

FURTHER LITERARY STRUCTURES IN DANIEL 2-7: AN ANALYSIS OF DANIEL 4

WILLIAM H. SHEA
Andrews University

An important contribution to the study of the literary structure of Daniel was published in 1972 by A. Lenglet, wherein he noted that the narratives of the Aramaic section of the book (2:4-7:28) are arranged in a chiasmic order.¹ In this arrangement, the two outline prophecies of the rise and fall of the successive nations, as given in Dan 2 and Dan 7, are located at the opposite ends of this chiasmic section. Dan 3 and Dan 6, which describe, respectively, the persecution of the three Hebrew worthies in the fiery furnace and Daniel in the lion's den, also balance each other as the intermediate blocks of this chiasm. Finally, Dan 4 and Dan 5 are juxtaposed at the center of the chiasm, with prophecies about two Neo-Babylonian kings—Nebuchadnezzar's seven years of insanity in the first case, and Belshazzar's loss of the kingdom to the Persians in the second. These relations can be outlined as follows:

C. Dan 4: Nebuchadnezzar's Insanity	C'. Dan 5: Belshazzar's Downfall
B. Dan 3: Fiery-furnace Persecution	B'. Dan 6: Lions'-den Persecution
A. Dan 2: Prophecy of the Nations	A'. Dan 7: Prophecy of the Nations

Once this succession of literary relations has been outlined, it raises a corollary line of inquiry. If this large-scale chiasm is present in Dan 2-7, then there probably should be other chiasmic structures on a smaller scale located within this section. My proposal is that there are indeed such structures and that two of them are located in the narratives of Dan 4 and Dan 5. In the present article, I shall deal with the structure of chap. 4, and in a following article I shall

¹A. Lenglet, "La structure litteraire de Daniel 2-7." *Bib* 53 (1972): 169-190.

examine the structure of chap. 5 and indicate how the structures of both chapters are to be incorporated into the overall chiasm of Dan 2-7 that has been outlined above.

1. *The Blocs of Chiastic Material in Daniel 4*

Prologue and Epilogue

An immediate clue to the fact that chap. 4 is in chiastic form is evident, it appears to me, on the basis of the nature and relationship of the two pieces of poetry found in the prologue (vss. 1-3) and epilogue (vss. 34-37) to this narrative.² The pieces of poetry are in vs. 3 and vss. 34d-35, respectively. Just the very fact that they are present in these two passages is already evidence for some kind of relationship between them, even if this is only as an *inclusio* to the narrative.

The relationship is seen to be more close, however, when the contents of these poetic pieces are compared. What emerges from such a comparison is the fact that the last half of the first poetic unit is the direct equivalent of the first half of the second, with but one minor alteration—namely, that the terms “kingdom” and “dominion” have been reversed in their order of mention. This correspondence both in *form* and in major *items of thought* indicates that these two literary sections can be correlated in a chiastic relationship. In fact, the alternation of “kingdom” and “dominion” is itself a chiastic arrangement of the major items of thought.

Thus, what we find here is a chiasm within a chiasm: The chiasm by content is located within the chiasm by form. These relationships can be demonstrated best by comparing the context of the two sections alongside of each other (here given in English translation):

Dan 4:3

How great are his signs,
how mighty his wonders!

His kingdom is an everlasting
kingdom,
and his dominion is from gen-
eration to generation.

Dan 4:34d-35

For his dominion is an everlasting dominion,
and his kingdom endures from generation
to generation.

²All verses mentioned in this article follow the versification of the English Bible. Translations throughout are from the RSV.

All the inhabitants of the earth are
 accounted as nothing;
 and he does according to his will in the
 host of heaven
 and among the inhabitants of the earth;
 And none can stay his hand
 or say to him, "What doest thou?"

It should be noted, furthermore, that the second of these two poetic pieces is in itself also chiasmatically arranged. First of all, it is chiasmic by *form* in that it is composed of a bicolon followed by a tricolon, which in turn is followed by another bicolon. The tricolon at the center of this piece is chiasmic, too, by *content*: It begins with a reference to the inhabitants of earth, its center consists of a reference to the host of heaven, and it concludes with mention again of the inhabitants of earth. All of this can be demonstrated by setting in Dan 4:34d-35 out in the following poetic form (italics supplied in order to highlight this central chiasm):

For his dominion is an everlasting dominion,
 and his kingdom endures from generation to generation;
 All the *inhabitants of the earth* are accounted as nothing;
 and he does according to his will in the *host of heaven*
 and among the *inhabitants of the earth*;
 And none can stay his hand
 or say to him, "What doest thou?"

The Central Passages: Recital and Interpretation of the Dream

With the relation of these small commencing and concluding blocs identified, the larger blocs of this narrative can now be examined for any similar relations. An obvious place to take up this task is at the center of the narrative, where two major passages are joined—Nebuchadnezzar's recital of the dream which he had seen (vss. 10-17) and Daniel's interpretation of that dream (vss. 20-26). These can be compared as follows:

Dan 4:10-17

¹⁰"The visions of my head as I lay in bed were these: I saw, and behold, a tree in the midst of the earth; and its

Dan 4:20-26

²⁰"The tree you saw, which grew and became strong, so that its top reached to heaven, and it was visible to

height was great. ¹¹The tree grew and became strong, and its top reached to heaven, and it was visible to the end of the whole earth. ¹²Its leaves were fair and its fruit abundant, and it was food for all. The beasts of the field found shade under it, and the birds of the air dwelt in its branches, and all flesh was fed from it.

¹³"I saw in the visions of my head as I lay in bed, and behold, a watcher, a holy one, came down from heaven. ¹⁴He cried aloud and said thus, 'Hew down the tree and cut off its branches, strip off its leaves and scatter its fruit; let the beasts flee from under it and the birds from its branches. ¹⁵But leave the stump of its roots in the earth, bound with a band of iron and bronze, amid the tender grass of the field. Let him be wet with the dew of heaven; let his lot be with the beasts in the grass of the earth; ¹⁶let his mind be changed from a man's, and let a beast's mind be given to him; and let seven times pass over him.

¹⁷"The sentence is by the decree of the watchers, the decision by the word of the holy ones, to the end that the living may know that the Most High rules the kingdom of men, and gives it to whom he will, and sets over it the lowliest of men.'"

the end of the whole earth; ²¹whose leaves were fair and its fruit abundant, and in which was food for all; under which beasts of the field found shade, and in whose branches the birds of the air dwelt—²²it is you, O king, who have grown and become strong. Your greatness has grown and reaches to heaven, and your dominion to the ends of the earth.

²³"And whereas the king saw a watcher, a holy one, coming down from heaven and saying, 'Hew down the tree and destroy it, but leave the stump of its roots in the earth, bound with a band of iron and bronze, in the tender grass of the field; and let him be wet with the dew of heaven; and let his lot be with the beasts of the field, till seven times pass over him':

²⁴"This is the interpretation, O king: It is a decree of the Most High, which has come upon my lord the king, ²⁵that you shall be driven from among men, and your dwelling shall be with the beasts of the field; you shall be made to eat grass like an ox, and you shall be wet with the dew of heaven, and seven times shall pass over you, till you know that the Most High rules the kingdom of men, and gives it to whom he will. ²⁶And as it was commanded to leave the stump of the roots of the tree, your kingdom shall be sure for you from the time that you know that Heaven rules."

Since Daniel's interpretation follows Nebuchadnezzar's recital of the contents of his dream in order, it is obvious that much of the

phraseology should be quite similar—the first portion of each interpretive statement, at least. And this turns out to be the case. The language of the second passage is very much in parallel with that of the first passage. At the center of Dan 4, therefore, we find twin parallel passages consisting of the recital of the contents of the dream and the interpretation of the contents of the dream.

*The Intermediate Passages: The Receiving
and Fulfilling of the Dream*

The circumstances surrounding the receiving of the dream by Nebuchadnezzar are related in the passage which is located between the prologue and the recital of the contents of the dream (i.e., in vss. 4-7). In the balancing position in the second half of the narrative, between the interpretation of the dream and the epilogue, the description of the fulfillment of the dream is given (i.e., in vss. 28-33). These two passages are not directly related linguistically, but they are obviously directly related to each other thematically—as prophecy and fulfillment.

The second of these two intermediate passages, that which describes the fulfillment of the dream, is rather precisely delimited as a discrete linguistic unit by its shift from the first to the third person as the subject of the narration. This appears to have taken place for the evident reason that Nebuchadnezzar—the first-person narrator of the rest of this chapter—was not personally mentally responsible for an account of his actions while he was incapacitated.

It should be noted that both of these intermediate passages are also introduced with the king's name in the contextual setting of the palace in Babylon (vss. 4, 28-29). Moreover, both passages consist of three main elements, as follows:

Dan 4:4-7: Receiving the Dream

1. Setting (vss. 4-5)
2. Decree of the King (vss. 6-7)
3. Non-fulfillment, Chaldeans (vs. 7)

Dan 4:28-33: Fulfilling the Dream

1. Setting (vss. 28-30)
2. Decree of Heaven (vss. 31-32)
3. Fulfillment to Nebuchadnezzar (vs. 33)

Both of these passages contain repetitive and parallel phraseology within themselves. In the first case, the decree is for the wise men of Babylon in vs. 6, amplified in vs. 7 with the list of the “magicians, the enchanters, the Chaldeans, and the astrologers” as

the group that was supposed to be able to explain the dream to the king. The charge to this group is stated in the same way in both instances: namely, to make known to the king the interpretation of the dream (vss. 6b, 7b).

In the second passage, the decree of heaven is first enunciated to the king (vss. 31-32); and then in very similar terms, it is stated as fulfilled to him (vs. 33). Only in the final phrase of vs. 33 about Nebuchadnezzar's hair growing to be like eagles' feathers and his nails becoming like birds' claws does the fulfillment expand significantly upon the statement of the decree of heaven.

The Linking Verses: Dialogue Passages

All of the major building blocs of the chiasmic structure of Dan 4 are now in place, but it remains to put some "cement" between them. This cement consists of snatches of dialogue. Even with these minor bits and pieces, there is a chiasmic relationship.

The gap between the giving of the dream (vss. 4-7) and the king's recital of it (vss. 10-17) is filled by the king's direct address to Daniel (vss. 8-9). Daniel does not answer at this point in the narrative. In the balancing position in the literary structure of the narrative (vs. 27), the gap is filled by Daniel's exhortation to the king to practice righteousness, in hope that the days of the king's tranquility might be lengthened. In this case, no reply is made by the king to Daniel.

Thus, these two brief pieces of literary cement act as opposites with respect to the dialogue reported: The king speaks to Daniel in the first case, and Daniel does not reply; Daniel speaks to the king in the second case, and the king does not reply. As can readily be seen from the identification of the speakers in these passages, these two pieces of literary cement form complementary and chiasmically related components.

The same two speakers come together again at the center of this narrative of chap. 4, at the juncture between the recital of the dream by Nebuchadnezzar and its interpretation by Daniel. Here, the king speaks first, as he charges Daniel to interpret the dream, after the wise men have failed to do so (vs. 18). Then, seeing that Daniel is so dismayed by the interpretation of the dream, he urges Daniel not to be upset by the dream or by its interpretation (vs. 19a). Daniel then finally responds by wishing the consequences of the

interpretation of the dream to be upon Nebuchadnezzar's enemies (vs. 19b). Only after having said this does Daniel launch into the interpretation of the dream proper. Thus, a brief but genuine piece of dialogue appears at the center of this narrative, for the king speaks first and then Daniel responds.

The chiasmic pattern of the pieces of cement between the major blocs in this narrative can now be set forth as follows:

A'. *The King Speaks, Vss. 18-19a*

[Nebuchadnezzar:] ¹⁸"This dream I, King Nebuchadnezzar, saw. And you, O Belteshazzar, declare the interpretation, because all the wise men of my kingdom are not able to make known to me the interpretation, but you are able, for the spirit of the holy gods is in you."

¹⁹Then Daniel, whose name was Belteshazzar, was dismayed for a moment, and his thoughts alarmed him. The king said, "Belteshazzar, let not the dream or the interpretation alarm you."

A. *The King Alone Speaks, Vss. 8-9*

[Nebuchadnezzar:] ⁸"At last Daniel came in before me—he who was named Belteshazzar after the name of my god, and in whom is the spirit of the holy gods—and I told him the dream, saying, ⁹"O Belteshazzar, chief of the magicians, because I know that the spirit of the holy gods is in you and that no mystery is difficult for you, here is the dream which I saw; tell me its interpretation.'"

B'. *Daniel Replies, Vs. 19b*

Belteshazzar answered, "My lord, may the dream be for those who hate you and its interpretation for your enemies!"

B. *Daniel Alone Speaks, Vs. 27*

[Daniel:] "Therefore, O king, let my counsel be acceptable to you; break off your sins by practicing righteousness, and your iniquities by showing mercy to the oppressed, that there may perhaps be a lengthening of your tranquility."

The Prologue and the Epilogue Again

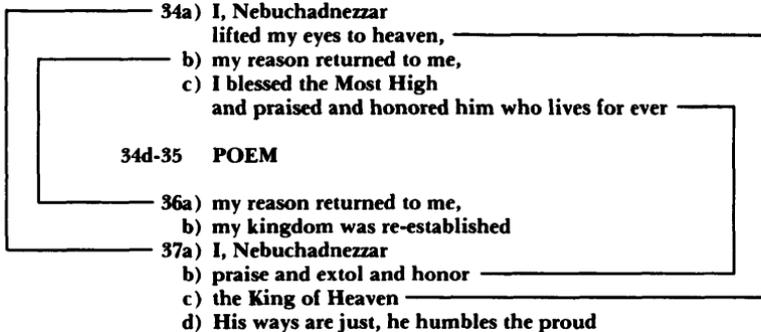
A preliminary consideration of the relation between the prologue and epilogue has already been given above. There are, however, some details in these two sections that require further examination. It has already been noted that the two poetic pieces

found within them are related to each other in a chiasmic fashion both by form and by content, but it should here be added that these two poetic pieces are also related to each other in chiasmic order according to their location within their respective literary units.

The prologue begins with a brief statement in prose (vss. 1-2), and this is followed by the brief unit of poetry (vs. 3). That unit of poetry comes at the end of the passage. In the epilogue, on the other hand, the piece of poetry is located near the commencement of the passage. Actually, the epilogue opens with a brief prose statement about Nebuchadnezzar's sanity returning to him (vs. 34a-b), followed by Nebuchadnezzar's praise of the Most High God, first briefly in prose (vs. 34c), and then in greater length in poetry (vss. 34d-35). Following this, the text contains a still longer passage of prose, which continues with a description of Nebuchadnezzar's restoration and concludes with further praise for the King of Heaven. Thus, the piece of poetry found within this passage is offset, since it is located between short and long pieces of prose; but the offset is towards the beginning of the epilogue, just as the piece of poetry in the prologue is found at the end of its section. And hence, these poetic pieces are related to each other chiasmically, not only according to form and content, but also location. Moreover, the second of them is constructed chiasmically within itself, as well.

Another relationship of that second piece of poetry to the epilogue in which it is found can be seen from relations between the prose passages which bracket it. They form an *inclusio* around the poetry. The relationships within the contents that are present here may be summarized as follows: In the first place, vs. 34a begins the narrative by telling of Nebuchadnezzar's lifting his eyes to *heaven*, while vs. 37 refers to God as the King of *heaven* (the only place in this narrative where he is referred to by that name). In the second place, Nebuchadnezzar declares, in vs. 34b, that "my reason returned to me," and he takes up the same statement at the beginning of vs. 36, after the poem of vss. 34d-35. And thirdly, Nebuchadnezzar also resumes, after the poetic section, his theme of praise to God which he began in prose preceding that poetry: After stating in vs. 34b that his reason had returned to him, Nebuchadnezzar continued in vs. 34c with the declaration that he "blessed the Most High, and praised and honored him who lives for ever"—a statement comparing directly with that in vs. 37, where

Nebuchadnezzar says, "Now I, Nebuchadnezzar, praise and extol and honor the King of Heaven." (It is interesting to note, too, that in both cases of adulation there are three verbs of praise employed.) The manner in which these prose statements in the epilogue enclose the poetic piece between them can be outlined as follows:



Only the two short statements in 36b and 37d, following the poem, are not related to statements made preceding the poem—namely, the statements concerning the re-establishment of the king and the reference to the justice of God. Thus, this brief poetic piece in 34d-35 is clearly enclosed by the frame or envelope construction present in the epilogue.

With these internal details of the epilogue described, we can now proceed to see how it relates to the prologue by overall content (the two have already been related by form, especially through their respective poetic pieces). As far as the central thrust of the contents of these two passages is concerned, the epilogue describes the state to which Nebuchadnezzar returned after the last portion of the prophecy about him was fulfilled—i.e., his restoration that had been foretold in the prophecy. The prologue describes his related action that stemmed from the vantage point of that restoration—namely, his report to the nations by way of reciting the signs and wonders that the Most High God had worked upon him. These two passages are thus related to each other as a description of the post-restoration state (epilogue) and the report that issued from that restored state (prologue).

2. Summary of the Structure in Daniel 4

With all of the main details in the literary structure of Dan 4 explored above, the findings from that examination can be summarized with the use of the following outline diagram:

THE CHIASTIC LITERARY STRUCTURE OF DANIEL 4

