are also discussed in the notes for Figure 12.4.

9) Y and Y' are connected since Y concerns the prophetic aspects of the sufferings of Christ on earth, and Y' concerns the prophetic aspects of the

risen Christ in heaven (as has already been discussed in previous chapters).

A Final Note

A possible complete chiasmic structural analysis having an A-B-A' pattern can also be recognised within Figure 12.2 if we see the “A” and the “A'” as starting and finishing similarly, but in which, *very broadly*, Israel's sins in the central part of A are replaced by blessings for the world (including Israel) in A'. A' is much shorter than A and we might “rationalise” this by suggesting that the shortened version in A' is a result of the authorities cutting short Peter's speech (Acts 4:1-3).

This proposed structure is shown in Figure 12.4 on the next page:

Notes:

1) If we exclude the references to the man's healing (light blue in the diagram) then both A and A' start off with references to God, Abraham and the fathers (with the order of the latter two being Abraham . . . fathers in A and fathers . . . Abraham in A' (shown in brown lettering in Figure 12.4)

2) Both A and A' finish similarly with their corresponding “Z” sections (red-brown lettering).

3) References to Christ's sufferings and of Israel's sins in relation to Christ are present in the central part of A (purple lettering) but missing in A' (although Christ's death is implied by the reference to His being “raised up” in A') By contrast, A' mentions and briefly describes the covenant with the fathers (and specifically with Abraham) (dark gold lettering). This covenant involves blessings in Christ (the Seed) for the whole world, including Israel.

4) A speaks of the God glorifying and raising Jesus, A' speaks of God raising Jesus (green lettering). The language used with regard to the glorification in A is very similar to the language for the raising in A' (“God glorified the Child/Servant of Him, Jesus” and “God having raised up the Child/Servant of Him, Jesus”) so the single reference in A' seems to combine the two references in A (although the verbs for “raised up” are different in A and A').

