

DISCOURSE STRUCTURE IN ZECHARIAH 7.1–8.23

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Many scholars treat Zechariah chapters 7 and 8 as a rather untidy appendix to chapters 1 to 6. This article tries to show that Zechariah 7.1–8.23 has a structure and unity of its own, based on certain discourse features of the Hebrew text.

The Extent of the Section

Repetition of the same or similar stretches of language is often an indication of significant patterning. Zechariah 7.1–8.23 contains a good deal of repetition, and this offers a foothold for the study of its structure at what can be loosely termed paragraph rank. 7.1 begins with a date. Dates occur elsewhere only at 1.1, which begins the introduction to the whole book, and at 1.7, which begins the series of visions covering 1.7–6.15. It is therefore a reasonable supposition that 7.1 begins a new section in some way parallel with 1.7. This view is strengthened by the general similarity of the content of the rest of 7.1 with both 1.7 and 1.1. If some other date occurred later in the book, it would offer a criterion for establishing the beginning of a subsequent section, and thus delimiting the section beginning at 7.1. There is no other date in the book however, so this criterion fails. Conventional wisdom uses the recurrence of the word *maššā'* (translated "oracle" in RSV and "message" in TEV) in 9.1 and 12.1 as an indicator of the beginning of subsequent sections of the book, and in the absence of any obvious counter-indications, this can be accepted. The section 7.1–8.23 then would seem to form some kind of unit in itself, delimited within the text, and therefore suitable for analysis in its own right.

The Quotative Formulae

It is obvious even on a superficial examination that the text of Zechariah 7.1–8.23 is broken into shorter pieces of direct quotation introduced by quotative formulae. The distribution of these formulae is sufficiently distinctive to permit study of them as a group, and constitutes a major interest of the rest of this paper.

The formulae are of two types. One has the basic structure *wayyāhī debar-YHWH (tsəbā'ōt) . . . lē'mōr* ("the word of the LORD (of hosts) came . . . saying": 7.4, 8; 8.1, 18). The other is *kōh 'āmar YHWH (tsəbā'ōt)* ("thus says the LORD of hosts": 7.9; 8.2, 3, 4, 6, 7, 9, 14, 19, 20, 23). In the first formula, "of hosts" is absent from 7.8, and the three dots represent an optional indirect object, 'elay ("to me": 7.4; 8.18) or 'el-zəkaryāh ("to Zechariah": 7.8; cf. 7.1). Except in its first occurrence (7.4), the first formula is always followed by the second, thus setting up a second degree quotation, or a quote within a quote. The second formula however also occurs independently. Since the first formula is less frequent, and is normally followed by the second, we can set up the hypothesis that the first formula indicates a more important break, or in linguistic terms, a higher ranking break, than the second. We can tentatively label each segment of the text introduced by *wayyāhī debar-YHWH tsəbā'ōt . . . lē'mōr* ("the word of the LORD (of hosts) came . . . saying") as a paragraph, and each of the intervening segments introduced by *kōh 'āmar YHWH tsəbā'ōt* ("thus says the LORD of hosts") as a sub-paragraph, for want of a better term. This is

basically a very simple observation, and rather an obvious one, yet of twelve modern Bible translations in English (nine), French (two) and German (one), none is fully consistent in making this feature of the Hebrew text the basis of its paragraph divisions. Modern exegetical tradition seems in this case to have led away from, rather than towards, a serious analysis of the canonical form of the Hebrew text. But such an analysis is becoming nowadays a prerequisite for adequate translation.

If the recurrent quotative formulae are made the basis for paragraph boundaries, then we have as paragraphs 7.4–7, 7.8–14, 8.1–17 and 8.18–23. 8.1–17 is subdivided into several sub-paragraphs, beginning at 8.2, 8.3, 8.4, 8.6, 8.7, 8.9 and possibly 8.14. 8.18–23 has three sub-paragraphs beginning at 8.19, 8.20 and 8.23.

This analysis leaves a few ragged edges, and to these we must now turn. First, 7.1–3 has not yet been accounted for. Second, there are some other expressions which could be considered quotative formulae which have not yet been mentioned, namely *'amar YHWH tsəbā' ot* ("says the LORD of hosts": 7.13; 8.14), *nə'um YHWH tsəbā' ot* ("oracle of the LORD of hosts": 8.6, 11), and *nə'um YHWH* ("oracle of the LORD": 8.17). Third, what is the effect of having *kī* ("for") before *kōh 'amar YHWH tsəbā' ot* ("thus says the LORD of hosts") in 8.14?

In 7.1–3, we notice the occurrence of *hāyā dəbar-YHWH 'el-zəkaryāh* ("the word of the LORD came to Zechariah"). This differs from the first quotative formula in two ways: it does not have the initial waw consecutive, and it is not followed by the second quotative formula. The absence of waw consecutive is conditioned by the fact that this clause is not at the beginning of the sentence, but occurs in the middle of the date, between the more general statement "In the fourth year of King Darius", and the more specific statement "on the fourth day of the ninth month, namely Kislev". The occurrence of this quotative expression in conjunction with a date which we have already accepted as marking the beginning of this section of the book suggests that here it is merely reinforcing the indication of the start of the new section (cf. 1.1, 7). In linguistic terms, we could say that *hāyā dəbar-YHWH 'el-zəkaryāh* ("the word of the LORD came to Zechariah") here is functioning at a higher rank than the corresponding clause in 7.8; 8.1, 18. The absence of the second quotative formula can be seen as separating 7.1 from what follows rather than joining it on. 7.1 as a whole then, is best taken as an introduction to the whole section 7.1–8.23. 7.2–3 gives a narrative framework for the oracles in the rest of the section, which begin, as we have seen, in 7.4.

Next we turn to the other items which might be considered quotative formulae, taking first *nə'um YHWH [tsəbā' ot]* ("oracle of the LORD [of hosts]") in 8.6, 11, 17. In 8.17 this expression occurs at the end of the longest paragraph in the whole section, and is fairly clearly a marker of the closure of the paragraph. A rather similar function can be attributed to the occurrence in 8.6, where it probably serves to complete the group of four shorter oracles (sub-paragraphs) beginning in 8.2, 8.3; 8.4 and 8.6, and to some extent to link them together. If this is so, then the same expression is functioning at a different rank in 8.6 from that in 8.17. The occurrence in 8.11 is the most difficult to account for

as some kind of closure marker. The question will be discussed when the whole complex sub-paragraph 8.9–17 is examined.

The expression *'amar YHWH tsebā'ōt* (“says the LORD of hosts”) in 7.13 and 8.14 neither introduces a quotation nor closes one. In both cases it occurs with an “as . . . so . . .” construction, and in the middle of a quotation. In 7.13–14, the quotation is the final sentence of a paragraph, and it is reasonable to suggest that “says the LORD of hosts” is intended to mark this. Thus it would have a function somewhat similar to “oracle of the LORD” in 8.17 even though it does not occur in the same relative position. The existence of alternative ways of making a particular function is common in language, and allows for what is often given the vague label “stylistic variation”.

The occurrence of “says the LORD of hosts” in 8.14 may have a rather similar purpose to that in 7.13. See the discussion of 8.9–17 below.

Finally, we note that the formula, *kōh 'amar YHWH tsebā'ōt* (“thus says the LORD of hosts”) in 8.14 alone of its eleven occurrences is preceded by *kī* (“for”). The possibility must be borne in mind that this changes its function, or the rank at which it functions. Again, this is discussed more fully in the analysis of 8.9–17 below.

Detailed analyses of 8.1–17

We will now attempt a more detailed study of one particular paragraph, namely the most complex one, 8.1–17, and see if further light can be thrown on the issues raised above.

We have noted already that the occurrence of the formula *kōh 'amar YHWH (tsebā'ōt)* (“thus says the LORD [of hosts]”) divides the paragraph into six sub-paragraphs, and that the first four are possibly grouped together by the occurrence of *nə'um YHWH tsebā'ōt* (“oracle of the LORD of hosts”) after the fourth. We will not attempt to go beyond this for these verses, nor to go into further detail on the fifth sub-paragraph, 8.7–8. Attention will be focussed on the last, longest and most intricate sub-paragraph, 8.9–17.

The first task is to see whether the text offers any reasons for breaking this passage into smaller units. We note at once that two of the formulae taken elsewhere as boundary markers occur within this sub-paragraph, namely *nə'um YHWH tsebā'ōt* (“oracle of the LORD of hosts”) in 8.11, and *kī kōh 'amar YHWH tsebā'ōt* (“for thus says the LORD of hosts”) in 8.14, where *'amar YHWH tsebā'ōt* (“says the LORD of hosts”) also occurs. Before deciding whether these items have similar functions here, it is necessary to consider other items which recur through the passage.

The first point of interest is the repetition of “let your hands be strong” in 9b and 13e, and of “fear not” in 13d and 15c. These look as if they could be the opening and closing elements of sections which are in some way parallel with each other. However this possibility is rather obscured by the Masoretic punctuation which throws together “fear not, let your hands be strong” at the end of verse 13. The parallelism would be more noticeable if “let your hands be strong” in its second occurrence opened verse 14 just as its first occurrence opens the quotation in verse 9.

Further investigation shows that there is a good deal of other parallelism between the structure of 9b–13d and 13e–15c. In both cases “let your hands be strong” is followed by material introduced by *kī* (“for”) in an explanatory rather than a temporal sense. In 9b–13d there are two groups of statements introduced by *kī* in 10a and 12a. (In the first instance, this follows a lengthy vocative expression in 9c which identifies the addressees of the whole paragraph). We take both groups of statements to be explanatory of “let your hands be strong” in 9b, and note further that *ne’um YHWH tsəbā’ōt* (“oracle of the LORD of hosts”) in 11b occurs immediately before the second *kī* (“for”), apparently marking the end of the first group of explanatory statements. We can therefore maintain the hypothesis that *ne’um YHWH tsəbā’ōt* (“oracle of the LORD of hosts”) is a terminal marker, with the proviso that in this case it is closing some unit smaller than a paragraph.

If we set the two groups of sentences beginning with *kī* (“for”; 10–11 and 12–13) against each other, we can see further parallelism in their structure in that both involve extensive comparisons. In the first instance the comparison is a contrastive temporal one introduced by “before those days” in 10a and “but now” in 11a. In the second instance, the comparison is found in verse 13 with its balancing parts introduced by “as” and “so”. We may further note lexical recursions of the expressions “peace” in 10c and 12a, and “the remnant of this people” in 11b and 12c. All this evidence lends support to the hypothesis that the stretch of text from “let your hands be strong” in 9b to “fear not” in 13d is indeed some kind of unit, the end of whose first half is marked by *ne’um YHWH tsəbā’ōt* (“oracle of the LORD of hosts”) in 11b.

It would be no surprise to find some further similarity between 9b–13d and the section marked by similar opening and closing features, 13e–15c. This is indeed what emerges: “let your hands be strong” in 13e is followed by another *kī* (“for”) in 14a and then by another comparison whose balancing parts are introduced by “as” (14b) and “so” (15a). All this is surely sufficient to establish that 8.9–15 is a tightly knit and carefully constructed unit whose parallel features can be shown clearly by the use of different degrees of indentation, as in the appendix.

We can now return to the quotative formulae *kōh h’āmar YHWH tsəbā’ōt* (“thus says the LORD of hosts”) in 14a and *’āmar YHWH tsəbā’ōt* (“says the LORD of hosts”) in 14b. The presence in *kī* (“for”) at the beginning of 14a, viewed in the context of the whole sub-paragraph 8.9–17, and in terms of the parallel occurrences of *kī* (“for”) in 10a and 12a, indicates rather clearly that, *kōh h’āmar YHWH tsəbā’ōt* (“thus says the LORD of hosts”) does not here function in a formulaic way as the beginning of a new sub-paragraph. The *kī* (“for”) so to speak overrides the formulaic use of the quotative clause as found elsewhere in this discourse, and pushes its function to a lower level as an element parallel with previous elements in 10a and 12a.

’āmar YHWH tsəbā’ōt (“says the LORD of hosts”) in 14b can now be seen to occur in the last sentence of a unit extending from 9b to 15. In this light, it is in a function parallel with that of the identical clause in 7.13. Both mark the climax of a longer paragraph, and both occur in the context of an “as . . . so . . .” comparison.

We have stated that the sub-paragraph under discussion covers 8.9–17, but

have so far accounted only for 8.9–15. Verses 16 and 17 we take as a closing summary of the whole paragraph. They consist of a generic statement: “these are the things that you shall do” followed by four imperatives, two positive: “speak” and “judge”) and two negative (“do not devise” and “do not love”). There is a final explanatory clause which the sense shows to be attached to the two negative imperatives only. This clause is discussed in more detail below.

If the above analysis is realistic, the paragraph 8.1–17 has the following outline:

- 8.1 First quotative formula
- 8.2a Second quotative formula
 - 8.2b–6 Four sub-paragraphs, linked by a closing formula
 - 8.7–8 Separate sub-paragraph with no closure marker
 - 8.9–17 Complex sub-paragraph
 - 8.9a Second quotative formula
 - 8.9b–13d First unit
 - 8.9b Let your hands be strong . . .
 - 8.10–11 for before . . . but now
 - 8.12–13c for . . . as . . . so . . .
 - 8.13d Fear not
 - 8.13e–15c Second unit
 - 8.13e Let your hands be strong . . .
 - 8.14–15b for . . . as . . . so . . .
 - 8.15c Fear not
 - 8.16–17 Third unit: ethical commands, with closing formula

On a broader canvas, it could be suggested that 8.1–17 as a whole consists of three major parts:

- 8.2b–6 Four sub-paragraphs with closure marker
- 8.7–8 One sub-paragraph with no closure marker
- 8.9–17 Complex sub-paragraph with closure marker

It is possible that in a case like this where there is a short unit without overt closure enveloped by longer units with overt closure, the short unit constitutes the centre and climax of the entire paragraph. It would be rash to assert that it is so, but the possibility that it is should certainly be taken seriously. However, since that would be more a matter of interpretation than discourse analysis, the question cannot be pursued here.

Syntactic Anomalies

Within the section 7.1–8.23, there are a few places where the Masoretic text presents syntactic problems, and we now look at three of these: (1) *'et* (“object marker”) in 7.7; (2) *'et* (“object marker”) and *'asher* (“relative pronoun”) in 8.17; (3) *'asher* (“relative pronoun”) in 8.20, 23.

(1) *'et* in 7.7. The main part of 7.7 reads *halō' 'et-haddəbārīm 'asher qārā' YHWH bəyad hannəbī'im hārī'shōnīm*, the remainder of the verse being a temporal expression. The problem is that *haddəbārīm* (“the words”) is marked as a direct object by the occurrence of the particle *'et*, yet there is no verb to

govern this object. As the apparatus of *Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia* indicates, some scholars consider that some words are missing from the verse, while others would prefer to remove the problem by emending 'et to 'ēlleh ("these"), thus bringing the Hebrew into line with the Septuagint and the Peshitta.

There are at least two other possibilities that could be considered, however. One is to supply a verb from the context, such as *dibbartū* ("I spoke") or better, *qārā'tī* ("I proclaimed"); the latter verb already occurs later in the verse. This would end the second degree quotation at the end of verse 6, and take verse 7 as the prophet's comment on God's message in 5b–6 (as TEV), rather than as a continuation of that message (as RSV). Zechariah would be claiming continuity between his words and those of the pre-exilic prophets. Since 5b–6 speak about hypocrisy in religious observances, this would be a very reasonable claim. This view is supported by the change from a first person reference to God in verse 5 to a third person reference in verse 7.

Another possibility is to suggest that 'et may have some function other than that of marking a direct object. Although this possibility is dismissed by Mitchell (International Critical Commentary, p. 203), it does seem to deserve further investigation, and other examples of similar anomalies should be sought. (One such is to be found in Haggai 2.5). Even as a definite object marker, the distribution of 'et seems erratic to say the least (see for instance 8.12), and the possibility should be investigated that it may also serve some kind of focus-marking purpose within a paragraph or other higher-ranking unit. Here we simply note that the apparently anomalous use occurs in the final sentence of a paragraph. (This is also the case in Haggai 2.5).

(2) 'et ("object marker") and 'asher ("relative pronoun") in 8.17. The Masoretic text reads *kī 'et-kol-'elleh 'asher sāne'tī* ("for object-all-these which I-hate"). Either the object marker or the relative seems redundant. BHS apparatus notes that the relative 'asher is lacking in a few Hebrew manuscripts, and has no equivalent in the Septuagint or Syriac, and recommends its deletion. However, it is also possible that 8.17 shows 'et in a usage similar to that in 7.7, perhaps marking some kind of focus within the paragraph as a whole. It is notable that as in 7.7, the sentence in which the apparently anomalous usage occurs is the final one of a paragraph. If the deletion of the relative is avoided, the sense given ("for all these are things which I hate") seems a somewhat stronger conclusion to the paragraph than is attained otherwise ("for all these things I hate"). Retaining the relative also has the advantage of yielding a construction which, apart from the 'et is parallel to the opening clause of this subsection 'ēlleh *haddēbārīm 'asher ta'asū* ("these are the things which you shall do"; 8.16a).

(3) 'asher ("relative pronoun") in 8.20, 23. In both these cases, the relative is followed by a verb ("shall come" in 8.20, and "shall take hold" in 8.23) which would seem to fit well into its context without the preceding relative. In both cases the Septuagint ignores the relative and thus gives support to modern exegetes who wish to do the same. But in both cases, is it not possible to construe 'asher and its following verb as forming the subject in a verbless subject-complement clause? In 8.20 this gives the meaning "those who shall yet come will be peoples and inhabitants of great cities". This is a tolerable sense in the context, though it offers no advantages over the interpretation which omits the

relative. In 8.23, the sense would be “in those days, those who shall take hold (metonymy for beseech) will be ten men from every gentile language group; and they will take hold of the robe of a Jew . . .” This gives a relationship of generic-specific between the two clauses, and does seem to be an improvement on the sense obtained by ignoring the relative, which gives an inane repetition of the verb “take hold”.

As with the apparently anomalous *'et*, more examples are needed to see whether a case can be sustained for *'asher* plus verb functioning as the subject of a verbless clause.

Comparison with Haggai

Because of their similar historical contexts, the book of Haggai is the obvious book to compare with Zechariah. It is in fact the only book which shows close structural similarities with Zechariah 7.1–8.23. The points of comparison are as follows:

- (1) Major divisions are marked by an initial date (Hag 1.1, 2.1, 2.10, 2.20).
- (2) Each date is accompanied by the clause *hāyā dābar-YHWH . . . lē'mōr* (“the word of the LORD came . . . saying”). This follows the date except in 2.20, where the date is the same as in 2.10. In 2.20, the equivalent clause comes at the beginning of the sentence with *waw* consecutive.
- (3) This quotative formula is followed by another one, *kōh 'amar YHWH tsəbā'ōt* (“thus says the LORD of hosts”) in 1.2 and 2.11, and by an apparent equivalent in the other instances (*'emor-nā' . . . lē'mōr*: “speak now . . . saying” in 2.2, and *'emōr . . . lē'mōr*: “speak . . . saying” in 2.21).
- (4) Haggai 1.1–2 is a narrative introduction comparable with Zechariah 7.1–3. The oracles of Haggai proper begin with another *wayyehi dābar-YHWH . . . lē'mōr* (“and the word of the LORD came . . . saying”) in 1.3.
- (5) *kōh 'amar YHWH tsəbā'ōt* (“thus says the LORD of hosts”) also occurs in 1.5, 7; 2.6. It is thus not as widely used as in Zechariah 7.1–8.23 to initiate a subparagraph. However, the data in Haggai does not contradict the hypothesis that this is its function. In Haggai 2.6, this quotative formula is preceded by *kī* (“for”) which may push its function to a lower rank as in Zechariah 8.14.
- (6) *nə'um YHWH (tsəbā'ōt)* (“oracle of the LORD [of hosts]”) is relatively commoner in Haggai (1.9, 13; 2.4 × 3, 2.8, 9, 14, 17, 2.23 × 3). In several of these places (1.13, 2.4c, 9, 23c) it has the function of a final marker. The other occurrences in 1.9; 2.8, 14, 23 can be said to reinforce the final sentence of a paragraph, as does *'amar YHWH tsəbā'ōt* (“says the LORD of hosts”) in Zechariah 7.13; 8.14. The other occurrences in 2.4, 17 need further study.
- (7) *'amar YHWH (tsəbā'ōt)* (“says the LORD [of hosts]”) occurs in 1.8; 2.7, 9, where it also seems to have a function similar to that in Zechariah 7.13; 8.14.

In general, the data from Haggai support those from Zechariah 7.1–8.23. The main difference is the additional function of *nə'um YHWH tsəbā'ōt* (“oracle of the LORD of hosts”) noted in 6 above.

Conclusion

Although the data in Zechariah 7.1–8.23 are limited, they nevertheless offer the possibility of dividing the section as a whole into reasonably well marked

component parts. Within the section, we have proposed a narrative introduction followed by four paragraphs of prophetic oracles beginning in 7.4, 7.8, 8.1 and 8.18. All but the first show evidence of division into sub-paragraphs. It has often been noted that the question asked of Zechariah in 7.3 does not receive an answer until 8.19. There are also other recursions in the section, such as the concern with ethics in 7.9–10 and 8.16–17. There is the repetition of “to entreat the favour of the LORD” in 7.2 and 8.21, 22. These items prompt a search for a chiasmic structure over the whole section, but in fact there does not seem to be enough formal patterning to support the recognition of such a structure.

It does appear however that 7.1–8.23 is to be regarded as a unit rather than as a motley collection of more or less unconnected oracles. This must affect the theological interpretation of the passage, though this article is not the place for a theological discussion. Perhaps such discussion would in any case be better deferred until the whole book of Zechariah has been subjected to analysis. But in so far as discourse studies are convincing, they are bound to have implications for theology.

APPENDIX

In the following layout, the paragraphs into which Zechariah 7.1–8.23 may be divided are marked off with an underline, and sub-paragraphs, structural indicators and closure markers by indentation. Dotted underlines represent the proposed main breaks within the paragraph 8.1–17.

- 7.1 Date
7.1 The word of the LORD came to Zechariah
7.4 And the word of the LORD of hosts came to me saying
7.8 And the word of the LORD came to Zechariah saying
7.9 Thus says the LORD of hosts
7.13 says the LORD of hosts
8.1 And the word of the LORD of hosts came saying
8.2 Thus says the LORD of hosts
8.3 Thus says the LORD
8.4 Thus says the LORD of hosts
8.6 Thus says the LORD of hosts
8.6 oracle of the LORD of hosts
8.7 Thus says the LORD of hosts
8.9 Thus says the LORD of hosts
8.10–11 for before . . . but now . . .
8.11 oracle of the LORD of hosts
8.12–13d for . . . as . . . so . . .
8.14 for thus says the LORD of hosts as . . .
8.14 says the LORD of hosts
8.15 so . . .
8.17 oracle of the LORD
8.18 And the word of the LORD of hosts came to me saying
8.19 Thus says the LORD of hosts
8.20 Thus says the LORD of hosts
8.23 Thus says the LORD of hosts