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## The Two “Abraham” Sections, X and X’

We have looked in some detail at the first Abraham section, X, in the previous chapter. In this chapter, I would like to look at the structure of the second Abraham section, X’, and then to see what structural and thematic connections might exist between X and X’. In Figure 14.1 of Chapter 14, it was proposed that the section labelled Z’ could simultaneously be considered be a part of X’ (hence the alternative label X’/Z’) and it is this “extended” X’ that we will be considering.

### *The Structure of X’ (Acts 3:25b-26).*

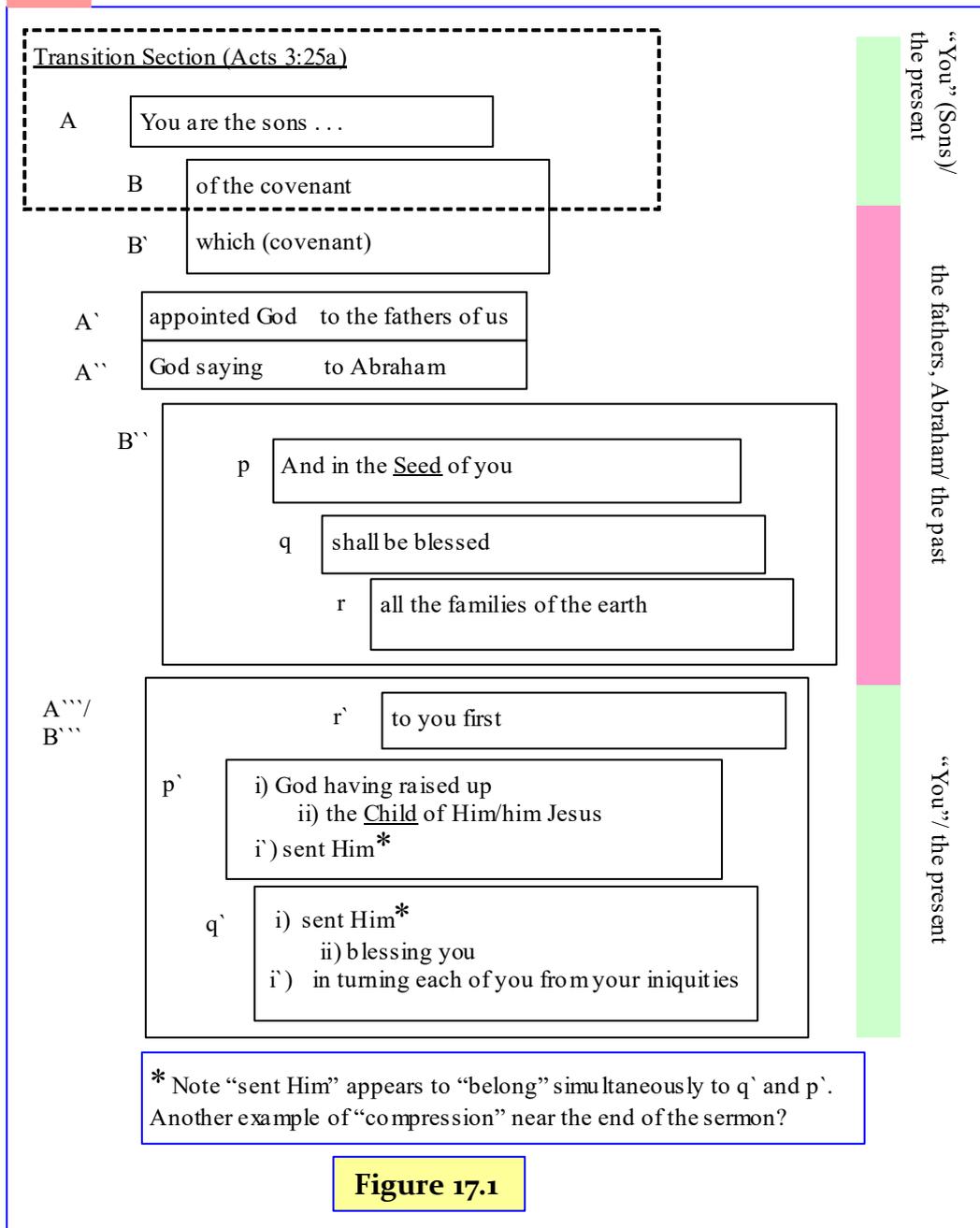
A possible structural analysis of X’ is presented on the next page (Figure 17.1).

#### Notes on Figure 17.1

1) In this Abrahamic section, God acts “unilaterally” throughout. He is the subject of all the verbs—the only exception being the “divine passive” verb “will be blessed” in v. 25 in which it is, again, God who actively brings about this blessing. Human beings throughout are the recipients of God’s covenantal purposes.

2) With this background that God acts pervasively throughout the section, we can sort of divide up the section into i) “the past”, i.e. God’s giving of the covenant promise to Abraham and the fathers plus the contents of that promise, and ii) the “present” (from Peter’s perspective) i.e. the present day “sons” (who Peter refers to as “you”) and the implementation of the promise in the “here and now” in the lives of Peter’s hearers (the beneficiaries of the covenant). This “present/past” division is indicated by the pink and green columns in Figure 17.1. There is also a “future” where the other families of the earth will be beneficiaries, and this starts to be fulfilled later on in Acts.

3) Alongside the “past/present” division, Figure 17.1 also divides the passage into references to people who actually receive the covenant (either as a statement in the past or as beneficiaries in the present) - and references to the covenant itself or to its contents. These categories make up the A’s and the B’s respectively.



4) Bearing these distinctions in mind, we can see, with reference to Figure 17.1, that the “past/present” subdivision leads to a broad chiastic structure where the past (pink) is embedded within the present (green), and also that the pink section is itself chiastic (B', A', A'', B'').

5) The final section, with a green column and labelled A'''/B''' is a fitting climax to the whole section. . It corresponds to the first green column since it is about the present. It is an “A” section since it is about “recipients” - in this case, “you”, the sons, and it is also a “B” section since

it describes the contents of the covenant as applied to "you" - that is Peter's hearers who belong to Israel, the first beneficiaries. From this perspective, we could argue that "thematically<sup>2</sup> the centre of this section of Peter's sermon comes between A' and A'' in Figure 17.1.

6) The word covenant occurs near the beginning of v. 25, in the little "transition section", "you are the sons of the prophets and of the covenant" which effects the transition from the second "prophecy" section to the second "Abrahamic" section. For "word count" reasons, this little section was seen to be "packaged up" within the "prophecy" section, but functionally and thematically, it is a genuine transition between these two sections, as well as being part of the Abrahamic section.

This little transition section reads, "You are the sons of the prophets and of the covenant" whose expanded meaning is:

"You are sons of the prophets and  
(you are sons) of the covenant".

The first half points back to the second prophecy section and the second half points forwards to the second Abrahamic" section.

7) As will be pointed out in more detail later in the book, both prophecy and covenant are ways in which God "mediates" between Himself and people. Ultimately, Christ, (the Word), is "the Prophet", and Christ, the Seed is the Covenant between God and men: all other Old Testament prophets culminate in Christ, and all other seeds of Abraham culminate in Christ. A key difference between covenant and prophecy which emerges from Peter's sermon is that God acts "unilaterally" with regard to covenant, whereas with prophecy, God "interacts" with people—which includes requiring a response from them and acting subsequently on the basis of that response - as we see clearly in the second prophecy section.

In the present section, in v. 26, we see that God's Child, Jesus is sent from God to "you, blessing you in turning each one of you from your sins". The Abrahamic covenant, Christ Himself is the means or channel (i.e. the mediator) between God and men, through Whom the Abrahamic blessings from God are given to men.

8) In the analysis presented in Figure 17.1, there is a close structural link between B'' - the contents of the covenant - and A'''/B''', the covenant's implementation in the present day lives of Peter's hearers. One interesting feature of this is that "the Seed of you" ("you" is masc. sing. here

referring to Abraham) in  $B''(p)$  corresponds with “the Child of Him/him, Jesus” in  $A'''/B'''(p')$ .

In all the commentaries that I have looked at, the reference to “the Child of Him, Jesus” in v. 26, the “Him” is always taken as a reference to God, and this is surely true, especially as a similar reference occurs earlier in v. 13. However, structurally, the reference here in v. 26 “matches” the reference to “Abraham” and his Seed in v. 25. I think therefore that a double reference is intended, (and has been compressed into a single statement) in which the “Him” refers back grammatically to the immediate antecedent, God, but structurally and thematically it refers back to him, Abraham. Some commentaries see the “seed” as Israel (in addition to Jesus—even, unfortunately, occasionally *instead* of Jesus (e.g. in *The New Interpreter’s Bible, Volume 10*)). Well, Jesus is the True Israel—the obedient Son in whom God’s purpose for Israel to be a blessing to the world, is actually fulfilled. This is a massive theme, and one excellent introduction to this is found in Peter Leithart’s two volume Matthew commentary, *Jesus as Israel*, Athanasius Press, 2017.

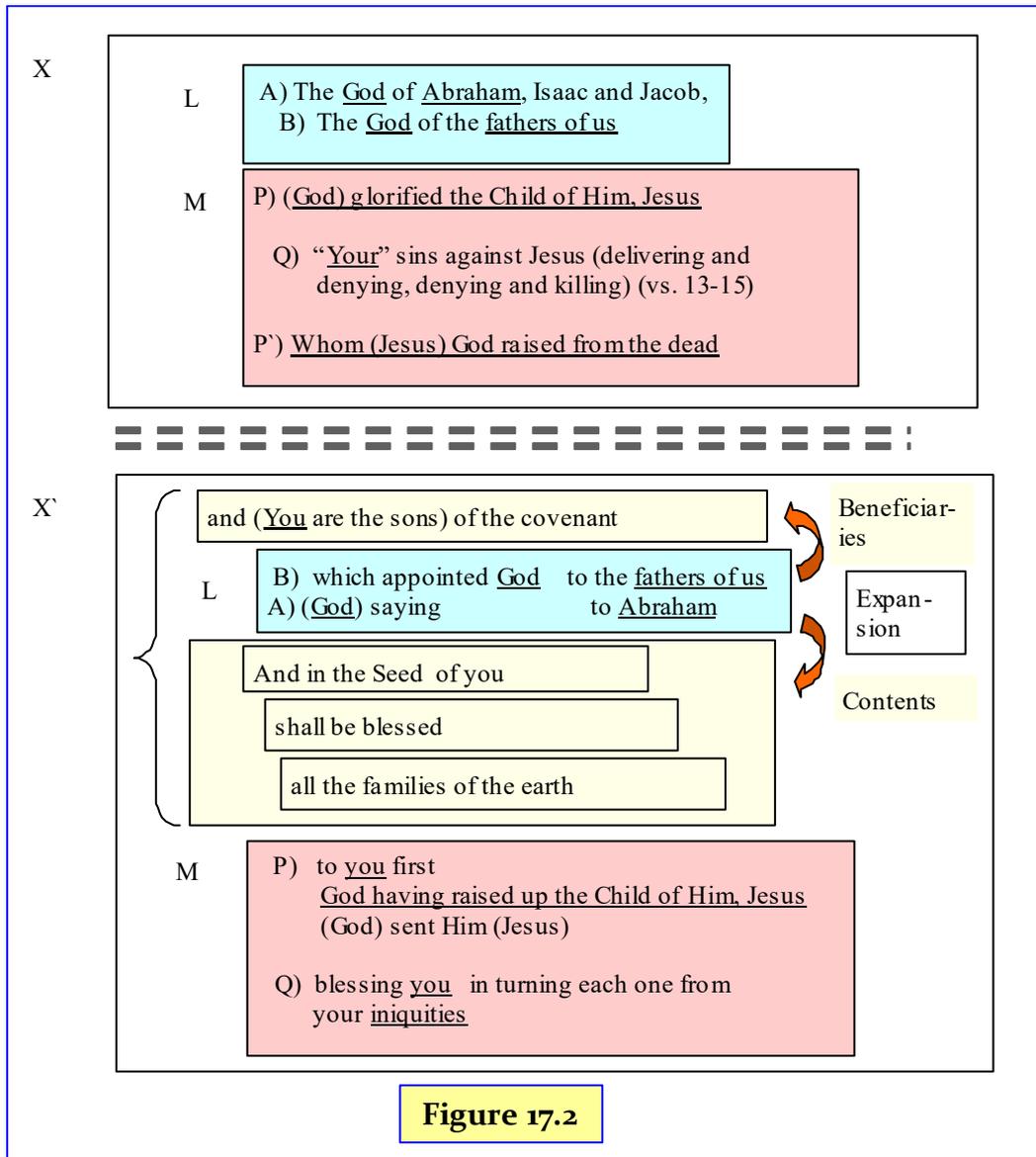
By linking Seed of Abraham in v. 25 with Child of Abraham, Jesus in v. 26, this structural analysis makes *explicit* the identity between the Seed and Jesus which is assumed *implicitly* in most commentaries.

9) Peter speaks of the blessing to “all the families of the earth”. Peter’s use of *patriai* (families) substituting for *ethne* (nations) in his quotation from the LXX of the promise to Abraham in Genesis (e.g. Gen. 22:18) is interesting. Perhaps this (valid) translation links in some way to Peter’s reference to “the fathers of us” (the Greek for fathers is *pateras*), (and also perhaps) to the fact that the name Abraham itself means “father of a multitude”. By pointing out that his hearers are the sons of the “fathers” (which includes especially “Father Abraham” himself!) and that the beneficiaries of the promise are “patriarchal lineages”, Peter perhaps helps to emphasise Israel’s temporal priority as beneficiaries, i.e. “to you first . . .”.

### *The Relationship Between X and (Extended) X'*

In Figure 14.1 of Chapter 14, the notation *X* and *X'* was used for the two “Abraham” sections of Peter’s sermon. The parts of Figure 14.1 that will be relevant for the present discussion are given in Figure 17.2 on the next page, (where *X'* is actually “extended *X'*” - i.e. we have included v. 26b as part of *X'* in the analysis).

#### Notes on Figure 17.4



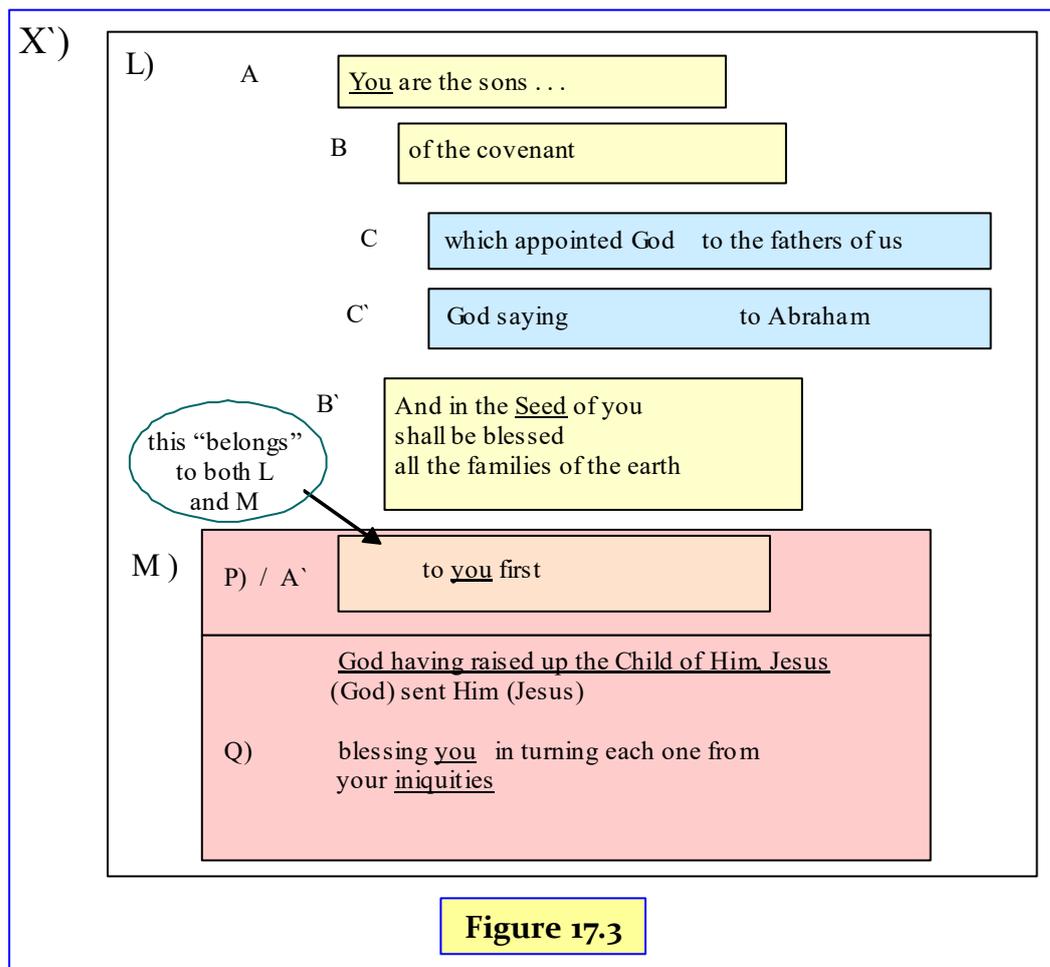
1) In both X and X’, God acts “unilaterally” by means of active verbs throughout (with the single exception of the “divine passive” noted earlier).

2) X’ has sections corresponding to everything in X, albeit sometimes in “reverse”, and in an abbreviated form.

For example, in X’, the blessing of God for “you” “in His turning each one from your sins” (X’ MQ)) corresponds to the sins (described in some detail) which were committed by “you” in XMQ). The theme of sins/iniquities is continued, but considerably abbreviated, in X’, and also the *sins* of the people against Jesus in X correspond inversely in X’ to the

amazing fact that Jesus comes in *blessing* to the very same people—described as “you” in both X and X’.

3) Nevertheless, X’ has additional information (found mainly in the central area of X’) not found in X. This information concerns the covenant, which is not specifically mentioned in X, but, when X and X’ are read together (i.e. when the hearer/reader reflects back to X on what he has heard in X’, he can see that God was “covenantally at work” in X all along.



Thus, in X(L), Peter mentions “The God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, the God of our fathers” and this is abbreviated and simultaneously “covenantally expanded” in the corresponding section, X’ (L): “You are sons of the covenant which God appointed to our fathers (God) saying to Abraham . . .”. X’ (L) is expanded also to specify the beneficiaries of the covenant (“you are the sons of the covenant”) and the contents of the covenant (“in the seed of you will be blessed all the families of the earth”).

4) Section X'(L) also has a possible alternative structure which includes the words "to you first" and so extends into and overlaps with the beginning of X'(M). This is shown below, Figure 17.3:

5) In X(M) there are two main points to look at. First, In P and P', we read that God "glorified the Child of him Jesus" (which we understand to refer to Jesus' ascension and to His receiving honour, authority and power at the Father's right hand) and we also read, ". . . Whom God raised from the dead". Both raising from the dead and glorification are "upwards movements". In the present analysis, these two upwards movements appear to be combined into the single movement "God having raised the child of Him Jesus". It seems clear that this upward movement also includes the ascension to Heaven since in the next clause we read that God has sent Him, blessing you . . .". I think that Peter is describing the present situation. Already, at the time of his sermon, over three thousand Israelites have already heard and believed the Gospel, and more are coming to believe as a result of this sermon. Jesus has thus come, and is continuing to come to Israel in a number of ways, as will be discussed in a later chapter, but including in the preaching of the Gospel and in the forgiveness of sins and in His presence in believers in and through the Holy Spirit.

Thus the glorification and raising from the dead of Jesus in P corresponds to the raising from the dead and glorification of Jesus in P'. but P' goes beyond this since, as a result, Jesus has now been sent to Israel—a glorious new feature in P' which is not mentioned in P.

Secondly, in the corresponding Q sections of X(M) and X'(M), as has already been noted, the sins of Israel in Q correspond both to the blessings and to the "turning away each one from you iniquities" in Q'.

6) The section labelled X'(M) was called Z' in Figure 14.1 and corresponds closely and chiasmatically with section Z ("Repent therefore . . .") in that figure. An important distinction however is that in Z, the sequence of repentance, blessing and sending is presented with an initial imperative to men, "Repent", followed by the blessings and the sending of Jesus. But here, the entire "initiative" lies with God who, in the reverse order to Z, sends Jesus, blesses and turns men from sin. Thus, when both passages are considered together, Peter has combined sovereign grace with human responsibility in the Gospel.





