

-6-

A Discussion of the Centre of the Sermon by Word Count

So far, we have looked at “thematic” structural divisions of the sermon, and this will continue to be our main focus. However, there is an interesting structural aspect which becomes clear when we consider the centre of the passage by word count. As already noted,

“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.”

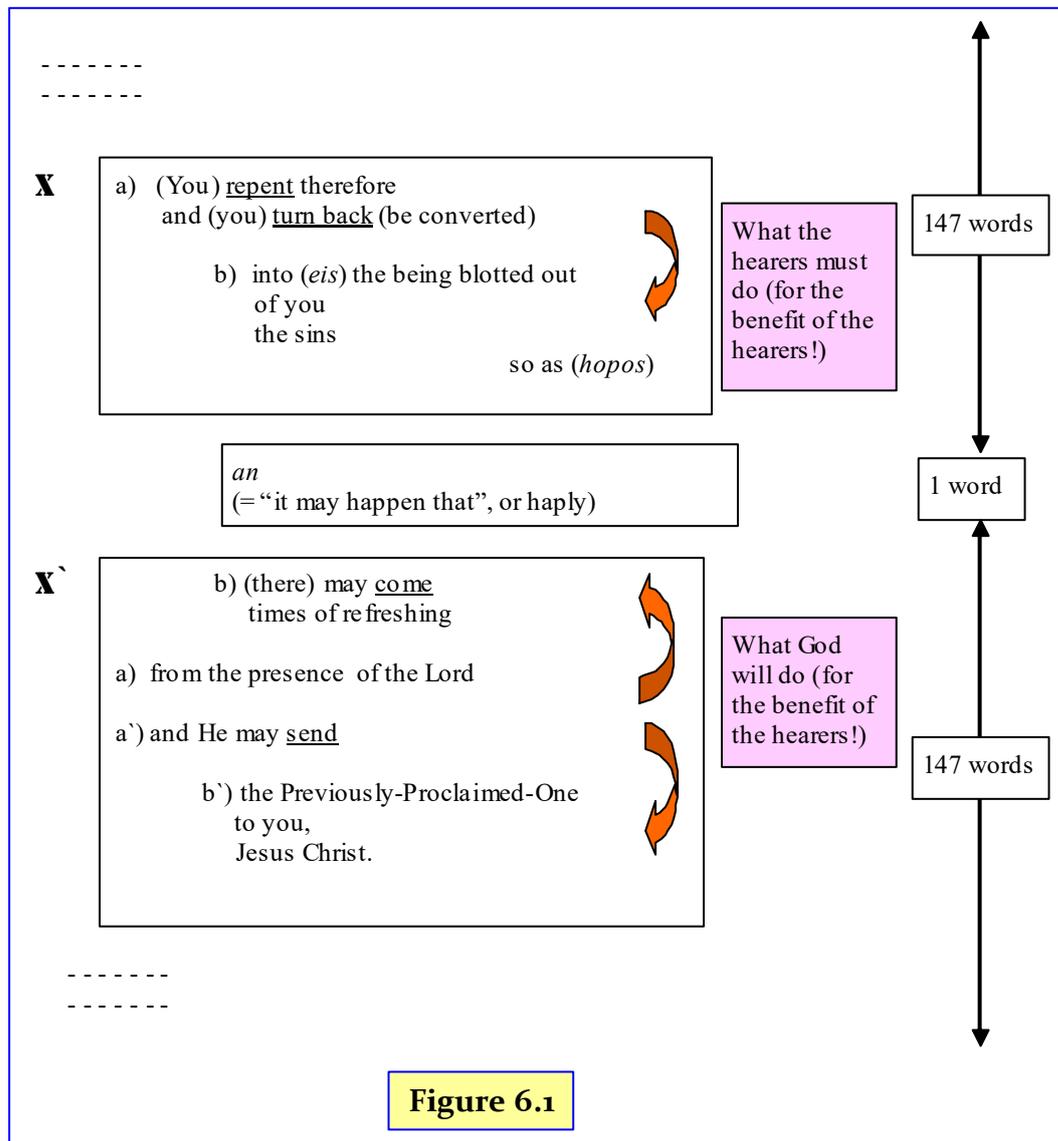
The interesting aspect to me is that, although this centre does not correspond to the thematic centre, (i.e. the “transition section”), it does occur at the central climax or “goal” of the sermon where Peter is telling the hearers what they must do, and what they will receive if they do so!

Here then is the centre of the sermon from what I suppose could be called an *existential* perspective in the sense used by John Frame in his *Systematic Theology* (p. 33). This centre is illustrated in the diagram on the next page (Figure 6.1):

Notes:

1) Although the passages on either side of the centre (i.e. what the hearers must do and what God will do) don’t match up by word count, they do have an interesting (and complicated!) structure. I don’t think a single diagram can really do justice to this, but I will try to describe some features of this structure in what follows:

2) I have called the two halves of the structure X and X’. we note that there are two main verbs in X and two main verbs in X’. Thus, in X, two related actions are required by the hearers—to repent and to “turn back” or “turn around”. Together, these two related actions procure a single result—the “blotting out of your sins”. Corresponding to this in X’, there are two related actions by the Lord God, but each of these procures a result, though the two results are related. As a consequence, the second half of our structure, X’, can be analysed as “structurally double” compared with



X.

Now, of course, the blotting out of sins is God’s action too, even though this is not stated, but the overall structure is that God “matches” man—two actions for two actions—but the results of God’s two actions are two blessings for man, and even the single result of man’s two actions is actually God’s doing too!! God out-does us at every turn, and He wants us to be involved and graciously allows us to play our part! There is a theological order to X and X’ too—an *ordo salutis*, but the structure binds together man’s actions and God’s responses very closely, so, structurally, we could expect all the three blessings described to follow closely on repentance and turning back—not for one or more blessing to be separated by great intervals of time as in many commentaries (which often do not look

all that closely at “structure as an aid to exegesis”). The hearers’ action results in a blessing that is the “removal of a negative”, (i.e. the blotting out of sins); the blessings from God are both “positive” blessings times of refreshing and the sending of Jesus Christ.

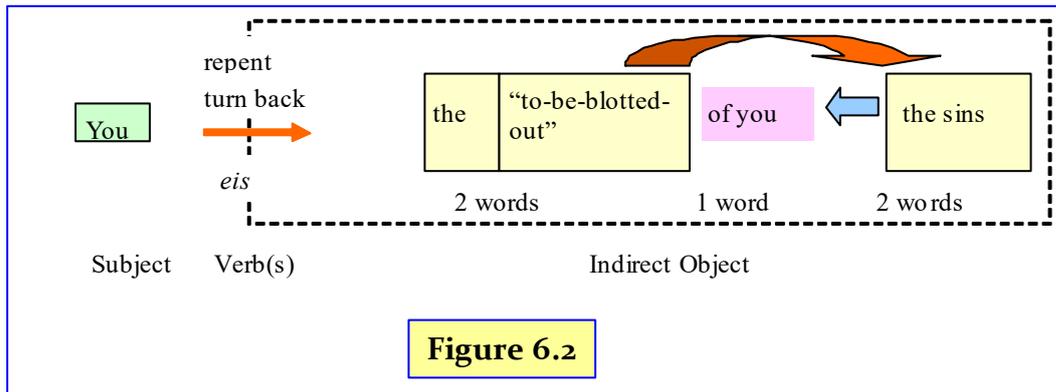
3) The first action of X` is described passively—times of refreshing come from God’s presence, and the second is described actively—He sends Jesus Christ. In this way, X` has an “internal” chiasmic aspect, with God at the centre and the blessings that come from Him are on either side. By expressing the first blessing in passive terms, the “blessing” itself (i.e. the times of refreshing) “travels backwards through the text” since its source or origin, i.e. the presence of the Lord, appears *after* the blessing, not before. This “inversion” of meaning relative to word order in the upper half of X` enhances the chiasmic aspect of X` - since in the second half of X` the normal forwards direction of meaning is restored.

4) Although the times of refreshing come from the presence of the Lord, God does not specifically say that He is sending them. Thus, there is an alternative structure which sees repentance and the blotting out of sins ascribed primarily to Peter’s hearers, and the sending of Jesus to an action by God but which leaves “the times of refreshing” in the middle, and they “come”, without the “motive force” being specified. God again is graciously prepared to be seen as acting as a “partner” in these verses, even though He really does everything apart from the specific act of repentance and turning back (and, we know from elsewhere in Scripture that He even gives grace for that—though this is not stated in our text!)

5) I would like now to look a little closer at the grammatical aspects of X and X`. First of all, we see that X employs straightforward word order—subject—verb—indirect object. However, in Greek, subject and verb can be combined into a single word, where English uses two words. Thus the command “You repent!” or “Repent ye!” is two words in English, but the single word, *metanoesate* in Greek. However, I’ll use the English equivalent in the following analysis, whilst bearing in mind that Greek verbs put the verb stem first and this is followed by the subject ending. (If the subject needs to be emphasised, it can be given as a separate noun in addition to its presence *in* the verb’s subject ending).

So, we can represent X as follows (please see Figure 6.2 on the next page):

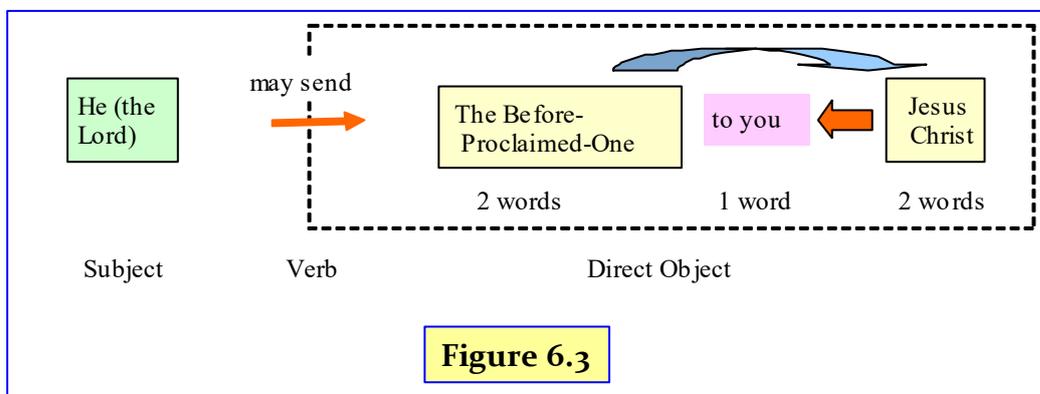
Although this sounds a bit odd in English, the commands repent and turn around in Greek here have a “direction” represented by the Greek word *eis* which means “into”. The sense here, I think is that the repentance “points



into” or “results in” or “creates” the (rather complicated!) “indirect object” in the above diagram. The “idiomatic” grammar here is complicated (at least to me!) although it is explained in my Greek textbook under the heading “aorist infinitive with preposition! The Greek word for “to have been blotted out” or “to be blotted out” is a passive aorist infinitive verb. Here however, I suggest, it is functioning either a) as a noun which is in apposition to “the sins” or alternatively b) that it sort of acts like an adjective—repentance creates a situation in which the sins “of you” are ones which are characterised by “being blotted out” or “having-been-blotted-out”. The net result is that the condition of “having-been-blotted-out” is attached or applied to “the sins (of you)” in the sentence. Or finally, (and I think, equivalently), c) it functions as a verb: “the sins of you are blotted out.”

In the diagram, the red block arrow indicates the “movement” resulting from the main verb, and the blue block arrow indicates the “point of attachment” of the little prepositional “phrase” “of you”.

The lower half of X' can be represented in an analogous manner as shown below (Figure 6.3). This time however, there is a direct object, rather than an indirect object.



Here, the basic structure is the same as before, namely,

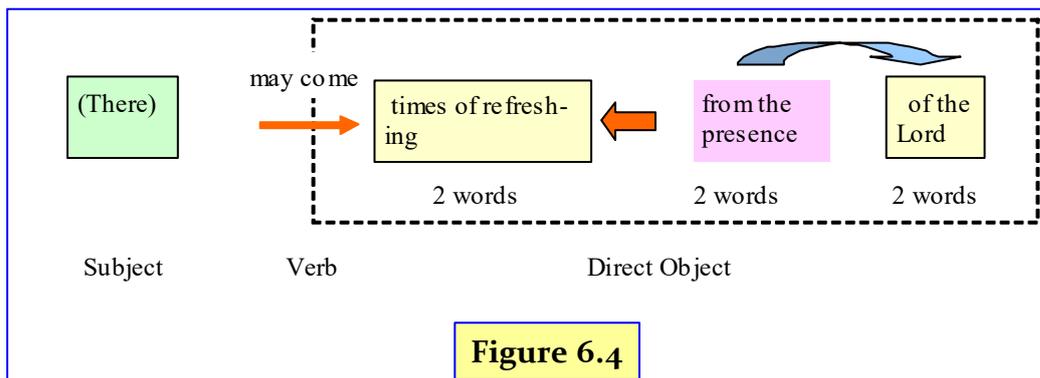
Subject+Verb - Verbal noun - prepositional phrase - noun

Although the structure is analogous, the interactions of the various elements differ from those in X. This time, the “movement” produced by the main verb is (as I am interpreting the grammar of the text, - though as noted, this is a minority viewpoint) from Jesus Christ to “you” - hence the red block arrow. The blue arrow indicates the “point of attachment” of the remaining element—this time “the Before Proclaimed One” which is a perfect passive participle— a verbal adjective functioning as a noun which is in apposition to Jesus Christ.

6) Let us now look at the upper half of X` :

(There) may come times of refreshing from [the] presence of the Lord.

The diagram for this is shown below (Figure 6.4):



As with the two previous structures, the verb (in this case, “may come”), comes at the beginning. This creates the “movement” of the “times of refreshing” from the Lord’s presence. We note that there is, again, an analogous structure:

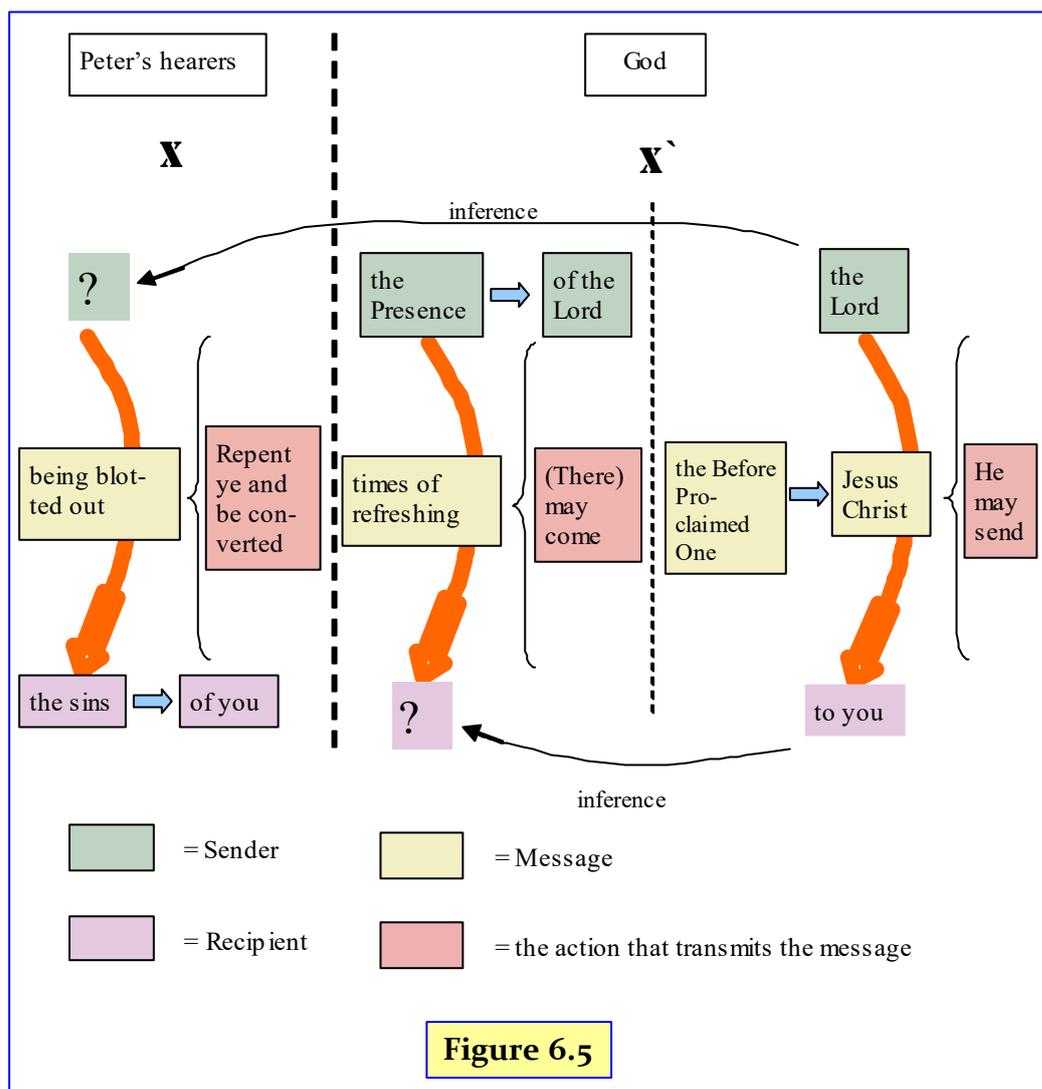
Subject+Verb - noun (with verbal “nuance”) - prepositional phrase - noun

Again we also note that there is a difference in the way the various elements interact.

The main verb, “may come”, results in a movement (red block arrow) - this time, “from the Presence” - and the blue block arrow indicates the

point of attachment of the remaining element of the structure—in this case “of the Lord”. The expression, “times of refreshing” is, as in the previous analogous instances, basically a noun—“times” - with the attached single word prepositional phrase (or genitive noun) “of refreshing”. It is this latter, which functions as an adjectival participle, and which provides the “dynamic”, verb-like, aspect in this element of the structure.

7) I would like now to present our three sections (X and the upper and lower halves of X') side-by-side in diagrammatic form in order to illustrate a couple of further structural observations. This diagram is based on the idea of the transmission of a message. There are four elements, a sender, a receiver, a message (these are all nouns) and the action that produces the transmission of the message from the sender to the receiver (a verb (plus its associated subject)). Here (Figure 6.5 below) is the diagram on which these observations will be based.



In X, the sender is missing, but there is a “double recipient”. In the upper half of X', the recipient is missing, but there is a double sender. In the lower half of X', there is a single sender and a single recipient, but there is a “double message” - so this, I suggest, “completes what is missing” as well as providing an additional element—the double message. If we follow the cues here, then we might reasonably infer that it is the Lord who is the sender of the blotting out of the sins, and it is “you” who are the recipients of the times of refreshing.

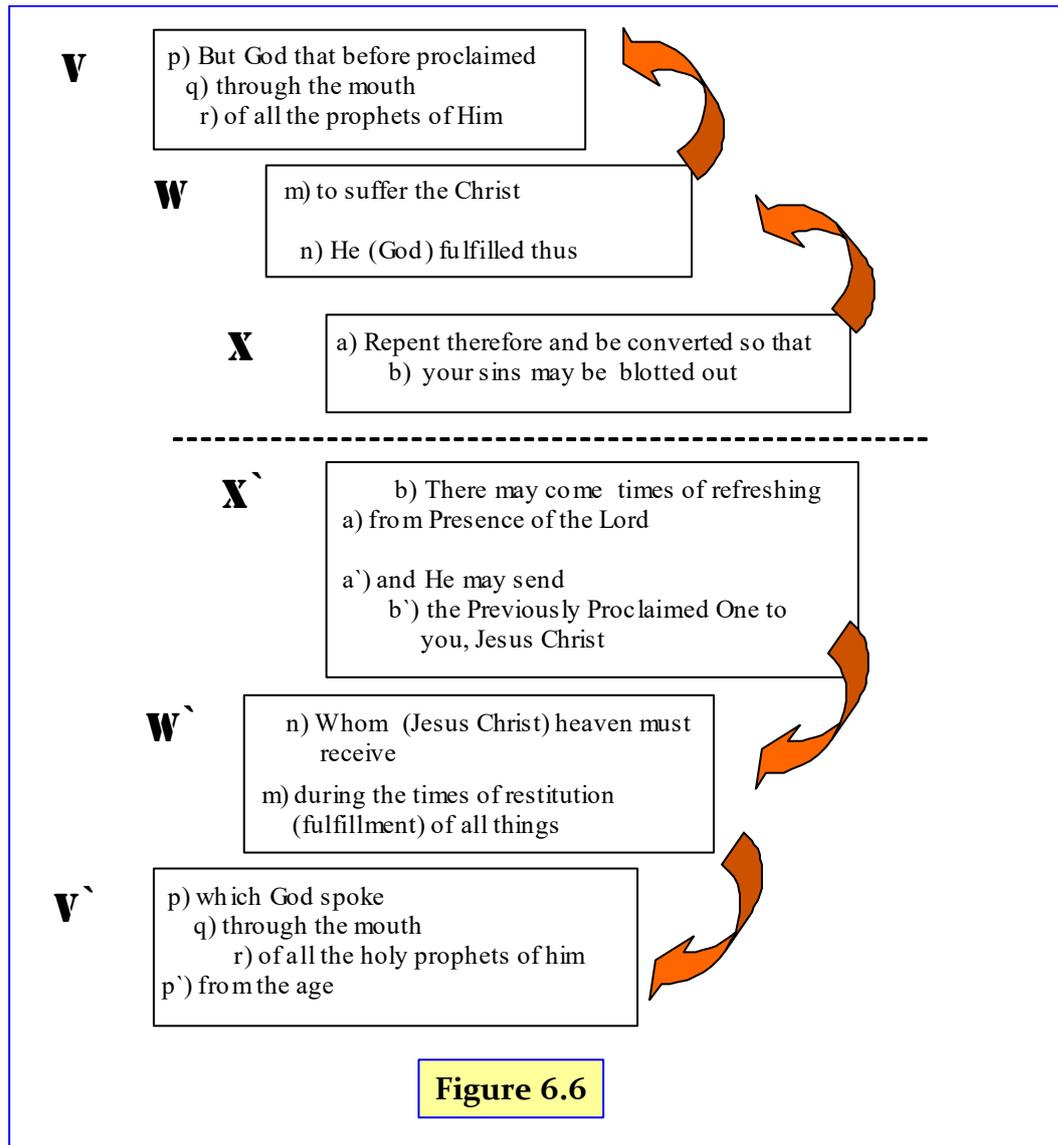
As a final point, we note that there are two “transmitting” verbs associated with Peter’s hearers (repent and be converted) and two associated with God—the coming of times of refreshing and the sending of Jesus Christ.

8) The structure that we have been looking at, X and X' actually I think forms the centre of a bigger structure: X and X' are enclosed within passages that speak of the fulfilling of prophecy. The diagram for this is given on the next page (Figure 6.6).

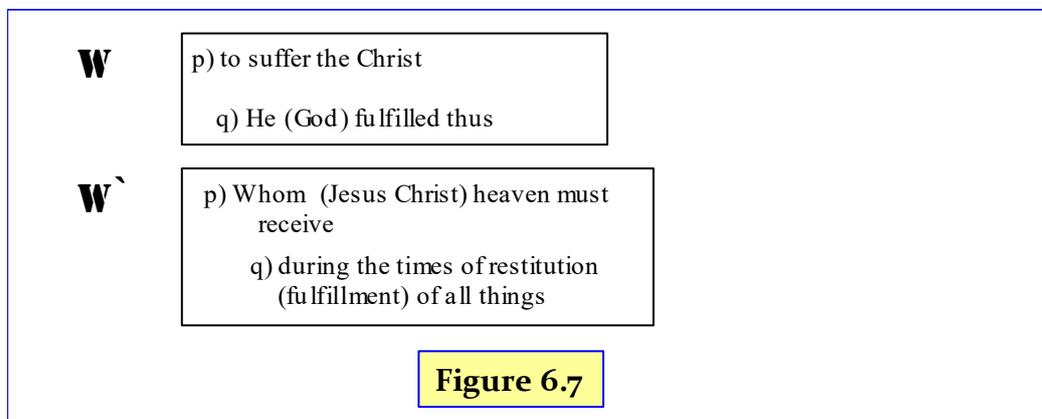
Briefly, working backwards from the centre, the blotting out of sins in X is consequent upon the suffering of Christ, W, which in turn was previously proclaimed by God through the prophets, V. Similarly, working forwards from the centre, the blessings in X' are consequent upon Christ’s ascension to heaven, Y', which in turn had been previously spoken by God through the prophets.

In this analysis then, the work of Christ and God is divided into 1) Christ’s past work on the cross through which God fulfilled what had been previously prophesied and which removes the “negative” of sin for Peter’s hearers if they repent in the present, and 2) the present (relative to Peter and his hearers) “positive” work of God and Christ in refreshing and in the sending Christ as a result of Christ’s reception into heaven during the times of restitution, again in fulfillment of prophecy.

I would just like to finish this little section by noting that W and W' have an interesting “cross-relation”. In the Figure 6.6, W and W' are shown as having a chiasmic structure. Here Wm), the suffering of Christ, and W'm), the restitution of all things, correspond since Wm) was prophesied in V and W'm) was prophesied in V'. Also Wn) and W'n) correspond since they both describe the role of God (in Wn) and heaven (which is an indirect way of referring to God) (in W'n) in the fulfillments of the respective prophecies.



However, W and W' can perhaps also be seen to have a parallel structure as shown on below (Figure 6.7):

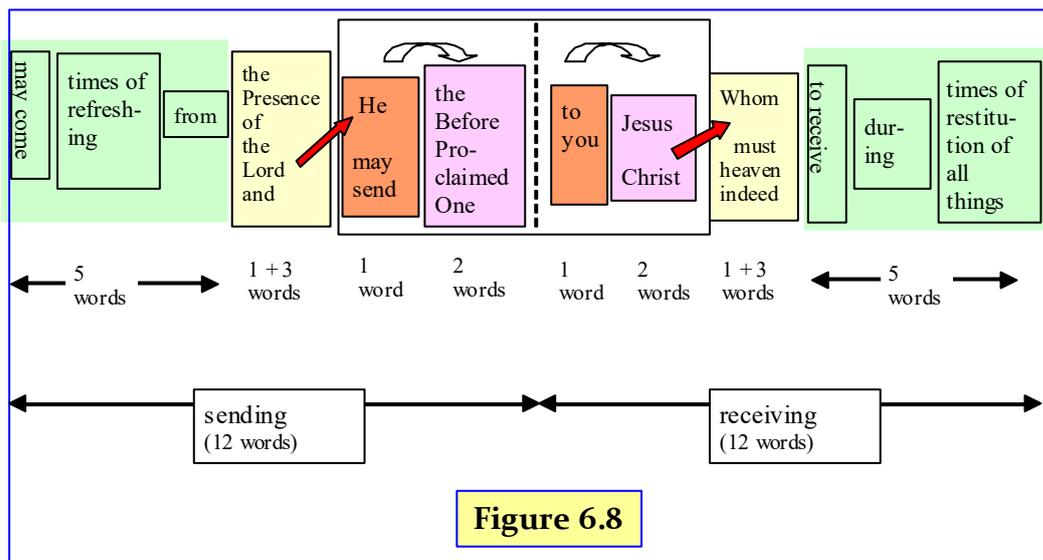


Here, Wp) and W`p) correspond since they both refer to Christ, and in which Christ is “passive” - He suffers and He is received. Also Wq) and W`q) correspond since they both refer to fulfilling or establishing something previously prophesied.

A Chiastic Sub-Structure in X` and W` Based on “Sending” and “Receiving” in Verses 19b-21a:

Now I would like to suggest another chiastic structure in this same general area of Peter’s sermon. It consists of all the additional blessings that are described after the hearers’ repentance and the blessing of the blotting out of their sins.— that is, it is made up of the sub-sections previously labelled X` and W` .

This chiastic structure centres on the blessing of the sending of Jesus Christ and is shown below (Figure 6.8):



Notes on Figure 6.8

1) There are 12 words in the “sending” half and 12 words in the “receiving” half of the chiasm. In the sending half, there are two sendings—both initiated by the Lord or the Presence of the Lord. These are the sending of times of refreshing and the sending of Jesus Christ. This is appropriate since, “Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights” (James 1:17). In the “receiving” half, there are two receivings both of Jesus Christ. In the first, He is received by “you” - the hearers—and in the second, He is received by heaven. These are deep ideas, since Jesus first came down at the Incarnation, but then He as-

cended at the resurrection and ascension, and, following this, He remains in heaven whilst He simultaneously comes to us in various ways (e.g. Rev. 3:20)—as I hope to (attempt to) discuss later. Scripture teaches, I think, that this state of affairs will last during the entire Church Age until the final consummation of all things, but that Christ also came in a very important way in judgement and to inaugurate definitively His Messianic Rule with the final abolishing of the Old Covenant in AD 70.

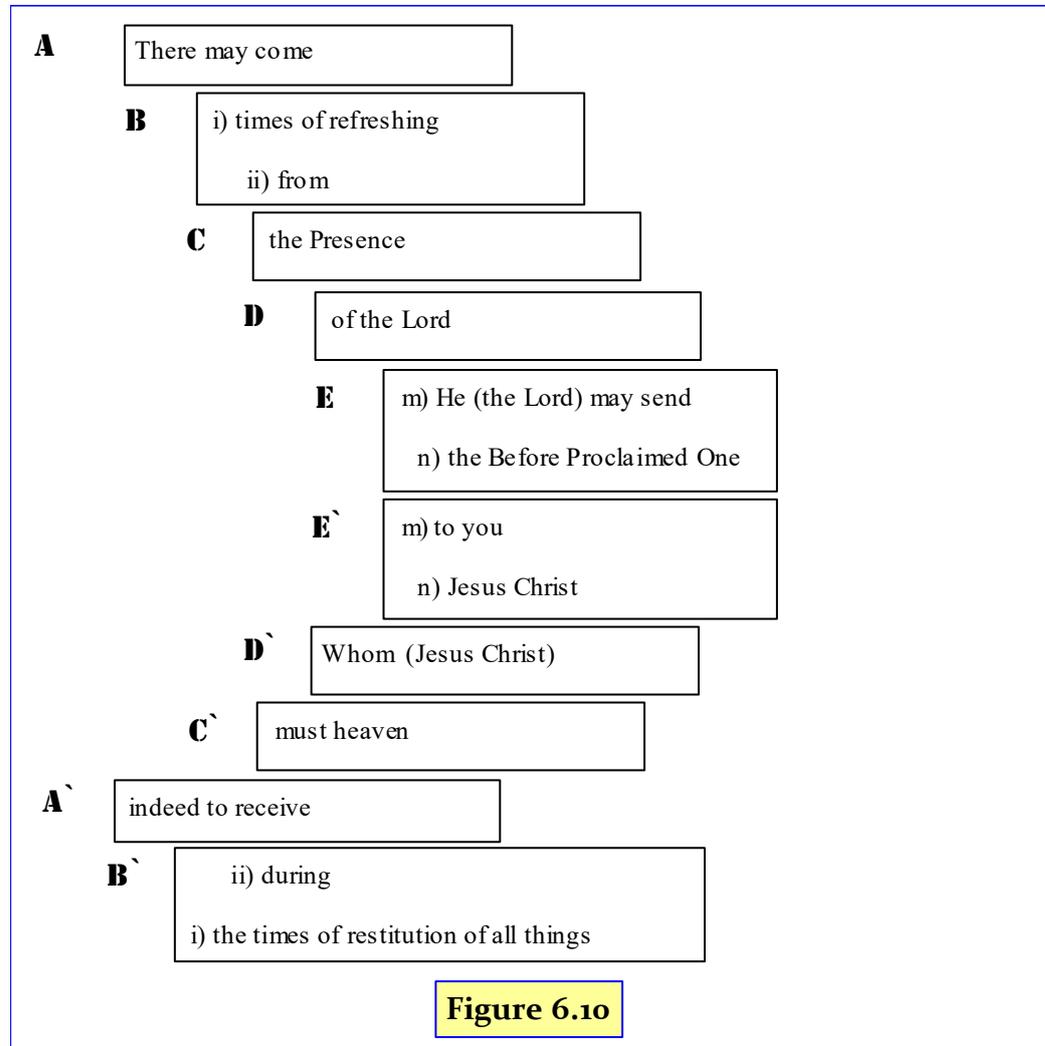
2) We note that Lord-Lord and Jesus-Jesus transitions correspond in the two sections (this is indicated by the red arrows).

3) I think that the various verbs in this structure—come, send and receive all have the sense of an action at a point in time with an on-going continuation of the situation brought into being by that action. Thus, the times of refreshing come at a point in time, (when the hearers repent) but they continue to act from then on. Likewise, Jesus Christ is sent to the believing hearers (presumably at the same time), and then He remains with them. Similarly, heaven receives Jesus Christ (at the ascension) and He remains “received” in heaven during the times of restitution. We will note later that the times of refreshing may correspond with the Sending of the Holy Spirit (when we briefly compare this sermon with Peter’s earlier Pentecost sermon).

4) The times of refreshing are thus associated with the Lord who sends them to people on earth, and the times of restitution are associated with Jesus in heaven. The times of refreshment and times of restitution thus correspond, but in complicated ways. From the limited structural perspective of the present discussion, the times of refreshing and the times of restitution are linked by the central component of Figure 6.8—the Lord’s “sending to you the Before-Proclaimed-One Jesus Christ”. In the diagram, these linkages take place via the “red arrows” representing the “Lord-Lord” and “Jesus-Jesus” transitions as already noted. The “stairway” between earth and heaven is Jesus Christ Who, in being sent, is the means by which the Father in heaven blesses the earth and Who, in being ascended, is the means by which God rules the earth. This is explored further in the next chapter, Chapter 7.

5) As well as the “individual” call to Peter’s hearers, whose results are indicated above, I suggest there is a “national” call at the same time. Thus, the “times of refreshing” refer to the blessing that the believing and repentant part of Israel receives under the New Covenant, and Jesus is likewise sent to them “in a good way”. When the Lord comes in judgement on Jerusalem and Israel in AD 70, He is also sent to and for His own, and for their “redemption” (e.g. Luke 21:28). Interestingly, the word for refreshing often

7) The chiasmic structure of Figure 8:8 can also be set out in the “conventional” way as shown in the diagram below (Figure 6.10):



A Final Note

In this chapter, we started off by using a word count of 295 words to arrive at the centre of the sermon shown in Figure 6.1. If however, we include the seven words (in Greek), “And seeing, Peter said to the people” which introduce the sermon, we would arrive at a total of 302 words, and so the sermon would be divided into two equal sections of 151 words each. Interestingly, this division appears to be significant also since at the very centre are the four words (again in Greek) “blotting out of you // the sins” which encapsulates the immediate aim of Peter’s sermon - a result produced by the people’s repentance and leading to heaven’s blessings for them—

spiritual refreshment and the sending of Jesus Christ.

The middle eight words using this word count are :

εἰς τὸ ἐξαλειφθῆναι ὑμῶν // τὰς ἀμαρτίας, ὅπως ἂν
for the blotting out of you the sins so that haply
----- 151 words-----><----- 151 words-----

Again, this is surely a fitting central point for the sermon!

