

Texts and Their Structure: Walls of Stones

Supplemental Materials

These nine exercises give practice in identifying stones in a literary wall and in sorting out some of their connection to one another in forming that wall.

Sections one to four take up the problem of identifying the internal units of a text; it uses the following passages: Luke 7:40-43; Acts 17:22-23; 1 Corinthians 10:12-13; and Revelation 11:4-6. Two or three pages are devoted to each passage. On the first page, find the NRSV text at the top. Copy-paste, or print out, and use that page to mark off what you think are the separate phrases and clauses in the text, and then on the blank portion of the page, use a scheme of indentation for graphically indicating the relationships between these separate clauses and phrases. (Sneak a peek at my own analysis of the Luke 7 passage for an example.) Giving this a try anticipates what we will do in chapter four. Once you have made a stab at it yourself, compare your results with those offered on the pages following each text.

Sections five to nine deal, on another level, with identifying the boundaries of larger portions of text. Within the structure of a wall, where does one stone (or *cluster of stones*) begin and where does it end?

Section five surveys structural signals in the letter to Philemon, first by noting paragraphing schemes in various versions and editions, then by focusing on verses 8-16, and finally by suggesting a simple annotated outline of the letter. Study this analysis before moving on to sections six through nine.

Sections six to nine take in turn the following four texts: Matthew 9:1-8; Acts 26:12-18; Galatians 3:15-18; and Revelation 19:11-16. Using a translation you are comfortable with, study the surrounding context of each passage for the kinds of structural signals discussed in the textbook under §3.2 and in sidebar 3.1. Jot down on the first page of each section your observations and then compare them with the suggestions on the following pages.

What you should aim at “getting” from these nine exercises is a clearer idea of the way contexts function to define and delimit texts, and, reciprocally, of the way texts themselves function to define and delimit their contexts. That is, aim at understanding how stones and clusters of stones in a wall put limits on the shape and extent of other stones and clusters of stones in that same wall.

I. Luke 7:40-43

⁴⁰ Jesus spoke up and said to him, “Simon, I have something to say to you.” “Teacher,” he replied, “Speak.” ⁴¹ “A certain creditor had two debtors; one owed five hundred denarii, and the other fifty. ⁴² When they could not pay, he canceled the debts for both of them. Now which of them will love him more?” ⁴³ Simon answered, “I suppose the one for whom he canceled the greater debt.” And Jesus said to him, “You have judged rightly.”

40 Jesus spoke up and said to him,
“Simon, I have something to say to you.”
“Teacher,” he replied, “Speak.”

41 “A certain creditor had two debtors;
one owed five hundred denarii,
and the other fifty.

42 When they could not pay,
he canceled the debts for both of them.
Now which of them will love him more?”

43 Simon answered,
“I suppose the one
for whom he canceled the greater debt.”
And Jesus said to him,
“You have judged rightly.”

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And Jesus said to him,
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Notes:

1. v. 40: Even though there are two verbs in line 1, they are so closely connected to each other that little is gained by breaking them out onto separate lines.
2. v. 40: Similarly, in line 3, since “Teacher...speak” is so short, it does not help much to set it on a separate line as the direct object of “he replied.”
3. v. 41: Obviously Jesus replies to Simon’s nod, even though it is not overtly indicated (in the NRSV, anyway; although one might wonder about the role of φησίν “says” in v. 40; it may refer to Jesus’ action in v. 41, not to Simon’s).
4. v. 41: Although lines 3-4 elaborate on line 2 and therefore could be indented under it, it is better first to list them as full sentences, just like line 2. Later, they can be indented, once we are sure of the basic text. This is an instance of the “problem” mentioned below regarding Philippians 2:1-2.
5. v. 43: Line 3 is indented under line 2 as a further specification of the identity of “the one.” Underlining “the one” in line 2 indicates that the indented modifier on line 3 pertains to that phrase alone, and not to the entire line 2.

II. Acts 17:22-23

²² Then Paul stood in front of the Areopagus and said, “Athenians, I see how extremely religious you are in every way. ²³ For as I went through the city and looked carefully at the objects of your worship, I found among them an altar with the inscription, ‘To an unknown god.’ What therefore you worship as unknown, this I proclaim to you.

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and said,
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I found among them an altar
with the inscription, ‘To an unknown god.’
What therefore you worship as unknown,
this I proclaim to you.

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 and said,
 “Athenians, I see how /.../ religious you are
 /extremely/
 in every way.
23 For
 as
 I went through the city
 and looked carefully at the objects of your worship,
 I found among them an altar
 with the inscription, ‘To an unknown god.’
 /therefore/
 What /.../ you worship as unknown,
 this I proclaim to you.

Note:
v. 22: The double-slash symbol /.../ in line 4 indicates that something has been removed from this location. The slashes around “extremely” in line 5 indicate what was removed. In this way the integrity of the text is preserved without preventing us from rearranging the text for the purposes of analysis.

III. 1 Corinthians 10:12-13

¹² So if you think you are standing, watch out that you do not fall. ¹³ No testing has overtaken you that is not common to everyone. God is faithful, and he will not let you be tested beyond your strength, but with the testing he will also provide the way out so that you may be able to endure it.

¹² So

if you think you are standing,
watch out
that you do not fall.

¹³ No testing has overtaken you
that is not common to everyone.

God is faithful,
and he will not let you be tested beyond your strength,
but with the testing he will also provide the way out
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¹²

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Note:

v. 13: Lines 4-5 are probably parallel contrasting explications of what it means in this context for God to be faithful. Hence, it might make sense for them to be indented under line 3. However, as in the case above in Luke 7:41, comment 4, we should first stick strictly to the grammar of the text as it stands. Once sure of that, we can begin adjusting for “sense.”

IV. Revelation 11:4-6

⁴ These are the two olive trees and the two lampstands that stand before the Lord of the earth. ⁵ And if anyone wants to harm them, fire pours from their mouth and consumes their foes; anyone who wants to harm them must be killed in this manner. ⁶ They have authority to shut the sky, so that no rain may fall during the days of their prophesying, and they have authority over the waters to turn them into blood, and to strike the earth with every kind of plague, as often as they desire.

V. Paragraph Limits in the Letter to Philemon

Compare paragraphing in various editions and translations.

NA ²⁷ :	1-3, 4-7, 8-14 [8-12, 13-14], 15-20, 21-22, 23-24, 25
UBS ⁴ :	1-3, 4-7, 8-16, 17-20, 21-22, 23-25
NRSV:	1-2, 3, 4-7, 8-16, 17-21, 22, 23-24, 25
NIV:	1-2, 3, 4-7, 8-11, 12-16, 17-21, 22, 23-24, 25
NVI/Spain:	1-2, 3, 4-7, 8-11, 12-16, 17-21, 22, 23-24, 25
GNB:	1-2, 3, 4-7, 8-11, 12-14, 15-16, 17-20, 21-22, 23-24, 25

From this brief comparison, it is clear that the opening (vv. 1-7) and closing portions (vv. 23-25) pose little difficulty, but that the central portion (vv. 8-22) presents several points of structural ambiguity. This means that in the first attempts to discern the structure of the text of Philemon, this central portion would be a good place to focus most of our energy. (Still it would also be worth evaluating the signals in verses 1-7 and 23-25, in order to see which ones may have led to such near unanimity among the editors and translators.)

From a survey of the Greek text, the following observations can be made about verses 8-22:

1. The $\delta\iota\acute{o}$ “therefore” at verse 8 signals a shift from greetings and blessings to the business at hand. However, this term may also signal a closer logical relationship between verses 4-7 and what follows.
2. The series of $\acute{o}\nu$ “whom” + first-person, singular verb constructions (vv. 10b, 12, 13) should be kept together in one paragraph. Similarly, verse 14 provides the contrast to verse 13 and should not be separated from it.
3. Verse 15 begins a new thought, but in support of Paul’s rationale in verses 8-14 for the concluding request/command in verses 17-21.
4. $O\acute{\upsilon}\nu$ “therefore” at verse 17 and the commands $\pi\rho\sigma\lambda\alpha\beta\acute{o}\upsilon$ “receive” and $\acute{\epsilon}\lambda\lambda\acute{o}\gamma\alpha$ “charge to [my] account” (v. 18), matched by the corresponding command $\acute{\alpha}\nu\acute{\alpha}\pi\alpha\upsilon\sigma\omicron\nu$ “refresh” in verse 20, mark a new paragraph at verse 17. Similarly verse 21, which is functionally a command, summarizes Paul’s request to Philemon and should not be connected directly with verse 22, which deals with a totally new subject.

Thus from this survey it is defensible to support the paragraphing scheme adopted by the NRSV.

Provisional Annotated Outline

This outline understands the connection between verses 4-7 and verses 8-22 to be closer than that between verses 4-7 and verses 1-3. Verses 1-3 therefore stand alone:

Philemon 1-25: Paul urges Philemon to receive back his runaway slave Onesimus with the same grace and love with which he would receive the “old jailbird” Paul himself.

vv. 1-3: Opening: Paul, in prison, greets Philemon and the other Christians there with Philemon, and blesses them in the usual fashion.

vv. 4-21: The main body of the letter.

vv. 4-7: Paul affirms Philemon’s Christian work, his faith in Christ and his love for the believers, and prays for Philemon’s further effectiveness.

vv. 8-9: Based on this good opinion of Philemon, Paul can appeal to Philemon’s goodwill; he will not command, even though he could.

vv. 10-16: Paul introduces the “new” Onesimus, formerly a useless runaway slave, now converted through Paul himself and, as a Christian brother, “useful” to both Paul and Philemon. Nevertheless Paul is sending Onesimus back to Philemon, as is right.

vv. 17-21: Paul therefore appeals to Philemon to respond appropriately by receiving Onesimus as he would receive Paul himself. In fact Paul suggests that Philemon do even more than receive Onesimus as a brother (set him free? return him to Paul?).

vv. 22-25: Closing matters

v. 22: Paul requests a room in Philemon’s house. (Is he coming to check up on how Onesimus has been treated?)

vv. 23-24: Greetings to the church from Paul’s companions where he is.

v. 25: Final blessing.

VI. Matthew 9:1-8

Using a translation you are comfortable with, study the surrounding context of this passage for the kinds of structural signals discussed in the textbook under §3.2 and in sidebar 3.1. Jot down here your observations on the appropriateness or inappropriateness of defining this text as a coherent pericope, a well-shaped stone in the wall. Then, compare your results with the suggestions on the next page.

Matthew 9:1-8

The outer boundaries for this “alleged” pericope are relatively obvious. Divisions within a Gospel narrative often involve changes in time, scene and cast. Matthew 8, especially in the latter half, involves a lot of travel back and forth on the Sea of Galilee. Matthew 8:28-34 relates Jesus’ encounter with two demoniacs in the country of the Gadarenes, following which the locals beg him to leave the area (v. 34). He leaves by boat and crosses the lake to “his own town” (Mt 9:1), Capernaum apparently. That is, we have a change of scene. We obviously have change of time as well, but it is not explicitly pointed out, as the scene change is.

A change in the cast, however, further marks a division between the pericope ending at 8:34 and the one beginning at 9:1. Jesus appears in both pericopes, of course, but now in place of the two demoniacs, their Gadarene neighbors and the herd of pigs, we have a paralytic man, his friends, some scribes and the crowds. The scene is nondescript, apart from belonging to “his own town.”

At 9:9, we have another change of scene, equally nondescript, indicated only by the fact that Jesus was “walking along.” The paralytic and his friends have vanished, and a taxman named Matthew comes into view.

The NRSV looks as if it makes a paragraph break between 9:1 and 9:2, suggesting that 9:1 belongs to the preceding pericope. (NA²⁷ breaks the text both at 9:1 and at 9:2.) This break in the NRSV is odd, considering the breaks it makes at 8:1, 5, 14, 18, 23 and 28. It makes more sense to me to include 9:1 with 9:2-8 than to attach it to 8:28-34.

VII. Acts 26:12-18

Using a translation you are comfortable with, study the surrounding context of this passage for the kinds of structural signals discussed in the textbook under §3.2 and in sidebar 3.1. Jot down here your observations on the appropriateness or inappropriateness of defining this text as a coherent pericope, a well-shaped stone in the wall. Then, compare your results with the suggestions on the next page.

Acts 26:12-18

This passage forms a portion of Paul's extended speech of self-defense before King Herod Agrippa II, his sister Bernice and the procurator Festus in Caesarea (Acts 25:13--26:32; the speech begins at 26:2). After some formal flattery (vv. 2-3), some preliminary remarks on his background and the charges brought against him (vv. 4-8), Paul describes his behavior toward the Christians and its motivation in the days before the incident on the Damascus Road (vv. 9-11). All this is framed in broad generalities.

Then at verse 12 he turns his attention to the event of that day, as he was en route to Damascus. This shift from describing generalities to describing a specific event can be taken as a division point within the speech. At verse 19, then, Paul turns to the later consequences of that event, beginning with the words "after that" (ὀθεν). Verses 12-18 cohere internally as an account of the dramatic confrontation that led to the change in Paul's behavior from what he described in verses 9-11 to what he describes in verses 19-23.

The one trouble point in this is the relative ἐν οἷς ("in which" or "during which things") in verse 12, which could be understood to bind verse 11 to verse 12 as one sentence. But it is not impossible in Greek (or in English!) to use "fragmentary" sentences as if they were complete.

VIII. Galatians 3:15-18

Using a translation you are comfortable with, study the surrounding context of this passage for the kinds of structural signals discussed in the textbook under §3.2 and in sidebar 3.1. Jot down here your observations on the appropriateness or inappropriateness of defining this text as a coherent pericope, a well-shaped stone in the wall. Then, compare your results with the suggestions on the next page.

Galatians 3:15-18

After rehearsing in chapter 2 his confrontation with Peter at Antioch over the issue of Jewish customs and justification for the Gentiles, Paul launches at Galatians 3:1 into a scathing attack on the Galatian believers' inconsistency regarding law and grace. He makes an exegetical appeal to the Old Testament account of Abraham's experience, and argues that the promise of the Spirit has come to the Gentiles solely through the medium of faith, apart from the law (Gal 3:6-14).

Verse 15, then, begins with a vocative: "Brothers and sisters!" Paul proceeds to explain from the example of a human will and testament how that divine promise cannot be annulled by something that came much later, namely the law. But if this is true, it raises the question of the purpose of the law. Paul turns to this problem with a rhetorical question at verse 19: τί οὖν ὁ νόμος "Why then the law?"

This suggests that Galatians 3:15-18 forms an internally coherent text, functioning in support of the argument put forward in verses 6-14 and in turn raising at verse 19 the question of the law's function.

IX. Revelation 19:11-16

Using a translation you are comfortable with, study the surrounding context of this passage for the kinds of structural signals discussed in the textbook under §3.2 and in sidebar 3.1. Jot down here your observations on the appropriateness or inappropriateness of defining this text as a coherent pericope, a well-shaped stone in the wall. Then, compare your results with the suggestions on the next page.

Revelation 19:11-16

In Revelation 17, John's vision turns from the universal plagues of judgment upon the earth to a close-up view of the judgment of the "great whore," Babylon, or Rome. This culminates in the song of hallelujah from the "great multitude in heaven" (Rev 19:1-8). In response to this, John is instructed to write the words, "Blessed are those who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb" (Rev 19:9), and is warned to worship God rather than the angel who gives him this instruction (Rev 19:10).

At verse 11, John *sees* heaven opened, and from out of heaven comes a white horse and a rider called Faithful and True. The following text describes this rider and his retinue (vv. 11-16). Then at verse 17, John *sees* another vision, an angel standing in the sun, calling the birds of heaven to feast on the carrion of the defeated armies of the earth. This repetition of verbs of *seeing* (and hearing) is used throughout Revelation as a marker of stages in the progress of the apocalypse.

Since then the text covered by vv. 11-16 is entirely devoted to describing the rider of the white horse and his retinue, and since v. 17 takes up a different focus, and since both v. 11 and v. 17 employ the familiar verb "see," it is likely that vv. 11-16 can be taken as a coherent pericope.