Preface

Several years ago I became fascinated with a few chiasms that had been found in the Book of Mormon. Simply stated, a chiasm is an ancient Hebrew writing structure in which a series of words, concepts, or verses is presented in one order in the first half of a passage and then repeated in reverse order in the second half.\(^1\) This form of composition is rarely found in English, German, Spanish, oriental languages, or most other writing systems found in the world’s literature.

Much of my interest in chiasms came from reading an article published in the *New Era* written by John W. Welch.\(^2\) After speaking and testifying about the Book of Mormon at a conference in Anchorage, Alaska, in 1990, I was approached by a member of the church named Dayton Conway. He showed me his marked copy of the Book of Mormon, which, he reported, contained about six hundred examples of chiasmus. I borrowed his book for the night and read it until early the next morning.

When I returned home to Utah, I contacted John Welch and Donald W. Parry, professors at Brigham Young University, who had been working on some projects involving chiasmus in the Book of Mormon. Little did I know that I was speaking to two of the world’s experts in this field—that it was John Welch who first discovered chiasmus in the Book of Mormon in 1967 and that Donald Parry was at that time completing the requirements for a doctoral degree in biblical Hebrew. These two dedicated scholars taught me enough in those first conversations to convince me of the importance of research in this field, and I felt that others would be served well if they, too, understood a little about this amazing form of ancient writing. The beauty and surprising presence of this Hebrew writing form in the Book of Mormon appeared to be an almost untapped reservoir of testimony-strengthening material.

We must never forget, of course, that all scriptural truth is revealed through the Spirit, and there is never a substitute for the workings of the Holy Ghost. Moroni advised us well when he wrote:

> Behold, I would exhort you that when ye shall read these things, if it be wisdom in God that ye should read them, that ye would remember how merciful the Lord hath been unto the children of men, from the creation of Adam even down until the time that ye shall receive these things, and ponder it in your hearts. And when you shall receive these things, I would exhort you that ye would ask God, the Eternal Father, in the name of Christ, if these things are not true; and if ye shall ask with a sincere heart, with real intent, having faith in Christ, he will manifest the truth of it unto you, by the power of the Holy Ghost. (Moroni 10:3—4)

Each of us can have a personal witness of the truth of the Book of Mormon by following Moroni’s promise, and that testimony can grow by further study of the scriptures. Still, even those who have not yet received the witness from the Holy Spirit can come to respect and appreciate the Book of Mormon by studying it closely.

After studying chiasmus in the Book of Mormon and then expanding my study to encompass other literary qualities of the Book of Mormon, I introduced several examples of Hebrew writing forms found in that amazing book to a well-educated and intelligent Jewish woman, Mary Kay Lazarus. She called a rabbi friend she knew in Ohio and said, “Rabbi, I have found a book filled with chiasmus.” “Then, my dear,” he responded, “you have found one of God’s books because chiasmus is the language of God.”\(^3\) Since that time she has had great respect for the Book of Mormon.
With only a few exceptions, all languages spoken and written today have ancient origins. The language forms found in the Book of Mormon naturally have beginnings prior to their being used to write the great messages found in that book of scripture.

As the classical Greeks studied language, they defined various arrangements of words scientifically, naming more than two hundred structural patterns. Today literary critics still use many titles the Greeks gave to various writing forms. The Romans developed this discipline further, but after language changes in the Middle Ages, the use of these forms and their classical definitions was almost forgotten. Knowledge of these Hebrew writing forms and Jewish poetry has been partially resurrected today, but these elements of biblical style are still not broadly understood or even known by many of today’s scripture experts. As far as I can determine, it was well after the publication of the Book of Mormon by Joseph Smith in 1830 that other books including or explaining these forms arrived in America. Hence Joseph Smith could not have been aware when he translated the Book of Mormon that it was full of chiasms and Hebraisms. He obediently did what the Savior wanted him to do—translate an ancient Israelite record for the benefit of our Heavenly Father’s children today.

In this study, we will look at some of the major forms used in the Hebrew Bible and the Book of Mormon, noting several scriptural examples of each. This book is a personal statement; many other examples could have been selected, and their arrangement is a matter of personal discretion. Because more than two hundred Hebrew forms and subforms have been identified, only some of the most commonly used forms are discussed in this book. However, my own research indicates that the forms I discuss represent a significant percentage of the types of forms used in the Book of Mormon.

By design, this book simply glances at these inspiring and fascinating forms. My hope is that this book will deepen your testimony of the Book of Mormon to the extent that you will agree it is an ancient Hebrew book that was translated, but not written, by Joseph Smith in the nineteenth century. Angela Crowell enthusiastically writes, “We have in the Book of Mormon an ancient Semitic treasure—a masterpiece of literary style that has yet to reach its zenith in appreciation and acclaim.”

This book offers a basic working knowledge of some of the ancient writing forms that can be identified in the scriptures. As John Welch writes, “Of all the things which can be said about the Book of Mormon, it must be acknowledged that the book, especially in its most literary portions, is replete and precise with extensive chiastic compositions. These passages are often meaningfully creative, original, and intricate, judged to be highly successful by any consistently applied criteria.”

As you study this book, I encourage you to mark in your own scriptures the forms given in the book and those you discover on your own in order to develop a better feel for the different literary forms found in the Bible and Book of Mormon. By persisting in marking your own scriptures as you continue to read these holy books, you will learn to recognize these beautiful writing forms more easily and will enjoy doing so.

Finally, I hope this book will inspire in you an even deeper faith in Jesus Christ. I believe that as you study the Book of Mormon as demonstrated in this book, the benefits I have mentioned, and many more, will flow from heaven and provide you with a firmer witness of this sacred record and its marvelously written message.

Acknowledgments
There are always many who deserve words of gratitude for the completion of a project such as this.

First I give my thanks to Anne, my eternal companion, who evolved into a fine researcher but mostly who offered her loving support, tirelessly typed the text while we lived in England, and helped with the project in many ways. Love and appreciation to our six children, who, with others, wondered if this project would ever be completed. Thanks to our son Nate for the artwork on the cover.

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While returning from a conference in Boise, Idaho, a number of years ago, President Thomas S. Monson expressed interest in what I was writing and offered unexpected encouragement. Elder Neal A. Maxwell, when asked how one could be more effective in the work of the Master, replied that one should write, write, and write. Thank you, brethren, for input at critical times in my own ministry and in preparing this text.

Thanks to the Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies (FARMS), which blesses the lives of both members and nonmembers of the church daily with their excellent publications, services, and untiring focus on Latter-day Saint scriptures and ancient religious studies. They compile much information pertaining to the kingdom of God that is read and appreciated by thousands. Their focus on the Book of Mormon is lifting our knowledge of that magnificent book to new heights and expanding its values beyond its unique original purposes.

This is not an official church publication, nor is it endorsed or sponsored by FARMS, although they have printed and will distribute it. Hence, though I was aided by many, I alone am responsible for the views found and communicated in this book. I have chosen to reformat a number of verses that other students of these writing
forms have arranged in other ways. There is much more to do in the formatting of the scriptures in Hebrew writing forms. E. W. Bullinger has concentrated on the Bible, whereas Donald Parry has contributed a significant service in arranging much of the Book of Mormon in his *Book of Mormon Text Reformatted*.

May I also recognize so many of you who, through prayer, pondering, and preaching the principles found within the Book of Mormon, know the truthfulness of it yet still want to know more. I am grateful if these ideas provide additional knowledge of the Book of Mormon.

**Author’s Testimony**

I would like to present my testimony of my sure knowledge that Joseph Smith translated the Book of Mormon by revelation from gold plates to which he was led by an ancient religious and military leader named Moroni. Joseph Smith forever altered the potential knowledge base of truth-seeking individuals with regard to the ancient people that for centuries dwelt in the Western Hemisphere. Those who inscribed the metal plates with their revelations, histories, and commentaries used the writing forms that they learned from their progenitors. This tradition was part of the Hebrew culture they brought from Jerusalem. It could have been no other way. David, Israel’s king who foresaw many things pertaining to the workings of God throughout the ages, prophesied that “truth shall spring out of the earth; and righteousness shall look down from heaven” (Psalm 85:11).

While serving as a newly called missionary in the Western States Mission in 1954, headquartered in Denver, Colorado, I was assigned to the small community of Rocky Ford, Colorado. There in our tiny apartment on Spruce Street, I read and prayed about the Book of Mormon with more fervor than ever before. The Holy Spirit forcefully responded. Before my mission, my first five quarters at the University of Utah included philosophy, anthropology, biology, social psychology, and sociology classes—hardly a scriptural or spiritual focus for a young elder preparing for his mission. No matter. Much of the negative worldly conditioning from the classroom slipped away during my mission as I focused on the teachings of the Book of Mormon and the tasks of a missionary.

In Rocky Ford, Colorado, I studied the teachings and lives of Lehi, Nephi, Mosiah, Alma, Alma the Younger, Mormon, and others. It was Moroni, however, who profoundly instructed me through his writings in the Book of Mormon. As I prayed and studied the promise found in Moroni 10:4, it was fulfilled completely in my own life. It still seems like only last week when that event transpired, even though it was over forty years ago. My life has never been the same.

I learned then that a spiritual testimony matters most. The Holy Ghost does not let us down. It is our responsibility to ask with faith, and the Lord will respond. Moroni wrote that we must first receive the truths found in the Book of Mormon and then pray for the confirmation that will surely come.

Studying ancient Hebrew writing forms and legal systems, determining agricultural practices, and deciphering the geography of the Book of Mormon are interesting pursuits that help us see the Book of Mormon in interesting ways, but such knowledge can never replace sincerely praying about that amazing book and studying continually its inspired examples, stories, and eternal doctrines. The Book of Mormon is a spiritual book. When we pray about its divine nature, it blossoms in our minds as the most helpful, powerful, and significant book in our lives.

Even though I have coordinated and authored most of this book, I stand first to declare that the evidences it contains pale in significance to the testimony that comes from humble prayer. That is my encouragement for you. If
you will study and pray, your testimony of the Book of Mormon will be from the Lord who gave us life.

Notes

1. See the section titled “Chiasmus” (pages 100—110).


3. The rabbi’s statement, of course, should not be misunderstood or exaggerated. While God may on occasion use chiasmus, alternate forms, or anaphoras, this does not mean that he always does.


5. This conclusion is based on several conversations I had with John W. Welch and Donald W. Parry beginning in 1991, as well as on my own personal studies.


9. See Bullinger, Figures of Speech.