CHIASMS
IN THE
BOOK OF MORMON
LEADING BOOK ON CHIASM

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A Handbook of Literary Terms (Yelland et al 1950:32) defines chiasm as, "A passage in which the second part is inverted, and balanced against the first."

TYPES OF CHIASMS

David Noel Freedman, Ph. D., Director of Program on Studies in Religion, University of Michigan and General Editor of the Anchor Bible and Biblical Archaeologist discusses two kinds of chiasms in his preface to Chiasmus In Antiquity. One kind deals with words and the other with ideas. The type dealing with words is easily identified. There is generally no argument as to the existence of this type of chiasm. The words which are inverted or balanced can either be the same, synonyms or antonyms. An example from the Book of Mormon is found in Mosiah 1: 118·120: "But men drink damnation to their own souls, except

a they humble themselves,

b and become as little children,

c and believe that salvation was, and is, and is to come, in and through the atoning blood of Christ, the Lord Om-

natural man

e is an enemy to God

f and has been, from the fall of Adam,

f' and will be, for ever and ever;

e' but if he yields to the enticing of the Holy Spirit,

d' and putteth off the natural man,

c' and becometh a saint, through the atoning of Christ, the Lord,

b' and becometh as a child,

c' submissive, meek and humble ..."

The last six points parallel or repeat the first six points in reverse order, therefore, chiasm is also defined as an inverted parallelism.

The type of chiasm dealing with ideas is more difficult to identify because there may be disagreement over which Ideas form the foundation of the chiastic structure. The author of this type of chiasm may use it to focus the attention of the reader (or hearer) on the central idea or turning point. A good example of this from the Book of Mormon is found in the First Book of Nephi (fig. 1).

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"Chiasmus in Talmudic-Aggadic Narrative" by Jonah Fraenkel, Ph.D., Senior Lecturer for Hallakhic and Aggadic Literature, Hebrew University, Jerusalem.

"Structure and Chiasm in Aramaic Contracts and Letters" by Bezalel Porten, Ph.D., Senior Lecturer of Hebrew and Aramaic Ancient Literature, Hebrew University, Jerusalem.

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"Chiasmus in Hebrew Biblical Narrative" by Yehuda T. Radday, Ph.D., Associate Professor Bible and Hebrew, Technion, Israel Institute of Technology, Haifa.

No doubt the publication of this book represents a major step toward the day when the Book of Mormon will be taken seriously by the world. Freedman states in the preface, "The editor is to be commended for his catholicity and courage, and for his own original contributions in several domains including a unique treatment of the Book of Mormon." Welch, now an Associate Professor of Law at Brigham Young University, obtained his training in ancient literature at BYU through an MA in Latin and Philosophy. His master's thesis was on chiasmus.

HISTORY OF CHIASM

"Most of the essential features of chiasm form and function" have been detected as early as late third millennium B.C. (2500-2000 B.C.) (Smith 1981). However, it appears that the usage of chiasm reached its peak in Hebrew writing—the Bible, especially the Old Testament, being the outstanding example. Welch comments that "Chiasmus remained a common literary form in the Hebrew world until the first century after Christ, when it and most Jewish institutions were destroyed (1969:72)."

It has only been in the last fifty years that there has been a growing awareness of the existence of this form. According to Welch (1981:9):

The early trickle of chiasmatic commentary, beginning with some initial observations by Johannes Bengel, Gnomon Novi Testamenti (Tubingen, 1742, John Jebb, Sacred Literature (London, 1820), Thomas Boys, Tactica Sacra (London, 1824), and then by John Forbes, Symmetrical Structure of Scripture (Edinburgh 1854), first grew to a steady flow of productive commentary through the efforts of Nils Lund from 1930 to 1955, and recently has increased dramatically, in both quantity and diversity.

When Nils Lund was first introduced to chiasmatic structure in 1908, known then as "the inverted order," he was skeptical about the validity of the form since the work to that point was not sufficiently advanced. Therefore, it is highly unlikely that Joseph Smith Jr. knew anything about chiasmatic structure. Welch (1981:208) comments:

No one seriously contends that Joseph Smith or anyone associated with him knew or could have known of chiasmus or had the training to discover this principle for himself. The evidence is overwhelming against such a claim. And even if he had known in theory of chiasmus, there would still have remained the formidable task of composing the well-balanced, meaningful chiasmatic structures (combined with other structures unknown or unanalyzed in his time) which are found in precisely those portions of the Book of Mormon in which one would logically and historically expect to find them. Accomplishing all of this would have been an especially imposing task, since the Book of Mormon was Joseph Smith's first work, which, at age 24, he dictated without notes mostly inside of six months and rarely revised the only draft which the manuscript ever saw.

PURPOSE AND EXAMPLES OF CHIASMS

In addition to being evidence for the historical authenticity of the Book of Mormon, the presence of chiasmatic structure is also helpful in gaining a better understanding of the spiritual message of the book. Chiasmatic writing will characterize the most important point at the center or cross over point. Once a chiasmatic pattern has been discovered in the Book of Mormon we have a clue to what the writer was trying to emphasize. An excellent example of this is the First Book of Nephi (fig. 1). This outline is based on an unpublished manuscript by Wallace King (n.d.). The central point of the First Book of Nephi according to King's analysis is found in verse 28 of Chapter 3: "And the way is prepared from the foundation of the world, if it so be that they repent and come unto him;". Another chiasmatic analysis of the First Book of Nephi by Robert F. Smith (1977 manuscript) places I Nephi 3:38 as the center: "... I was caught away in the Spirit of the Lord, yea, into an exceeding high mountain..." There is always some minor difference of interpretation when working with chiasmatic structure based on ideas rather than words as mentioned earlier. However, there does not seem to be any disagreement that the First Book of Nephi is chiasmatically arranged. Both verse 28 and verse 38 make good central points since both lead to the celestial level life style. King (n.d.:5) points out that the theme of repentance, the message of every prophet, is emphasized by being placed at the opening (B), at the closing (B') and at the center.

Robert F. Smith has prepared an index of all the known chiasmus in the Book of Mormon discovered to date by various authors. This index shows that in addition to the entire book of First Nephi being a chiasm, there are 61 smaller chiasmus within the book. Smith discovered this short one for example:

... they were made manifest unto the prophet,

by the voice of the Spirit:

for by the Spirit

are all things made known unto the prophets... (1 Nephi 7:3-4)

In addition to his other achievements we must add that Nephi was an accomplished writer. "His use of parallelism, balance, and particularly chiasmus is that of a sophisticated literary technician (Welch 1981:199)." Welch also points out that Nephi divided his writings into two books because "Both books are independent chiasm units, centrally focused and symmetrically organized (1981:100)." Welch's brief outline of the chiasmatic arrangement of the Second Book of Nephi is as follows:

Linguistics—65
A Introduction (1:1-2)
B God reigns (1:5-7)
D Lehi comes to know Christ (1:8-10)
E Testimony of Christ (1:11-20)
F God protects the chosen (1:21-23)
G A part of the House of Israel is being scattered (1:24-25)
H Obtaining the Plates of Brass (1:26-37)
I Keeping records (2:1-6)
J A narrative about: the family of Ishmael, a journey, and rebellion against Nephi (2:8-33)
K Nephi exhorts his brothers, they humble themselves before the Lord (2:34-36)
L The Tree of Life (2:41-92)
M Two sets of records (2:93-102)
O "... (Lehi) spake by the power of the Holy Ghost..." (3:24)
P Nephi desires righteousness "I, Nephi, was desirous also that I might see, and know of these things..." (3:26)
Q (a) "... the power of the Holy Ghost... is the gift of God unto all those who diligently seek him..." (3:27)
R "And the way is prepared from the foundation of the world, if they repent and come unto him:..." (3:28)
Q' (a) "... for he that diligently seeketh shall find; and the mysteries of God shall be unfolded unto them by the power of the Holy Ghost," (3:29-30)
R' "And the way is prepared from the foundation of the world, if they repent and come unto him:" (3:29)
Q'' (a) "... For he is the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever."
R'' "And the way is prepared from the foundation of the world, if they repent and come unto him:" (3:29-30)
Q''' (a) "... as well in times of old as in times of old; and as well in times of old as in times to come:" (3:30-31)
R''' "And the way is prepared from the foundation of the world, if they repent and come unto him:" (3:30)
Q'''' (a) "... wherefore, the course of the Lord is one eternal round."
R'''' "And the way is prepared from the foundation of the world, if they repent and come unto him:" (3:31)
Q''''' (a) "... when they come from the dead."
R''''' "And the way is prepared from the foundation of the world, if they repent and come unto him:" (3:32)
Q'''''' (a) "... And the Holy Ghost giveth authority that I (Nephi) should speak these things and deny them not." (3:36)
N' Prophecy of coming of Christ and other events (3:37-237)
M' The Tree of Life (4:1-64)
K' Nephi exhorts his brothers, they humble themselves before the Lord (5:1-5)
J' A narrative about: the family of Ishmael, a journey, and rebellion against Nephi (5:7-54)
I' Keeping records (5:218-231)
H' Information from the Plates of Brass (5:239-7:4)
G' The House of Israel is to be scattered (7:6-12)
F' God protects the righteous (7:35-37)
E' Testimony of Christ (7:43-46)
D' All the righteous will know Christ (7:55-57)
C' The Holy One of Israel reigneth (7:62)
B' Repentance (7:64)
A' Conclusion (7:65-69)
The entire Book of Mosiah is also chiastically arranged. The following outline is based on Welch (1969):

A King Benjamin exhorts his sons (1:1-13)
B Mosiah chosen to succeed his father (1:15,16)
C Mosiah receives the records (1:23)
D Benjamin's speech and the words of the angel (1:36-2:50)
E People enter into a covenant (3:6)
F Priests consecrated (4:4)
G Ammon leaves Zarahemla for the land of Lehi-Nephi (5:4-8)
H People in bondage. Ammon put in prison (5:9)
I The 24 gold plates (5:64)
J The record of Zeniff begins as he leaves Zarahemla (6:1)
K Defense against the Lamanites (6:14-57)
L Noah and his priests (7:1-15)
M Abinadi persecuted and thrown into prison (7:69)
N Abinadi reads old law to priests (7:70-99)
N' Abinadi makes his own prophecies (7:106-8:91)
M' Abinadi persecuted and killed (9:1-27)
L' Noah and his priests (9:100-112)
K' Lamanites threaten the people of Limhi (9:113-139)
J' Record of Zeniff ends as he leaves the land of Lehi-Nephi (10:19)
I' The 24 gold plates (9:169)
H' People of Alma in bondage (11:54-64)
G' Alma leaves the land of Lehi-Nephi for Zarahemla (11:65)
F' The church organized by Alma (11:97-104)
E' Unbelievers refuse to enter covenant (11:105-120)
D' The words of Alma and the words of the angel of the Lord (11:116-176)
C' Alma the Younger receives the records (13:1-2)
B' Judges chosen instead of a king (13:7-62)
A' Mosiah exhorts his people (13:7-62)

According to Welch's analysis, the theme of repentance, as delivered by the prophet Abinadi, is the chiastic center of the Book of Mosiah. Welch has also analyzed the chiastic structure of Benjamin's proclamation. His 1973 version (manuscript) divided the speech into six parts, each part being a chiastic in itself. If the main theme of each part was further arranged, the pattern would turn out something like this (Welch's parts III and IV have been combined into a single part—"C"):

A Humble yourselves (serve) (Mosiah 1:38-66)
B Be obedient (accountable) (1:70-91)
C Christ is your example (1:95-130)
B' Believe in Christ (2:8-23)
A' Repent (2:24-50)

The following chiastic from the Third Book of Nephi is a modification of a pattern discovered by Robert F. Smith (manuscript):

A Gentiles trodden down (7:40)
B Isaiah 52:8-10 (Zion) (7:43-45)
C Sick restored-circle of fire (Zion) (8:4-26)
D Bread and wine (8:28-43)
E Prayer (8:47-57)
F Baptism, the twelve disciples, the Holy Ghost (8:62, 70-71)
G Ascent of Jesus (8:73-75)
F Baptism, the twelve disciples, the Holy Ghost (9:4-16)
E' Prayer (9:17-39)
D' Bread and wine (9:40-45)
C' Restoration of the House of Israel (Zion) (9:46-69)
B' Isaiah 52:8-10 (Zion) (9:70-73)
A' Gentiles trodden down (9:99-106)
B Land of inheritance (10:1)

The central element here is the ascent of Jesus. Ascent or going to a high place would correspond to a mountain which is a common central element of Biblical chiastic structures. Smith has also worked out a preliminary outline of the chiastic structure of the entire Third Book of Nephi with the Beatitudes and the Sermon on the Mount as the central element.
CONCLUSION

This has been a very brief review of chiasmic structure and its occurrence in the Book of Mormon. Everyone should be aware of this aspect of the Book of Mormon to strengthen their understanding of its historical authenticity and to provide means to better understand its spiritual message. Some of the arguments against the Book of Mormon have mentioned awkward style and frequent repetition. The discovery of the chiastic nature of the Book of Mormon helps turn the argument into support for the Book of Mormon.

The chiastic form of writing, therefore, takes its place along with other ancient patterns, such as the many examples of Hebraisms and the many archaeological patterns, to show that the Book of Mormon is exactly what it claims to be, an ancient document.

God's creation is orderly. There is no doubt a balance and a symmetry throughout the divine plan for this earth. The abundant use of chiastic writing among God's chosen people, the Hebrews, seems to be evidence of this fact.

For God speaketh once, yea twice, yet man perceiveth it not. Job 33:14

Twenty-four shorter chiastic patterns have also been discovered in Third Nephi including 21 also found in the New Testament. The following example, first discovered by Lund (Matt. 5:12-14), is from III Nephi 5:57-59:

\[
\begin{align*}
a & \text{And blessed are all they who are persecuted for my name's sake} \\
& b \text{For theirs is the kingdom of heaven} \\
c & \text{And blessed are ye when men shall revile you, and persecute, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely for my sake} \\
b' & \text{For ye shall have great joy and be exceeding glad, for great shall be your reward in heaven;} \\
a' & \text{For so persecuted they the prophets who were before you.}
\end{align*}
\]

Smith lists a possible 229 chiastic patterns in the Book of Mormon including five entire books—I, II, III Nephi, Mosiah and Ether. The Book of Mormon is one of the world's outstanding examples of chiastic writing thus providing another parallel between it and the Bible.

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