

Reaction of Prof. J. Revell on the five theses formulated by Paul Sanders for a planned discussion at the SBL Groningen meeting 2004.

Thesis 1

To a large extent, the placing of the major disjunctive accents in the Hebrew Bible goes back to a division of the text from the pre-Christian era.

R: I would think this is demonstrated incontrovertibly by the spaces in the Deuteronomy text of John Rylands Greek Papyrus 458, to which the Naḥal Ḥever text of the Twelve Prophets (8ḤevXIIgr) gives support. It should also be noted that 'Palestinian' manuscripts of the Hebrew Bible show many variations from Tiberian in accentuation, and much variation is recorded in the form of MT published by C. D. Ginsburg (and, I believe, in the HUBP text), but the variants in these sources do not involve the major accents to any great extent. However, if the early history of the different system of accentuation found in the Babylonian biblical manuscripts were fully known, some modification of this thesis might be required.

Thesis 2

Only if a distinctive Masoretic accent is preceded by a weaker distinctive accent (for instance *zaqef qaton* preceded by *paṭā*), the Masoretes assumed the end of a colon after the word bearing the stronger distinctive accent (in this case after *zaqef qaton*).

R: The thesis appears to depend on what I would consider a mistaken view of the accents. They represent melodies, not divisions, as pointed out by Mordecai Breuer in *Ta'amei Hamikra Bekhaf Alef Sefarim Uvesifrei Emet (The Accents of the Bible in the 21 Books and the Three Books)*, Jerusalem, 1989, 368. (For a study of the accents from the points of view both of Music and of Linguistics, see D. M. Weil, *The Masoretic Chant of the Bible*, Jerusalem 1995.) A Biblical verse is a passage set off by tradition on the basis of its content as an independent unit. The accents which divide a verse do not mark a set of discrete entities which make up that unit. They mark the boundaries and relationships of the semantic subdivisions of the unit, reflecting the understanding of that unit. This is, of course, the reason why Korpel and de Moor found themselves 'able to suggest that the Masoretic distinctive accents rest on rabbinic exegesis' in some cases in which they did not support the suggested division of cola (*The Structure of Classical Hebrew Poetry*, 11). If the accents do not delimit the cola in such cases, they are not 'wrong'. They are carrying out the Masoretic intention.

The view presented in the thesis is most commonly cited in attempts to find objective support for analysis of the structure of Biblical poetry. Marjo Korpel (*Pericope I*, 27) states that the use of the term 'colon' in the analysis of a text does not imply that it is considered to be poetry, but the views described are

certainly cited most commonly in the analysis of poetry, and I have seen no clear definition of how ‘colon’ should be defined when used of Biblical texts in prose. I can see no persuasive evidence that the Masoretes had any interest in representing the structure of Biblical poetry. Certainly, the ongoing debate as to what is prose and what poetry in, for instance the Book of Jeremiah, indicates that they left no clear evidence there. Sanders, among others, accepts that the accents were not added to indicate correct colometry (*Pericope* I, 280). Certain passages of the Bible are written ‘colometrically’, following a long tradition which no doubt did originally represent poetic structure accurately, but even the best manuscripts of the Torah do not present what is now considered to be the structure with full consistency. In most manuscripts the ‘colometric’ writing outside the Torah is simply a conventional pattern irrelevant to the poetry. Similar patterns (ignored by BHS) are used, with similar irregularities, in the writing of lists, as 2 Sam 23:24-39 in the manuscripts A, C, and L.

Most, whatever their views on the nature of pausal forms, would accept that they stand at the end of a major unit. If such a unit can be considered a colon, the thesis must be abandoned. A disjunctive accent with no preceding lesser disjunctive is, from time to time, used on a pausal form, e.g. *tifḥa* Judg 17:1, *revia* in 1 Sam 8:11, *zaqef* 1 Kgs 17:21, *zaqef gadol* 1 Sam 3:18, 7:12. Occasionally, the first word in a verse is a pausal form, as with *šalšelet* Gen 19:16, 24:12, Lev 8:23, Isa 13:8, Amos 1:2.

The thesis, if accepted, would narrow the usual understanding of a colon in poetry. Many verses of Ps 119 would consist of one only (as v. 8, 12) despite the Masoretic colometry), others could be seen as two (as v.2, 7). I would suggest that the thesis could represent, at best, only a ‘general rule’. The relationship of the accents to poetic structure which undoubtedly exists is presumably an accidental side-effect of the close relation between linguistic units (semantic or syntactic) and poetical cola. Price comments ‘In good poetry, grammatical syntax and poetic structure exhibit considerable harmony’ (*The Syntax of the Masoretic Accents in the Hebrew Bible*, Lewiston 1990, 17), and the relationship is, of course, implied by the term ‘enjambment’.

Thesis 3

The distribution of the pausal forms in the Hebrew Bible represents a division of the text that is older than the division by means of the Tiberian accentuation.

R: This is my opinion, but it cannot, I think, be demonstrated beyond doubt. Palestinian Biblical MSS mark both accents and pausal forms, but both vary from the standard Tiberian to a certain extent. I feel that the argument that the accents and the pausal forms reflect the same reading tradition (put by B. E. Drescher in his article ‘The Prosodic Basis of the Tiberian Hebrew System of Accents in the American journal *Language* 70, 1994, 1-52) is disproved by the fact that conjunctive accents are occasionally used with pausal forms (as in Deut 5:14, Lev 10:6), or that a word in contextual form is marked with a

major disjunctive (as *atnaḥ* Deut 21:7). As I mentioned, my doubt of the thesis is based on the fact that I could not find any way to counter the argument of A. Dotan that some features of the use of conjunctive accents proves that the accent system must have been established before the vowel system was fully developed. ('The Relative Chronology of the Accentuation System', in: *Mehqarim (Language Studies)* 2-3 (1987), 355-65 (Hebrew), pp. xxviii-xxix (English summary). However, I suppose that this argument could be valid without disproving the idea that the pausal forms were already established (and their function forgotten) when the accent system was developed.

Thesis 4

The distribution of the *petuchot* and *setumot* in the best mediaeval manuscripts of the Hebrew Bible is largely due to the use of the texts in the Jewish liturgy, and does not go back to an ancient text division.

R: I would think that this view was adequately countered by E. Tov in 'The Background of Sense Divisions in the Biblical Texts' (*Pericope* I, 312-350). I would argue against it on the basis of the usage of Papyrus Fouad inv. 266, and of the fact that examples of *pisqah b^e'emša' pasuq* (see Tov, *ibid.* p.332) occur within the Pentateuch, suggesting that the tradition of division (in the Pentateuch at least) is very old. These verse-internal divisions represent the same system as other *petuchot* and *setumot*. Outside the Pentateuch, the use of *petuchot* and *setumot* in the best MSS varies much in detail, but little in the units actually marked. I.e. the variation is often a matter of a verse or two, probably reflecting uncertainty as to where a unit actually begins. The same sort of variation occurs between other traditions of division, e.g. European chapter divisions.

Thesis 5

The remarkable correspondences between divisions in the Hebrew Bible and the divisions in the oldest translations suggest that these divisions go back to a very early stage.

R: There seems no doubt of this for the cola of poetry, and very little for the verses of prose (on the evidence of early Greek texts). However, I assume that this thesis refers to the *petuchot* and *setumot*, and that it is, in effect, the reverse of thesis 4. If so, my view, is stated above.