

A Chiastic Outline for Dan 12:5-13

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Below we examine two ways of outlining Dan 12:5-13. The outline we choose will materially affect our understanding of the passage.

Non-Chiastic Outline

C. Mervyn Maxwell, in *God Cares*,¹ states that "Daniel 12 may be separated into four divisions: events at the time of the end, verses 1-4; questions and answers, verses 5-10; days and blessings, verses 11, 12; and a personal promise in parting, verse 13." Our attention in the present note will focus on 12:5-13. I suggest below that it is not necessary to divide vss. 11-12 from vss. 5-10 and that doing so obscures an important fact about the chapter's structure. The text of Dan 12:5-13 (NIV) is now quoted using Maxwell's proposed verse groupings.

Questions and answers

(5) Then I, Daniel, looked, and there before me stood two others, one on this bank of the river and one on the opposite bank. (6) One of them said to the man clothed in linen, who was above the waters of the river, "How long will it be before these astonishing things are fulfilled?" (7) The man clothed in linen, who was above the waters of the river, lifted his right hand and his left hand toward heaven, and I heard him swear by him who lives forever, saying, "It will be for a time, times and half a time. When the power of the holy people has been finally broken, all these things will be completed." (8) I heard, but I did not understand. So I asked, "My lord, what will the outcome of all this be?" (9) He replied, "Go your way, Daniel, because the words are closed up and sealed until the time of the end. (10) Many will be purified, made spotless and refined, but the wicked will continue to be wicked. None of the wicked will understand, but those who are wise will understand.

Days and blessings

(11) "From the time that the daily sacrifice is abolished and the abomination that causes desolation is set up, there will be 1,290 days. (12) Blessed is the one who waits for and reaches the end of the 1,335 days.

Personal promise

(13) "As for you, go your way till the end. You will rest, and then at the end of the days you will rise to receive your allotted inheritance."

In a model such as the one above no special literary connection is posited--on the basis of the chapter's structure--between the "time, times, and half a time" of vs. 7 on the one hand, and the "1,290 days" of vs. 11 and "1,335 days" of vs. 12 on the other.

Alternative Chiastic Outline

Below I suggest that the last part of Dan 12 forms an ABBA chiasm. I subdivide the center (B,B') for the sake of completeness. The same structure, however, could be stated in ABA form (any ABBA chiasm could be), and in such a case the emphasis would be shifted slightly toward the outer verses (A,A'). The relationships among the various verses groupings are now summarized.

(A) In vss. 5-6 an angel poses a question to the "man clothed in linen" who had been narrating the events of chap. 11.

(B) The answer begins in vs. 7, but Daniel, not understanding the first part of the answer and perhaps not understanding that the one before him was not yet finished speaking, breaks in with a general question as to what the whole vision might mean in vs. 8.

(B') Daniel's bewildered question, though intrusive, is not dismissed; it is answered in vss. 9-10. The thrust of the answer is that Daniel's lack of understanding is to be expected, since "the words are closed up and sealed until the time of the end" (vs. 9). At the appropriate point in history a few--"those who are wise"--would understand what had been revealed.

(A') With Daniel's question now answered, the speaker returns to the original question which had to do with time and finishes answering it.

Thus, before vs. 8 the "man clothed in linen" is talking about time and after vss. 11-12 he returns to the same subject. In vss. 9-10, at Daniel's request, he addresses the quite different matter of understanding.

The text of Dan 12:5-13 is now repeated, with the proposed chiastic relationships shown in outline form.

The setting

(5) Then I, Daniel, looked, and there before me stood two others, one on this bank of the river and one on the opposite bank.

(A) First question and partial answer to first question

(6) One of them said to the man clothed in linen, who was above the waters of the river, "How long will it be before these astonishing things are fulfilled?" (7) The man clothed in linen, who was above the waters of the river, lifted his right hand and his left hand toward heaven, and I heard him swear by him who lives forever, saying, "It will be for a time, times and half a time. When the power of the holy people has been finally broken, all these things will be completed."

(B) Second question

(8) I heard, but I did not understand. So I asked, "My lord, what will the outcome of all this be?"

(B') Answer to second question

(9) He replied, "Go your way, Daniel, because the words are closed up and sealed until the time of the end. (10) Many will be purified, made spotless and refined, but the wicked will continue to be wicked. None of the wicked will understand, but those who are wise will understand.

(A') Remainder of answer to first question

(11) "From the time that the daily sacrifice is abolished and the abomination that causes desolation is set up, there will be 1,290 days. (12) Blessed is the one who waits for and reaches the end of the 1,335 days.

Personal promise

(13) "As for you, go your way till the end. You will rest, and then at the end of the days you will rise to receive your allotted inheritance."

Exegetical Implications of the Alternative Outline

The chiastic outline of Dan 12:5-13 proposed here has exegetical implications. Just before Daniel's question is posed and answered (vss. 8-10) we find the first of three long time periods mentioned--"a time, times and half a time" (vs. 7), or 1,260 prophetic days. Then, immediately after the answer to Daniel's question, a second time period ("1,290 days," vs. 11) is introduced, and a third ("1,335 days," vs. 12). What separates the first time period from the second and third is an interruption. This is one conclusion we must draw.

There are two others that we must avoid. The first of these conclusions is that vss. 8-10 are textually intrusive. There is no evidence to support such an idea. The second is that the time periods of vss. 7, 11, and 12 are identical to each other.² It is true that the time periods are closely related, but they are not identical.

My point here is that Daniel's question disrupts an otherwise continuous train of thought. The passage that flows around it is tightly cohesive. Thus, the three time periods of Dan 12 are by no means identical, but they do bear a close relationship to each other. In applying these time periods to history we will have to discuss Dan 12:7, 11, and 12 together.

¹*God Cares, vol. 1: The Message of Daniel for You and Your Family* (Mountain View: Pacific Press, 1981), p. 289.

²It is assumed by preterist writers that the different time periods in Daniel all refer to the amount of time expected to elapse before Antiochus IV Epiphanes would be forced to abandon his desecration of the temple and withdraw. See, for example, Roger Alan Hall, "Post-Exilic Theological Streams and the Book of Daniel" (Ph.D. dissertation, Yale University, 1974), p. 226: "I have already stated the unlikelihood that the vision reports were all written at the same time, in view of the variations from one another and the several interpolated passages. The strongest evidence that they were written on different occasions, however, is probably the presence of the

differing indications of the length of time anticipated before the events of the end--3 1/2 years in 7:25, 9:27 and 12:7; 1150 days in 8:14; 1290 days in 12:11; and 1335 days in 12:12." The same author later concludes that "A handbook [such as the book of Daniel] would be absolutely invaluable when the precise fulfillment of the eschatological expectations had several times failed to occur, and inner as well as outer voices began to suggest that perhaps the expectations had been a delusion after all" (*ibid.*, p. 231). Such conclusions are unnecessary when the time periods are understood. They do have an impressively coherent application, but it is not in the second century B.C.