

❖Appendix❖

Literary Design in the Book of Daniel

Parallelism is a characteristic feature of Hebrew poetry. Each structural unit is balanced by another with synonymous, complementary, or antithetical meaning. The units paired in this manner may be lines, stanzas, or even larger sections. For the purposes of our discussion, two parallel units will be called a pairing, and the two members of a pairing will be called branches. Most of the sayings in Proverbs are parallel couplets. For example,

Treasures of wickedness profiteth nothing: but righteousness delivereth from death.

Proverbs 10:2

In more ambitious poetic structures, such as we find throughout the Psalms and the prophetic books of Isaiah and Daniel, parallel branches may be separated from each other and fitted into a larger pattern. A poem containing two pairings (the branches of the first designated A and A', the branches of the second designated B and B') might exhibit either the pattern ABA'B', which is known as a step parallelism, or the pattern ABB'A', which is known as an introversion, inversion,¹ chiasmus,² or palinostrophe.³

As noted in the introduction to this commentary, the whole book of Daniel is built on a framework of inverted parallelisms. Our purpose here is not to review the large plan of the book, but to show that poetic design is pervasive. Ernest Lucas finds chiastic structure in chapters 1, 3, 5, 6, and 7.⁴

In chapter 1, for example, he uncovers the pattern ABCB'A'. Yet this is an oversimplification. The actual structure retains parallelism down to small details. The true pattern is an elaboration of ABCDD'C'B'A'.

A. Nebuchadnezzar's appearance on the scene (v. 1)

B. Seeming superiority of his Babylonian god to the God of Israel (v. 2)

C1. Outstanding qualifications of the Hebrew captives (vv. 3-4)

C2. Initiation of training to enter the king's service (v. 5)

C3. Four captives named (vv. 6–7)

D1. Daniel's approach to Ashpenaz (v. 8)

D2. Daniel's enjoyment of exceptional favor (v. 9)

D1'. Ashpenaz's response (v. 10)

D'1*. Daniel's approach to Melzar (vv. 11–13)

D'2*. Melzar allows test to be carried out (vv. 14–15)

D'1'*. Melzar's response (v. 16)

C'1'. Outstanding qualifications of the Hebrew captives (v. 17)

C'2'. Entrance into the king's service (v. 18)

C'3'. Four captives named (v. 19)

B'. Actual superiority of Jewish captives to the wise men (v. 20)

A'. Cyrus' appearance on the scene (v. 21)

Again in chapter 3, Lucas misses the fine structure. He sees the pattern ABCDC'B'A'. Since the middle branch stands alone, without a balancing member, a poem of this kind would not be a chiasmus, strictly speaking, although it would still qualify as a palinstraphe. Yet Kenneth E. Bailey has shown that a much more complex scheme governs the details of verses 13 to 30.

The king in anger commands that the three be brought in.

Serve my God or you will be punished.

Who is the God who can deliver you?

The God we serve can deliver us from the king.

We will not serve or worship the golden image.

The fire is heated seven times.

The king orders the three bound and cast into the fire.

The three are bound and cast into the fire.

The king asks if three men were cast into the fire.

The king sees a fourth like a son of man.

The king orders the three to come out.
The three come out.

The fire did not touch them.

The God of the three delivered them from the king.
They did not serve or worship any God except God.

Speak against the God of the three and you will be punished.
There is no other God who can deliver in this way.

The king promotes the three in Babylon.⁵

A central climax is framed on either side by six branches in opposite order. Several corresponding pairs exhibit ABA'B' structure.

We will append to Bailey's analysis the observation that verses 1 through 12 of the same chapter also have poetic structure. They are molded to exhibit step parallelism.

Background (v. 1)

A. Order to assemble (v. 2)

B. Compliance (v. 3)

A'. Cry of the herald (vv. 4–6)

1. Salutation of the assembled crowd (v. 4)

2. Command to worship the image (v. 5)

3. Punishment for noncompliance (v. 6)

B'. General compliance (v. 7)

Background (v. 8)

A". Accusation brought by the Chaldeans (vv. 9–12)

1'. Salutation of Nebuchadnezzar (v. 9)

2'. Command restated (v. 10)

3'. Punishment restated (v. 11)

B". Noncompliance charged against the three (v. 12)

Although the composition of the book is everywhere controlled by a poetic scheme, the underlying design is never obtrusive. It varies from section to section, and it is always flexible enough to allow the occasional insertion of statements that do not quite fit (an example being the background material noted in the previous outline). Nevertheless, once elucidated, the structure of each section is undeniable.

The impression given by Lucas is that parallelism is missing from the grand visions recorded in chapters 8 through 12. Yet in fact these are poetic compositions as well. The most notable example is the prophecy of the sixty-nine weeks.

Gabriel's message recorded in Daniel 9 has an ingeniously intricate design appropriate to its heavenly origin. It is ornamented with numerous repetitions of both thoughts and words, the effect being to create a giant step parallelism with the form ABCDEA'B'C'D'E'.

A. O Daniel, I am now come forth to give thee skill and understanding.

B. At the beginning of thy supplications the commandment came forth,

(A*. and I am come to shew thee; . . . : therefore understand the matter. . . .)

- C1. Seventy weeks are determined
- 2. upon thy people
- 3. and upon thy holy city.

- D1. to finish the transgression,
- 2. and to make an end of sins,
- 3. and to make reconciliation for iniquity,

- E1. and to bring in everlasting righteousness,
- 2. and to seal up the vision and prophecy,
- 3. and to anoint the most Holy.

A'. Know therefore and understand.

B'. that from the going forth of the commandment

- C'3'. to restore and to build Jerusalem
- 2'. unto the Messiah the Prince
- 1'. shall be seven weeks, and threescore and two weeks:

D'4. the street shall be built again, and the wall, even in troublous times.

5. And after threescore and two weeks shall Messiah be cut off. . . . :

4'a. and the people . . . shall destroy the city and the sanctuary;

a'. and the end thereof . . . , and unto the end of the war desolations. . . .

E'4. And he shall confirm the covenant with many for one week:

5. and . . . he shall cause the sacrifice and the oblation to cease,

4'a. and . . . [upon a wing as] abominations . . . [a desolator],

a'. . . . that determined shall be poured upon the . . . [desolator].

Branches A and A' contain direct exhortation to Daniel. B and B' refer to commandments from an unnamed source. C and C' pinpoint the

exact time of certain future events and tell something about who or what will be involved. D and D' speak of events at or before the first advent of Christ, E and E' of events ushering in His second advent.

So far we have elucidated only the two main series of steps. But poetic craftsmanship has not neglected the details. After B is inserted a parenthetical line parallel to A. As a result, the introduction to the message is a complete, symmetrical unit set apart from what follows. The ABA pattern at the beginning of the message is balanced at the end by the ABA pattern exhibited within both D' and E'. C consists of three branches that are inverted in C'. Branches 1 and 1' specify a term of weeks. Branch 2', which speaks of the King, is complementary to 2, which speaks of the people He will govern. Branches 3 and 3' are alike in their reference to Jerusalem. D and D' both have three branches, as do both E and E'. D' and E' are very similar not only in structure but also in the ideas they set forth. In D'4 the city rises, in D'5 the Messiah is rejected, and in D'4' the city falls. In E'4 the Antichrist rises, in E'5 God is rejected, and in E'4' the Antichrist falls. Notice the ABA pattern in each sequence. Notice also in each sequence that the climax, foretelling divine judgment, is expanded into a lengthy couplet.

Notes

Appendix 1

¹Bullinger, 12–13.

²Bailey, 48–49; Archer, *Old Testament*, 443.

³Ernest Lucas, *Daniel*, vol. 20 of *Apollos Old Testament Commentary* (Leicester, England: Apollos, 2002), 163–164.

⁴*Ibid.*, 48–49, 86, 124, 146, 163–164.

⁵Bailey, 51.