

POETIC RELATIONS OF THE TIME PERIODS IN DAN 9:25

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English translations differ in the subjects with which they connect the time periods referred to in Dan 9:25. On the one hand, the KJV, ASV, NASB, NIV, MLB, and JB renderings follow the ancient versions (LXX, Theodotion, Vulgate, Syriac)¹ which indicate that the Messiah was to come at the end of the sixty-two week period. On the other hand, the RSV, NEB, AB, and others have translated this verse following the punctuation of the MT, which suggests that the Messiah was to come at the end of the seven-week period.

The more accurate of these two types of translations can be determined, in my opinion, through the previously unexplored avenue of poetic analysis.² Like other passages in the historical and prophetic chapters of Daniel (e.g., 2:20-23, 6:26-27, and 7:9-10, 13-14, 23-27, respectively), and like so much of the writing of other biblical prophets, Dan 9:24-27 is poetic in form. This is evident from how readily its structure and meter can be analyzed according to the canons of Hebrew poetry.

A transliteration of the consonantal Hebrew text of Dan 9:24-26a is given here as the basis for this type of analysis, followed by a rather literal English translation of the passage:

<i>Verse</i>	<i>Text</i>	<i>Stress accents³</i>	<i>Poetic units</i>
24a	šb'ym šb'ym nḥtk 'l-'mk w'l-'yr qdšk	3 } 3 }	Bicolon

¹For a discussion of this point, see G. F. Hasel, "The Seventy Weeks of Daniel 9:24-27," *Ministry Insert* (May, 1976), p. 15D.

²A stylistic analysis of Dan 9:24-27 has been published recently by J. Doukhan, "The Seventy Weeks of Dan 9: An Exegetical Study," *AUSS* 17 (1979): 1-22. Unfortunately, Doukhan eschewed analyzing this passage as poetry when that type of analysis would have lent considerable support to his line of argument.

³For the accentual system of analyzing the meter of Hebrew poetry see J. Ley, *Leitfaden der Metrik der hebräischen Poesie* (Bonn, 1887), E. Sievers, *Metrische Studien I-III* (1901-1907), and the KTAV reprint edition of G. B. Gray, *The Forms of Hebrew Poetry* (New York, 1972 [reprint of edition of 1915]), which includes a prolegomenon by D. N. Freedman that presents the alternative system of analyzing meter by counting syllables.

24b	<i>lkl' hḫš'</i>	2	} Tricolon
	<i>wlḫtm ḫt'wt</i>	2	
	<i>wlḫpr 'wn</i>	2	
24c	<i>wlḫby' ṣdq 'lmym</i>	3	} Tricolon
	<i>wlḫtm ḫzwon wnb'y'</i>	3	
	<i>wlmsḫ qdš qdšym</i>	3	
25a	<i>wtd' wtškl</i>	(2)	Anacrusis: extrametrical
25b	<i>mn-mš' dbr</i>	2	} Tricolon
	<i>lhšyb wlnwt yrwšlm</i>	3	
	<i>'d-mšyh ngyd</i>	2	
25c	<i>šb'ym šb'h</i>	2	} Bicolon
	<i>wšb'ym ššym wšnym</i>	3	
25d	<i>tšwb wnbnth</i>	2	} Tricolon
	<i>rḫwb whrwš</i>	2	
	<i>wbšwq h'tym</i>	2	
26a	<i>w'hry ḫšb'ym ššym wšnym</i>	4	} Bicolon
	<i>ykrṯ mšyh w'yn lw</i>	4	

Translation

- 24a Seventy weeks are cut off
upon your people and upon your holy city,
- 24b To finish the transgression,
and to make an end of sins,
and to atone for iniquity.
- 24c and to bring in everlasting righteousness,
and to seal up vision and prophet,
and to anoint the Holy of Holies.
- 25a Then know and understand:
- 25b From the going forth of the word
to restore and to build Jerusalem
unto Messiah the Prince,
- 25c (shall be) seven weeks
and sixty-two weeks.
- 25d It shall be restored and it shall be rebuilt,
square and moat,
but in hard-pressed times.
- 26a Then after the sixty-two weeks
The Messiah shall be cut off but no one shall be for him.

The stress accent pattern of the first two tricola provide us with an interesting instance in which form lays stress upon content. The

first tricolon, in which the emphasis is upon the negative aspect of putting away sin, is written in 2:2:2 meter. On the other hand, the second tricolon, in which more emphasis is placed upon the positive aspect of bringing in everlasting righteousness, is written in 3:3:3 meter. Thus the positive side of these two series of actions receives more stress accents and thus more stress. The two imperative verbs with which vs. 25 begins have been treated as an anacrusis here, and hence they have been considered extrametrical and do not enter into our poetic analysis of this passage.

The prophetic time period consisting of seven weeks and sixty-two weeks has been divided off here as a separate bicolon. At first glance, it may appear unusual to delimit as a separate bicolon one which consists solely of two phrases that contain time periods. It should be remembered, however, that this is an existential statement in which a form of the verb "to be" is understood as preceding those time periods; hence there is more to this bicolon than first meets the eye. It should also be noted that the word for "weeks" is repeated as the first word in both of the cola of this bicolon. That repetition would not have been necessary in narrative prose, but it provides an internal parallelism in this bicolon. When this bicolon is compared with the tricolon that precedes it, the relationship between them can be seen as that of synthetic external parallelism, in which the bicolon provides the times for the events referred to in the tricolon.

The really conclusive argument which the poetic analysis of this passage provides against separating the sixty-two weeks from the seven weeks is found in the form and content of the second tricolon of vs. 25. If the sixty-two weeks are separated from the seven weeks they must be connected with this poetic unit in some way or another. There are only two ways in which this can be done. The first is to take the sixty-two weeks as the first colon of a bicolon. In this case the two verbs that follow this chronological reference make up the second colon of that bicolon. The following pair of nouns—"square and moat"—and the subsequent prepositional phrase—"in hard-pressed times"—would then become parallel members of a succeeding bicolon. Thus:

And for sixty-two weeks

It shall be restored and it shall be rebuilt.

Square and moat,

but in hard-pressed times.

The second bicolon of this couplet is left dangling for want of a verb to go with it, and the prepositional phrase in it obviously refers to the building of the city mentioned in the preceding bicolon. Such an arrangement would disrupt the even 2:2:2 meter of the tricolon of vs. 25d. To disrupt this neatly arranged poetic unit and substitute for it a much more awkward construction just to connect the "sixty-two weeks" with what follows does not make good sense, and this proposal should be rejected.

The other alternative is to take the sixty-two weeks as the first colon of a tricolon. That arrangement would indicate that the prepositional phrase which refers to the troublous times should be connected with what follows it. Thus:

And for sixty-two weeks
it shall be restored and it shall be rebuilt,
square and moat.

But in hard-pressed times,
and after the sixty-two weeks,
the Messiah shall be cut off but no one shall be for him.

This arrangement fails to make good sense too, for the phrase about hard-pressed times does not relate well to what follows it. The chronological reference with which vs. 26 begins actually demarcates a new poetic and prophetic unit with which the preceding prepositional phrase cannot be connected either on the basis of poetic form or thematic links. Meter also argues against this arrangement, for the first tricolon would be 3:2:2 instead of the more precise 2:2:2, and the second tricolon of this arrangement would be 2:4:4, an even more unlikely metrical combination.

In the analyses of Hebrew poetry which have been developed since the classic study of Robert Lowth in the middle of the eighteenth century, no conceivable technique employed by the ancient Hebrew poets is known whereby the sixty-two weeks of Dan 9:25c can be connected with the tricolon of Dan 9:25d, which refers to the rebuilding of Jerusalem. It could only be joined here as a part of a bicolon or a part of a tricolon. Both of these arrangements are impossible according to the preceding evaluation. No such form as a quadracolon is available to accomplish such a collocation either, since such must be broken down into couplets of bicola, thus putting us right back at the point from which we started.

What we have here, according to this analysis, is another example of an external parallelism in which the initial bicolon gives the time periods for accomplishment of the two events referred to in the tricolon and in the bicolon which follow it. This parallel A:B::A:B arrangement may be outlined briefly as follows:

A. Seven weeks	}	in the bicolon of vs. 25c.
B. Sixty-two weeks		

A. (Seven weeks for the) Rebuilding of Jerusalem, in the tricolon of vs. 25d.

B. Sixty-two weeks to the Messiah, in the bicolon of vs. 26a.

This A:B::A:B thematic arrangement appears elsewhere in Daniel's prophetic poetry, in statements about the Son of Man and the little horn in Dan 7. Of the Son of Man, Dan 7:14b states,

A. His dominion is an everlasting dominion,	}	3:2 Bicolon
B. which shall not pass away;		

A. and his kingdom one,	}	2:2 Bicolon
B. which shall not be destroyed.		

Regarding the work of the little horn, Dan 7:25 states,

A. He shall speak words against the Most High,	}	4:4 Bicolon
B. and shall wear out the saints of the Most High;		

A. and he shall think to change times and the law,	}	4:5 Bicolon
B. and they shall be given into his hand for a time, two times, and half a time.		

In conclusion, we may state regarding Dan 9:24-26a that the poetic form of this passage strongly supports the rendering found in the KJV and kindred translations. Poetic analysis indicates that the translations of the RSV, NEB, AB, etc., are distinctly inferior to the KJV here.