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The Two Main Structural Divisions of Peter's Sermon

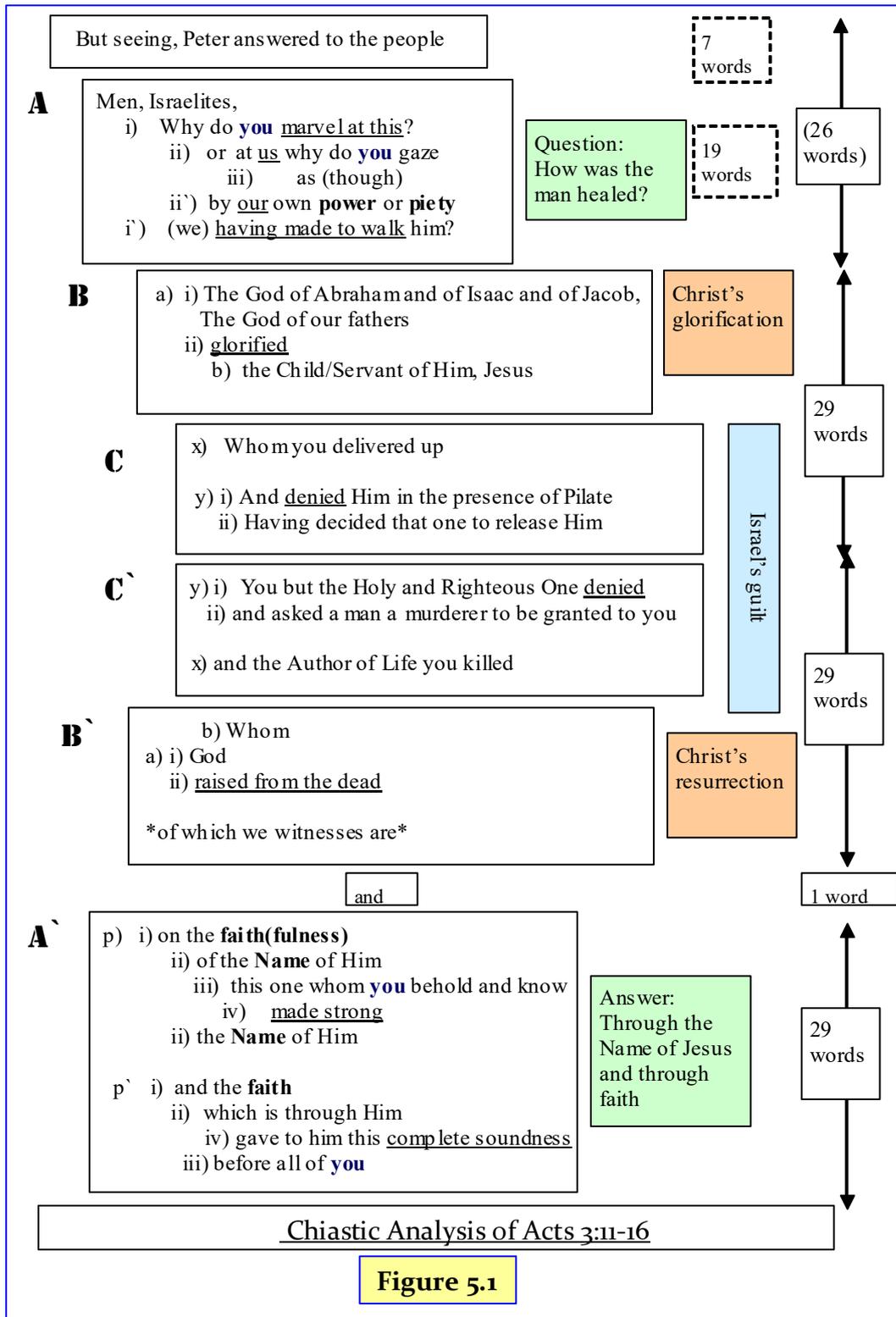
As is widely recognised, the passage falls into two main sections—the interpretation of the healing miracle in verses 11-16 followed by an “application” section in verses 17-26. Sometimes verses 17-18 are treated as a “transition” section, and the “application” section then goes from verses 19-26. I think that both of these approaches are basically “true” and I will be using both in the analyses that follow. I will also be suggesting a “conceptual analysis” which attempts to link all the sections together into a single unit. Well, let’s now look at each of these sections in turn starting with the first section, the interpretation of the healing miracle.

First Main Section - The Interpretation of the Miracle (vs. 11-16)

Verses 11-16 consist of 114 words in the Received Text. The first 7 words (in Greek) are “And Peter, seeing, addressed the people” and this is followed by the opening section of Peter’s speech which is 107 words long. The structure is chiasmic— A, B, C, C’, B’, A’ and, compared with some of the chiasmic analyses that will be presented later, fairly straightforward. It is shown in the diagram on the next page (Figure 5.1):

Notes:

1) The A sections match since in A, Peter asks his hearers a question regarding how the man was healed, and he answers the question in A’. Although the structures of A and A’ are not closely aligned, I suggest that there is a contrast between Peter and John’s 1) power and 2) piety in A, (which are not the cause of the healing, and 1) the Name of Jesus Christ and 2) faith in that Name which are the cause of the healing (our power corresponding “inversely” to His Name and our piety to “inversely” to faith). If we pursue this contrast, then it would suggest that it is Peter and John’s faith in the name of Jesus that has enabled the healing, rather than that of the man or that of the man together with that of Peter and John. (Commentators are somewhat divided on this issue, although the faith referred seemed to me to be that of Peter and John, even before noticing the above structural evidence). The “answer” in A’ to the question(s) in A is related to what lies in between: it made possible by the events described



in B and B', and despite the events in C and C'.

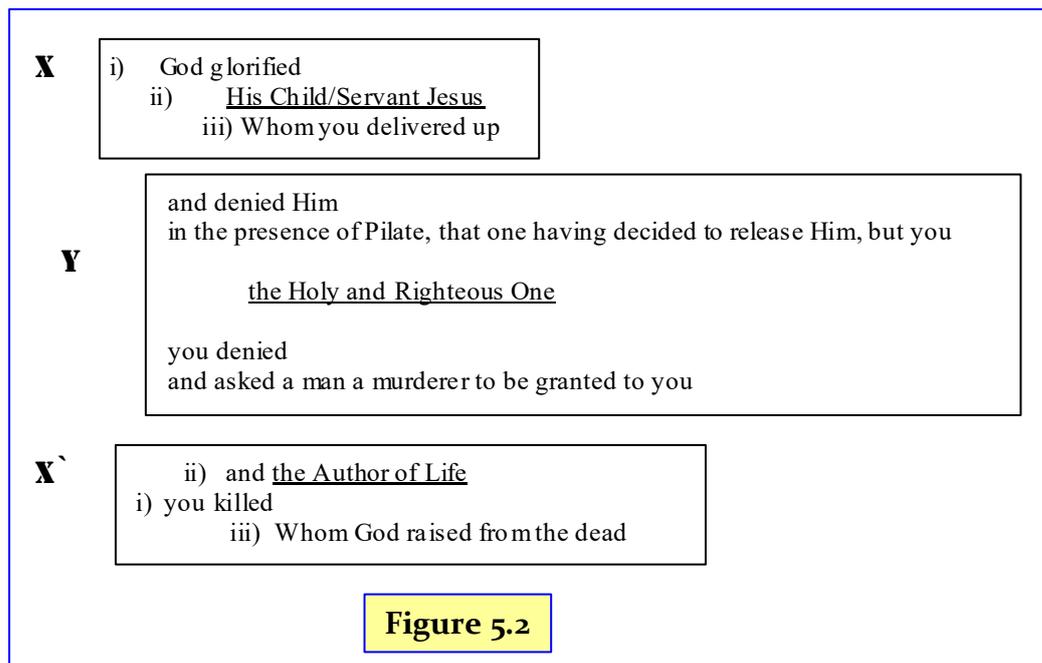
2) Another link between A and A' is the double reference to the healing in both ("marvel at this"/"(we) having made him to walk" in A and "made strong"/"complete soundness" in A'). Furthermore, there are two references to "you" (i.e. to those witnessing the miracle) in both A and A' ("Why do you marvel" and "why do you gaze" in A and "this one whom you both behold and know" and "this complete soundness before all of you" in A'). (Interestingly one of these references in A and one in A' involve looking—"gaze intently" in A and "behold and know" ("behold" is *theoreo* and "know" here is *eido* (literally = to see!) in A': one look at two people (James and John) in A; two looks at one person (the healed man) in A' !)

3) The B sections describe God's glorification and raising of Jesus (with the glorification aspect being presented first). A feature of B' which is not present in B is the reference to Peter and John's witnessing of the resurrection, but not of the glorification (which occurred in heaven). In B', God raises Jesus, but it is witnessed to by the Apostles, and this is structurally, though clearly not thematically, balanced in B by God being described twice—as God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob as well as God of the fathers. (This is the description of the Lord in Ex. 3:15 and 16 when God appeared to Moses at the burning bush). There are perhaps some other structures in the passage as a whole that might better account for this apparent lack of clear "matching" - for example, the fathers and Abraham are both mentioned again in v. 26. (Or perhaps we might think of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and the fathers as witnesses to Christ's glorification in heaven corresponding to the Apostles as witnesses to Christ's resurrection on earth?)

4) B, C and C', B' also correspond in that each has a total of 29 words.

5) These sections, B, C, C', B' (i.e. verses 13-15) are also structured around wonderful names and titles that Peter gives to Jesus. In verses 13-15 there are three "pairings": i) God's Servant, Jesus, ii) the Righteous and Holy One and iii) the Author of Life. Then in v. 18, Jesus is called the Christ, in verses 22 and 23 He is the Prophet and He is the Seed in v. 25. The diagram on the next page (Figure 5.2) illustrates the thematic/structural arrangement of the three pairings in verses 13-15.

In X and X' of Figure 5.2, a good action by God is contrasted with a wicked action by the people of Israel. In Y, two wicked "denying" actions by Israel, (an opposing of a just action and the committing of an evil action) lie on either side of "the Holy and Righteous One", with the words "you" and "you denied" significantly placed immediately on either side of this title which is an Old Testament name for God.



6) The upper half of the structure has to do with the delivering up/handing over of Jesus and its reversal by God in Christ's glorification and the lower half to do with the killing of Jesus, and its reversal by God in Christ's resurrection. The wicked actions have resulted in Christ being elevated to the highest power and authority over everything including all principalities and powers and over death also (Eph. 1:21, Rom. 6:9).

7) It is interesting to note that this first section of Peter's speech is 107 words long, and the middle word is "righteous" or the middle words are "Holy and // Righteous One you denied" (dividing the passage into two sections of 53 and 54 words respectively). This righteousness of Christ was denied since i) Pilate had found no fault with Jesus and had decided to release Him (and Pilate's wife called Him righteous following her dream (Matt. 27:19)), and ii) Israel chose a wicked man instead. If we include the "transition" section (please see the next section for this) in our word count, then the middle words are as shown in the diagram on the next page (Figure 5.3).

8) Another aspect of the word counts is that sections B-C, C`-B` and A` are of basically equal length (29 words, 29 words and 29 words (or 30 words if we include the linking word "and" as part of A`) respectively whereas A is only 19 words (or 26 words if we include the opening seven words). This might suggest that A is to be distinguished from the rest of the structure in some way. A actually functions as a sort of introduction in

i) "Author of Life
 ii) you killed
 iii) Whom
 ----- (middle of passage by word count) -----
 iii') God
 ii') raised
 i') from the dead"

Figure 5.3

which Peter explains what is not the explanation for the miracle—just as in his Pentecost sermon, he likewise starts his sermon by telling his hearers what is not the correct explanation for the miracle on that occasion.

This view that A might be seen as an introduction or preamble to the sermon proper is a helpful thought and will await further analysis. Later we will be looking at some other analyses involving the “interpretation” section of Peter’s sermon (i.e. verses 11-16), and eventually, (jumping ahead!) we will find an explanation for the 26 words of the opening section labelled A (which, as we have seen, contrasts with the 29 words of the other sections of the present analysis.)

The Transition Section (vs. 17-18)

The transition section is shown below (Figure 5.4):

P) And now brothers, I know that by way of ignorance you acted,
 as also your rulers (v. 17) (13 words)

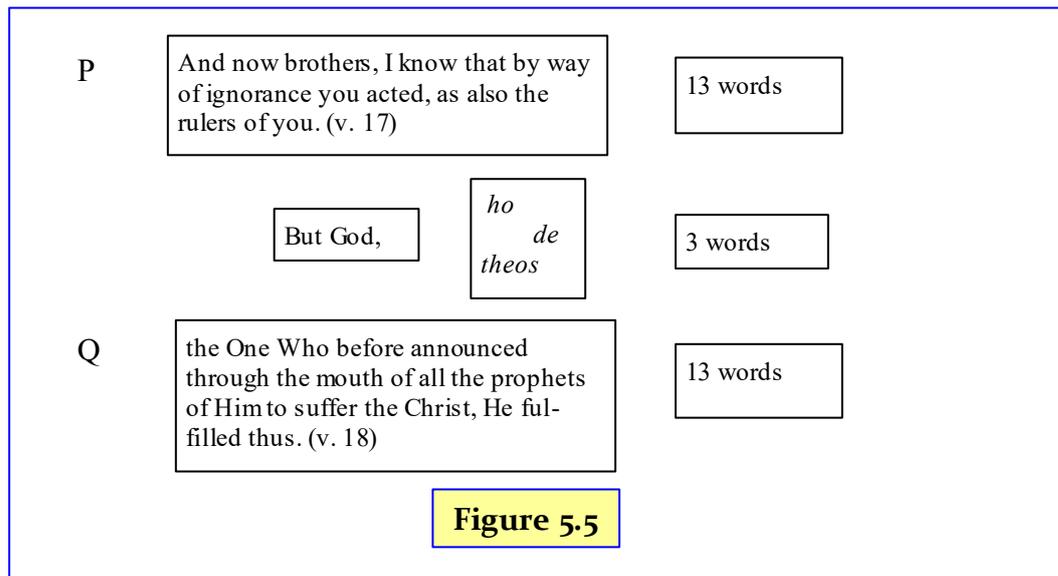
Q) But what things God before announced through the mouth of all His
 holy prophets, to suffer the Christ, He fulfilled in this manner. (v. 18)
 (16 words)
 (total 29 words)

Figure 5.4

Notes:

The transition section actually has a symmetrical structure by word count as shown in the diagram on the next page (Figure 5.5).

The words “But God” (three words in Greek) appropriately form the



central “transition” of this “transition section”! The actual central word is “but” (*de*) with the two word expression for God (*ho theos*) on either side!

P describes Israel’s sinful actions with respect to Christ. These actions, as already discussed, form the centre of the “Interpretation” section of Peter’s sermon (the sections labelled C and C’).

Section Q in Figure 5.5 describes the same events, not from Israel’s perspective, but God’s: Q introduces a new idea not explicitly stated in the first section of Peter’s sermon, namely that the sufferings of Christ described in the first part of the sermon had been planned and fore-ordained by God—as shown by announcing it beforehand through the prophets. However, interestingly, Q) does not tell us that Christ’s resurrection and glorification were also planned, fore-ordained and prophesied by God, even though these events are described in sections B and B’ of the first section (i.e. verses 11-16); this topic is reserved, as it were, for the second half of Peter’s sermon.

4) The theme of the fulfilment of Old Testament prophecy (Q), whilst “looking back” to the first part of Peter’s sermon, also forms a major part of the second section, the “application” section, which follows the transition section.

5) It is possible to see that there may be a *conceptual* structural parallelism between the two halves of Peter’s sermon and to which the transition section contributes. I will try to discuss this more fully later when we have looked at the “application” section of the sermon but would just like to

mention two of the proposed features of this here: the wonderful healing of the man through Christ in the first part of the sermon corresponds to those Israelites who now repent and are blessed in the second half and, ii) Israel's sin worked (paradoxically) with God's plan to further God's purpose according to prophecy in the first part of the sermon (dealing with Christ's suffering and death—in the recent *past* of Peter's hearers) and this corresponds with Israel's repentance working with God's plan to further God's purpose (either directly spoken or delivered through the prophets) in the second part of the sermon (dealing with the *present* time in relation to Peter's hearers).

6) There is a second way of analysing the transition section—please see the diagram below (Figure 5.6):

- A) And now brothers I know that *by way of ignorance you acted, as also your rulers*
- B) But what things God before announced through the mouth of all his holy prophets
- C) to suffer the Christ
- B') He fulfilled
- A') *thus*

Figure 5.6

Here in this analysis, the separate actions of Israel and God (P and Q in the earlier analysis) are more closely intertwined than in that earlier analysis, and they are intertwined around the central element—the sufferings of Christ. These intertwined elements—God's prophecy and plan in Christ's sufferings, and Israel's guilt in those sufferings underpin and shed light on the “backwards look” to Israel's guilt in the first half of the sermon, and they also underpin and shed light on the ground for, and the need for Israel's repentance in the “forwards look” to the second part of the sermon.” In particular, the announcement here of God's involvement (B and B') is the “new” (Divine) element introduced into the “backwards look” providing Divine hope that Israel's guilt can be overcome and Israel's guilt (A and A') is the “new” (human) element introduced into the “forwards look” providing the human need for Israel's repentance to over-

come that guilt.

7) Although the transition section, and in particular the centre of the transition section (“But God”), thus forms the “thematic” centre of the sermon, the centre by word count is located in a different place. The sermon itself is 295 words long. The middle word is therefore the 148th word, and this is the little word *av* in Acts 3:19 in the KJV (at the beginning of v. 20 in some translations) which doesn't really have an English equivalent, but which here expresses conditions that have to be met. The possible significance of the centre of the passage by word count is briefly discussed in the next chapter—Chapter 6.

Second Main Section: The “Application” Section of Peter's Sermon (vs. 19-26)

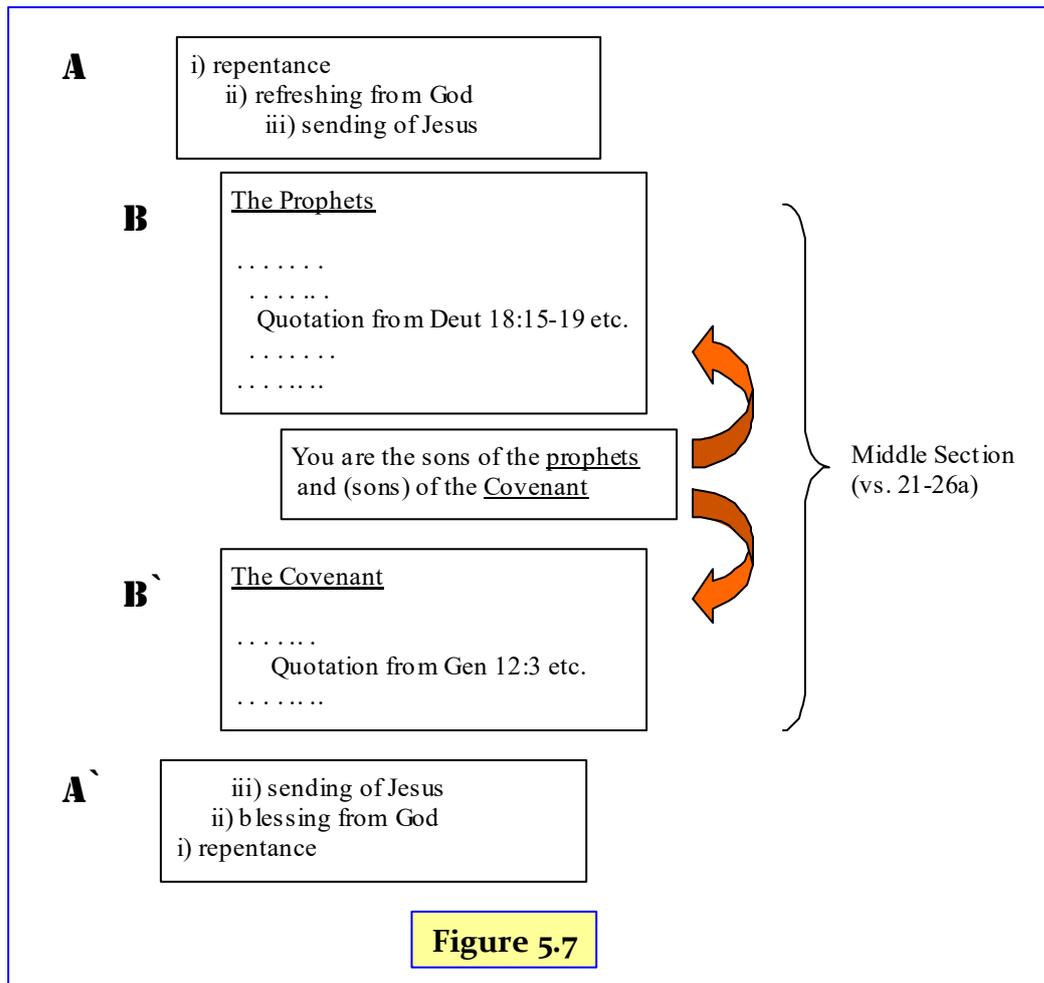
The application section of Peter's sermon is the major topic of this book and has quite a number of interpretive matters that I will be attempting to discuss along with the structural analysis of the passage.

i) Overall Structure of the Passage

A structural outline for verses 19-26 is suggested in the diagram on the next page (Figure 5.7).

There is clearly a chiasmic element (actually an *inclusio*) since the passage starts off (vs. 19-20) with repentance, refreshing and the sending of Jesus, (A), and ends in v. 26 with the sending of Jesus, blessing and repentance (A') (i.e. the order is reversed). In the middle, information about the past, present and future is presented from two “parallel” sources—a longer section about the prophets (vs. 21-24), (B), and a shorter section about the Covenant with the Fathers/Abraham (v. 25) (B'). Both of these sections are associated with Old Testament quotations—the one relating to the prophets is from Deut. 18:15-19 though including words from Lev. 23:29 also, and the one relating to the Covenant is from Gen. 12:3 plus Gen. 22:18.

I hope to discuss this further later, but it seems to me that the parallelism between the prophets and the Covenant is indicated in v. 25a: “You are the sons of the prophets and (sons) of the Covenant . . .” In this “hinge” expression, Peter makes what God said through the prophets (on one side of the “hinge”) and the Covenant God spoke to Abraham (on the other side of the hinge) both applicable to Peter's present day hearers, (i.e. the



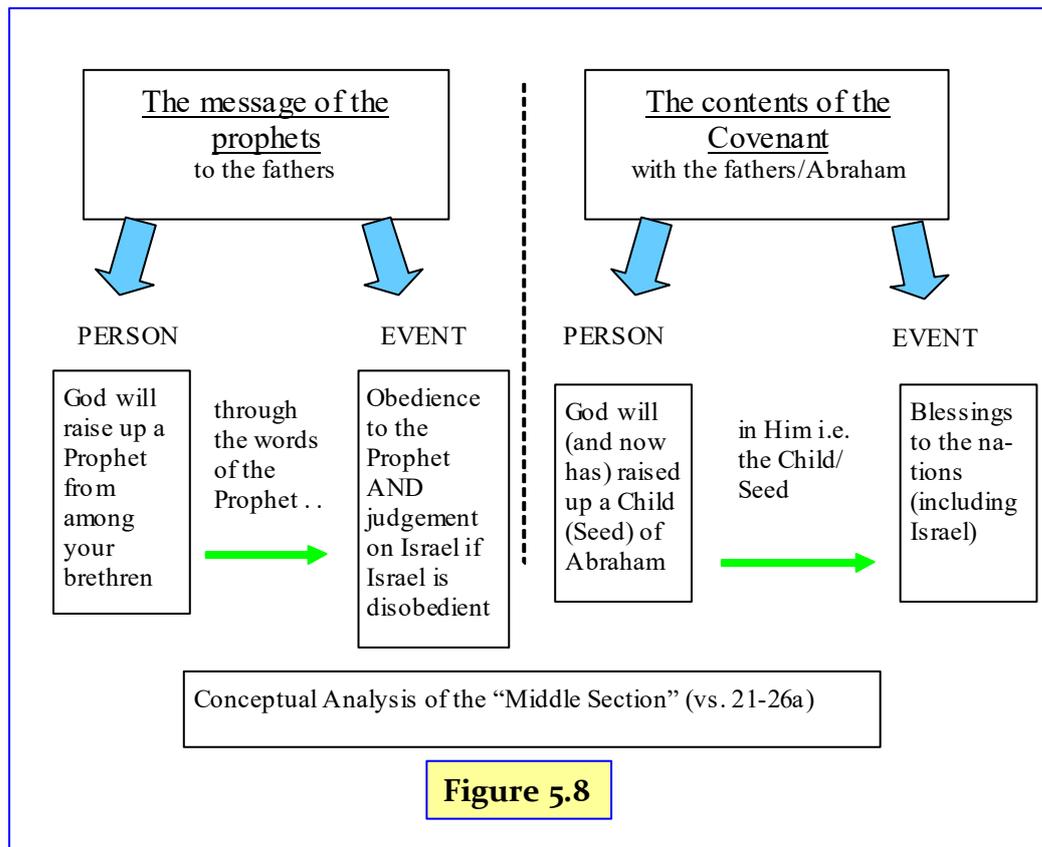
“sons”) - even though the “you” referred to in both quotations is “the fathers” (v. 22a) or the fathers/Abraham (v. 25b). (Please note, Abraham means “father of a multitude”).

[Note: Unfortunately, NA27 does not have the words “to the fathers” at the start of v. 22, found in the Received Text, and so misses this important connection with v. 25b.]

ii) “Conceptual Analysis of the “Middle Section” (vs. 21-26a)

If we “work” with this possible parallelism between B and B’ in the light of the details given in this middle section then we can propose the following “conceptual” analysis (briefly discussed below and also discussed further later!) (Please see the diagram on the next page—Figure 5.8):

In this conceptual analysis, I have been very bold, and (implicitly) under-



stood v. 26a in a way which does not occur in any of the translations.

The Greek words are:

ho theos anastesas ton paida autou Iesoun
 God having raised up the Child of him Jesus

But who is the “him/Him” referred to? Is it God or is it Abraham?

All the translations are clear that *autou* here refers to God, even though the reference to Abraham is grammatically possible.

If we look at the structure of v. 25b-26a however, there is a parallelism between 1) God’s covenantal promise to Abraham, “in the Seed of you . . .”, where “you” is Abraham, and 2) the fulfilment of the promise, “God having raised up the Child of him, Jesus sent him. . .”. The fulfilment is achieved by God’s raising up and sending—and these two verbs occur on either side of “the Child of him, Jesus”. Structurally then, the Child of him corresponds with the Seed of you, and since the “you” is Abraham, it is possible that the “him” is also Abraham. This is illustrated in the diagram below:

- a) i) in the Seed of you (i.e. Abraham)
 - ii) shall be blessed

- b) all the families of the earth
 -
 - b') to you first

- a`) i) x) God having raised up
 - y) the Child of Him/him, Jesus
 - x') sent Him
 - ii') to bless you

I have thus suggested in the above structural diagram that it is possible that the Child, Jesus who is raised up in v. 26 is seen there as the child of Abraham, whereas all the translations and commentaries understand the Child, Jesus, to be the Child/Servant of God, not Abraham, (and they often point out that Peter does not actually identify the Seed as Jesus, but rather, assumes it). One main reason for suggesting this bold interpretation is that it forges an understandable link between the expression “Seed of you (Abraham)” and “Child of him, Jesus” - since blessing comes both in the Seed of Abraham and also in the sending of the Child of “him”—suggesting that the “him” is Abraham, and thus that there is very likely a (deliberately ambiguous) double reference to both God and Abraham. We note that Abraham’s child, Isaac, having been offered up, was figuratively raised from the dead (Heb. 11:19).

Evidence that this double reference is intended is found in the expression

ton paida autou Iesoun
the Child of him/Him Jesus.

The word *autou* is placed between the “the Child” which on this interpretation corresponds to “the Seed (of Abraham) and identifies the Seed with Jesus. But the expression can equally refer to God’s Child, Jesus—indeed the identical words have already been found with precisely this meaning in Acts 3:13!

(NA27 omits the word Jesus in v. 26, and so misses part of the connection of “God raising the Child of Him Jesus” in v. 26 with “God glorifying the Child of Him Jesus” in Acts 3:13.)

