

- 18 -

The Two Prophecy Sections, Y and Y'

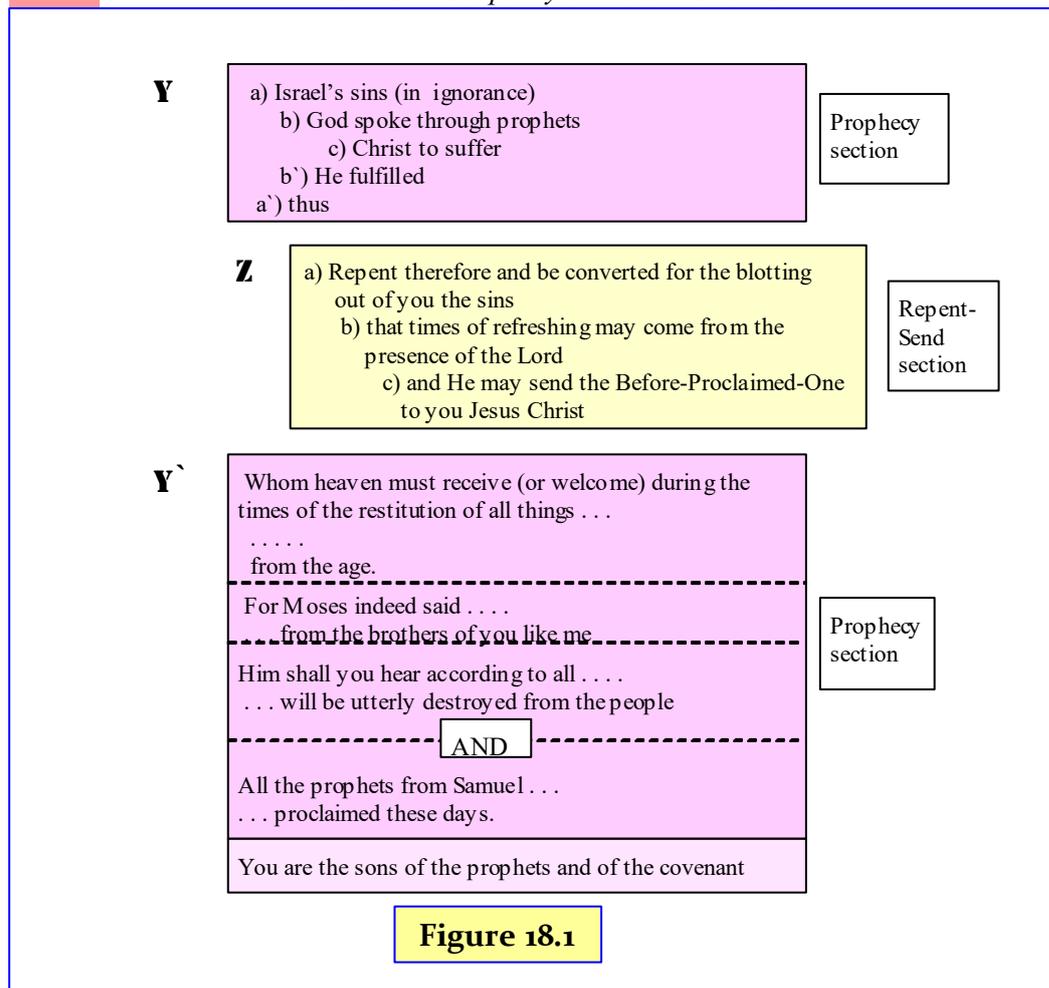
We have seen that Figure 14.1 that the structure of the sermon as a whole appears to be a combination of chiasmic and parallel elements. In arriving at this structure, we treated the “healing” sections H₁ and H₂ as belonging to the first Abraham section, X, and regarded the section labelled as X'/Z' as simultaneously functioning as part of X' and also as Z', corresponding to Z earlier in the structure. In this analysis, the two prophetic sections lie on either side of Z, i.e. verses 19 and 20 in which Peter assures his hearers that their repentance will be accompanied by forgiveness of sins, times of refreshing and the sending of Jesus Christ (to them).

If, however, we were to treat section X'/Z' as though it were simply X', (and ignore for the moment the fact that it also simultaneously Z' and so corresponds to Z) then Peter's sermon would have a straightforward chiasmic structure centred on Z. This seems to me to be a valid procedure, provided we recognise that it is only giving one way of analysing the entire sermon. However, if we do this, we arrive at the interesting result that the central climax of the sermon is the command to “repent and turn again” followed by the promised blessings in vs. 19 and 20, and that the two prophetic sections, Y and Y' lie on either side of this central climax. This structure is shown in Figure 18.1 on the next page. If we retain the analysis of Figure 14.1, however, we still have Y and Y' on either side of this “thematic climax” to the sermon.

Notes on Figure 18.1

1) As noted in Chapter 2 of the present book, there is a textual issue in Acts 3:22 (i.e. in the second prophecy section, Y'), and that is the presence of the little word *gar* meaning “for” near the start of that verse, present in the Received Text, but absent in NA27. This important little word shows that i) Moses' prophecy regarding the Prophet Who has been raised up and Who demands obedience - otherwise judgement will fall - and ii) the words of the other prophets from Samuel *explain and exemplify* the prophetic account of Christ's reception in heaven and the times of the restoration of all things in v.21. The word “for” tells us that there is no change of subject at this point.

2) In Y, the “interaction” between Christ and the people is that Christ suffers at their hands, and this is presented in the context of God's speaking



beforehand concerning these events and His “fulfilling” that speaking beforehand through these same events. In Y', it is the *risen* Christ who is described, and his interactions with people take place in the context of His heavenly authority. As the heavenly prophet, His command/promise of obedience and His warning of the certainty of destruction if disobeyed characterise the “times of the restitution of all things”, and this, in section Y', is the uniform message of all the prophets.

3) In both Y and Y', it is prophets from the past who are speaking. In Y, they are describing Christ's sufferings which have already been fulfilled, but in Y', it is rather the “continuing present” which started with Christ's ascension to glory and which continues into the future, and which includes both obedience and judgement aspects that are described.

4) Y serves to “ameliorate” or modify the dire situation described in X. Section X describes Israel's sins with regard to the sufferings of Christ and God's reversal of the effects of those sins whereas Y softens this by point-

ing out that Israel's sins were committed "in ignorance" and that God was fulfilling His purposes, previously announced through the [prophets, in Christ's sufferings. The "ignorance" aspect, at least as it relates to the role of the "rulers" is also found in 1 Cor. 2:8— ". . . which none of the rulers of this age knew; for had they known, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory."

But in the "reverse direction", Y' modifies X'. In section X', God acts unconditionally to bless Israel (and also all the families of the earth). However, in Y', this blessing is conditional upon obedience to Christ, the Prophet.

5) Why are the "prophecy" sections Y and Y' enclosed within the "Abraham" sections X and X' in the chiasmic structure of Peter's sermon? Well, I suggest that this structure embodies the theological truth that the work of the prophets takes place within the context of the fundamental truth of the Abrahamic covenant. The prophets bring the people back to God through obedience to the Law revealed at Sinai, which as Paul shows in Galatians was secondary to the Abrahamic covenant. When God commissions Moses at the burning bush at Horeb, He gives the Name by which He is to be known to Israel as, "The Lord, the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, the God of Jacob" (Ex. 3:15) and as "The Lord, the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, of Isaac and of Jacob" (Ex. 3:16) - the latter expression corresponding closely to Acts 3:13 in the Received Text.

6) Further Links Between Y and Y'.

We have already noted that Y is essentially "about" Christ's sufferings, and Y' "about" Christ's heavenly authority. The descriptions of the prophetic task in Y and Y' also have similarities and contrasts between the sections:

i) In Y, God before-announces "through the mouth of all His prophets" (v. 18). In Y', God speaks "through the mouth of all His holy prophets" (v. 21). The wording is very similar, except for the word "holy" in Y' but not in Y. It has been (very tentatively) suggested in an earlier chapter that the presence of the word "holy" in Y' but not in Y may be related to the identification of the prophets with, respectively, the "heavenly" and "earthly" nature of their prophetic message. Another possible explanation is that it is not "fitting" for attention to be drawn to the holiness of the prophets when acting as God's mouthpiece in before-announcing the sufferings of Christ because of the glorious holiness of the Saviour Himself at this time—perfect and unsullied despite the wicked men surrounding Him.

ii) Y says that “God before-announced (*prokataggello*) through His prophets . . .” (v. 18). At the end of Y', in v. 24 the same verb occurs in reference to the prophets “And all the prophets from Samuel . . . before-announced (*prokataggello*) . . .”.

iii) In Y and Y' considered together, there are four “speakings” (verses 18, 21, 22 and 24) (although in one of these, the speaking by Moses, there is also the speaking by the Prophet which is “indirect” in the sense that it is embedded in Moses’ words.) In two of these, God is speaking through the mouth of (unnamed) prophets, and in the other two it is the prophets themselves who speak, and in both of these, the name of a prophet (Moses and Samuel) is given.

7) In the present book, the “raising up” of the Prophet in v. 22 has been treated as primarily describing Christ’s resurrection and His ascension to heavenly glory (whilst allowing that the prophecy itself, from Deut. Ch. 18, can also refer to Christ’s earthly ministry - though this understanding does not seem to be Peter’s interpretation of the prophecy in the present sermon). Christ, the Prophet speaks from heaven indifferent ways, but here, He is speaking through the preached word.

It is perhaps an unfamiliar notion that Christ as the Prophet should continue to speak *as the Prophet* once He has ascended to heaven, and this unfamiliarity could be used as an argument against interpreting God’s “raising up” of Jesus the Prophet in v. 22 as a reference to the resurrection, ascension and glorification of Christ. (In a number of commentaries— probably a majority—the “raising up” is taken to refer rather to His being “established” as the Prophet during the time of His earthly ministry.) To defend the “heavenly Prophet” view, I would like to quote from T. F. Torrance’s book *Atonement: The Person and Work of Christ*. In this book there is a section called “The Ascension of Christ the Prophet” (on pp. 277-281).

He says,

“He [Christ] is prophet in a unique sense, for he is in himself the Word he proclaims just as he himself is king of the kingdom and the priest who is identical with the offering he makes. Christ ascended, then, as the Word made flesh, as he who is both word from God to humanity and word from humanity back to God. He is God’s own Word translated into human form and reality and returning back to the Father as answering word in perfect fulfilment of His will. It is in that identity of Word of God and word of man that Christ’s prophetic ministry is fulfilled”

Having “set the scene” in this way, T. F. Torrance goes on to say, in the subsection titled “Christ continues his prophetic ministry through his spirit in the church”,

“The ascension is not only the bearing up of that Word before the face of the Father, but that Word accepted and honoured by God, that Word fully installed in the divine kingdom, sent back to earth through the Spirit and by means of the church proclaimed to all nations and ages. Thus the ascended Christ, through the Spirit which he has sent down upon the church to abide with it, continues to exercise his prophetic ministry throughout all history.”

And finally,

“It is perhaps in connection with the notion of the mediator or interpreter that we should seek to understand this prophetic ministry, for it is the ministry of the word which is not separable from the ministry of reconciliation. It is word of forgiveness now finally actualised by act of God in the cross and resurrection, word that is itself act of God, but it is word in which the historical Jesus Christ and the eternal Word of God are in indissoluble union. That is the kind of word that is mediated to us through the blessing of Christ and the pouring out of his Spirit, a prophetic ministry in which Christ himself its living, actual and full content, or in which Christ himself ministers to us.”

[My underlinings throughout S. F.]

T. F. Torrance’s view of Christ’s heavenly prophetic ministry is very broad, but it includes “proclamation to all nations and ages by means of the church”, and also forgiveness and reconciliation, so would reasonably include Christ speaking as “the Prophet” to Peter’s Israelite hearers and, through Peter’s sermon, offering forgiveness of sins through repentance and commanding/promising obedience to His words.



