Forms of Repetition

There are two basic classifications of Hebrew writing forms: repetitions and parallelisms. In each area we find many different, distinct, and interesting forms. The repetitions we find in scripture are of letters, words, numbers, figures of speech, phrases, sentences, subjects, descriptions, conclusions, positions of words, meanings of words, arrangements of words, double meanings of words, and many more. They all seem to have several characteristics in common.

Repetition is almost always used for emphasis, clarity, or to make the phrase or verse more euphonious. However, we generally find redundancies and repetitions not encouraged and often even inappropriate in English, German, Spanish, and many other languages. Often they are described as boring and unneeded. Language teachers usually discourage their use. This is not the case in Hebrew. In fact, the opposite is true. We must remember that even though a word or phrase is repeated in close proximity, the two words or phrases do not necessarily mean exactly the same thing. The repetition might emphasize a completely different concept or principle, even if it is similar or identical to words or phrases used earlier. This is important to remember. Because repetitions are so common in Hebrew writing, we often ignore them. However, the scriptures become even more meaningful when we recognize the various types of repetition and realize that in almost every instance they were purposely designed for our benefit. Following Donald Parry's outline, we can identify several types of repetitions and parallelisms.

Anaphora: The Same Beginning

Anaphora is the easiest type of Hebrew writing form to identify. It is the “repetition of the same word or phrase in several successive clauses.” E. W. Bullinger defines it as “the repetitions of the same word at the beginning of successive sentences.”

Anaphora is a Greek term meaning “to repeat” or “to bring again.” It describes an “important and impressive figure of speech” that in English is simply designated as “like sentence beginnings.” Anaphoric phrases are common and are easily found in both the Bible and the Book of Mormon.

Perhaps the most famous example to Latter-day Saints is the phrase and it came to pass, found plentifully throughout the Book of Mormon. This phrase is also used frequently in the historical writings of the Old Testament (namely, parts of the Pentateuch, 1 and 2 Samuel, 1 and 2 Kings, and 1 and 2 Chronicles). In the book of Genesis, and it came to pass is found sixty-two times to begin sentences. The phrase is characteristic of prose narrative and is seldom found in poetry, song, wisdom literature, or epistles. It is more common in the Book of Mormon (found in one of every four verses) than in the book of Genesis (found in one of every twenty-four verses). These numbers are an average; the phrase is more concentrated in some parts of these books than others. It is natural that the phrase is so prevalent in the Book of Mormon, because as Robert F. Smith explains, “Most of the Book of Mormon claims to be a highly condensed prose narrative, and to a far greater and more uniform degree than can be claimed of most biblical books.”

Turning to the Book of Mormon, it is worth noting that Lehi, Nephi, and the successive prophets and custodians of the records had available to them the books of the Hebrew prophets in which anaphora is found most frequently.
The phrase and it came to pass is used approximately 1,430 times in the Book of Mormon. For instance, from 1 Nephi 7:16—9:2, we find that of forty-seven verses, twenty-three begin with and it came to pass and forty-three begin with and. But anaphora is not restricted to the phrase and it came to pass, as evidenced in 2 Nephi 9:31—38:

And wo unto the deaf that will not hear; for they shall perish.
Wo unto the blind that will not see; for they shall perish also.
Wo unto the uncircumcised of heart, for a knowledge of their iniquities shall smite them at the last day.
Wo unto the liar, for he shall be thrust down to hell.
Wo unto the murderer who deliberately killeth, for he shall die.
Wo unto them who commit whoredoms, for they shall be thrust down to hell.
Yea, wo unto those that worship idols, for the devil of all devils delighteth in them.
And, in fine, wo unto all those who die in their sins; for they shall return to God, and behold his face, and remain in their sins.

One of the most beautiful anaphoras in all scripture is found in Genesis 1:3—11:

And God said, Let there be light: and there was light.
And God saw the light, that it was good: and God divided the light from the darkness.
And God called the light Day, and the darkness he called Night. And the evening and the morning were the first day.
And God said, Let there be a firmament in the midst of the waters, and let it divide the waters from the waters.
And God made the firmament, and divided the waters which were under the firmament from the waters which were above the firmament: and it was so.
And God called the firmament Heaven. And the evening and the morning were the second day.
And God said, Let the waters under the heaven be gathered together unto one place, and let the dry land appear: and it was so.
And God called the dry land Earth; and the gathering together of the waters called he Seas: and God saw that it was good.
And God said, Let the earth bring forth grass, the herb yielding seed, and the fruit tree yielding fruit after his kind, whose seed is in itself, upon the earth: and it was so.

Of similar power and feeling is Psalm 150:1—5, in which praise him begins nearly every phrase:

Praise ye the Lord.
Praise God in his sanctuary:
praise him in the firmament of his power.
Praise him for his mighty acts:
praise him according to his excellent greatness.
Praise him with the sound of the trumpet:
praise him with the psaltery and harp.
Praise him with the timbrel and dance:
praise him with stringed instruments and organs.
Praise him upon the loud cymbals:
praise him upon the high sounding cymbals.
Anaphora is found throughout Hebraic writings and often in historical writings in the New Testament. A deeper appreciation of the Book of Mormon can be gained by identifying the Hebrew writing forms used in both the Old Testament and the Book of Mormon.

For further study, the following is a list of several significant examples of anaphora: Deuteronomy 28:16—19 (cursed); Psalms 13:1—3; 148:1—4 (praise); Proverbs 30:11—14 (there is a generation); Jeremiah 4:23—26 (I beheld); 50:35—37 (a sword); Zephaniah 1:15—16 (day); Matthew 5:3—11 (blessed are; see 3 Nephi 12:2—11); Romans 8:33—35 (who); 1 Corinthians 11:3 (the head); 12:8—10 (to another); Hebrews 11:1, 3—9, 11, 13, 17, 20—24, 27—31 (faith); 1 Nephi 7:9—12 (how is it); 7:16—8:2 (and it came to pass); 2 Nephi 15:20—22 (wo unto); 28:24—29 (wo be unto); Mosiah 4:9—10 (believe); Alma 5:3—60 (variations of I say unto you); 11:44 (both); Helaman 13:11—12, 14—16 and 3 Nephi 29:5—7 (variations of wo be unto, a phrase found almost exclusively in the Book of Mormon; however, see D&C 56:16—17); Mormon 9:26 (who can, who will).

**Polysyndeton: Many Conjunctions**

Polysyndeton is “a figure consisting in the use of several conjunctions in close succession; usually, the repetition of the same conjunction . . . to connect a number of coordinate words or clauses.” It is among the easiest of repetitious forms to identify because it repeats “the word and at the beginning of successive clauses.” As Parry explains, the literal translation of the Greek word polysyndeton is “many, bound together”—referring to the many phrases [or items] bound together by the repetition of a conjunction. Polysyndeton is a special type of anaphora (like sentence beginnings) that usually limits itself to and. Other conjunctions might also be used in such a pattern.

Polysyndeton somewhat resembles anaphora in that the word and is often repeated in both forms. The difference lies in the position and function of the repeated word. With anaphora, the repeated and will often begin consecutive clauses or sentences, whereas with polysyndeton, the repeated and can be in various positions in the sentence or phrase and is used to connect a series of items such as weapons, people, or animals.

Old Testament writers used the conjunction and profusely, but in the translation from the Hebrew Masoretic text to the King James Version, many of them were ignored. After all, in English the frequent repetition of and seems awkward and unnecessary. An example of polysyndeton that survived is found in Joshua 7:24:

And Joshua,  
and all Israel with him, took Achan the son of Zerah,  
and the silver,  
and the garment,  
and the wedge of gold,  
and his sons,  
and his daughters,  
and his oxen,  
and his asses,  
and his sheep,  
and his tent,
Another example of polysyndeton that survived is found in the book of Genesis. And is the first word in 1,142 of the book’s 1,533 verses (73 percent).

The Prophet Joseph Smith’s translation of the Book of Mormon contains numerous redundant uses of the word and. The sheer numbers indicate that he, through the direction of the Holy Spirit, retained a greater percentage of instances of the word and than the King James translators did in their monumental translation efforts. That implies that this form could have been intentionally preserved for emphasis in the Book of Mormon translation under direct guidance from the Lord. A good example of polysyndeton in the Book of Mormon is found in Alma 1:29:

\[
\text{an abundance of flocks}
\text{and herds,}
\text{and fatlings of every kind,}
\text{and also abundance of grain,}
\text{and of gold,}
\text{and of silver,}
\text{and of precious things,}
\text{and abundance of silk}
\text{and fine-twined linen,}
\text{and all manner of good homely cloth.}
\]

Hebrew writing did not employ punctuation as we know it today, so and was often used in place of commas and semicolons. Because so much of Hebrew is written using repetitions, the connective and was used to link these elements and sometimes also to add continuity to a series of thoughts, principles, or historical happenings that the writer wanted to communicate. We would receive a low grade in an English class today if we were to use many ands, whereas this would have been natural for a Hebrew schoolboy. Helaman 3:14 contains an excellent example of how and had the effect of intensifying a listing of the “proceedings of this people” by focusing attention on each element individually and stressing the cumulative extent of the series:

\[
\text{yea, the account of the Lamanites}
\text{and of the Nephites,}
\text{and their wars,}
\text{and contentions,}
\text{and dissensions,}
\text{and their preaching,}
\text{and their prophecies,}
\text{and their shipping}
\text{and their building of ships,}
\text{and their building of temples,}
\text{and of synagogues}
\text{and their sanctuaries,}
\text{and their righteousness,}
\text{and their wickedness,}
\]
and their murders,
and their robbings,
and their plundering,
and all manner of abominations
and whoredoms, cannot be contained in this work.

After eighteen ands, one is almost glad that the Book of Mormon authors decided not to include the complete history of everything that the people did!

In the next examples we see further uses of and. The first shows how and gives power through step-by-step clarity to the connection between the requirements that the gentiles must follow and the necessity of remaining on the narrow path:

except they shall be reconciled unto Christ,
and enter into the narrow gate,
and walk in the strait path which leads to life,
and continue in the path until the end of the day of probation.
(2 Nephi 33:9)

And it came to pass that they did come up to battle;
and it was in the sixth month;
and behold, great and terrible was the day that they did come up to battle;
and they were girded about after the manner of robbers;
and they had a lamb-skin about their loins,
and they were dyed in blood,
and their heads were shorn,
and they had headplates upon them;
and great and terrible was the appearance of the armies . . . because of their armor,
and because of their being dyed in blood.
(3 Nephi 4:7)

One of the finest examples of polysyndeton is found in the King James translation of 1 Corinthians 13:1—3. Seven of these ands are present in the original Greek, and the others are grammatically implied.

Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels,
and have not charity, I am become as sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal.
And though I have the gift of prophecy,
and understand all mysteries,
and all knowledge;
and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains,
and have not charity, I am nothing.
And though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor,
and though I give my body to be burned,
The use of polysyndeton in these three verses adds a repetitive literary power that probably could not come in any other way.

Many ands are used often in 3 Nephi 10 to 12. Like other Hebrew writing forms, polysyndeton is used with varying frequency by various authors. Another fine example of how and strengthens a prophet’s message is found in 3 Nephi 11:19—20:

> And Nephi arose and went forth, and bowed himself before the Lord and did kiss his feet. And the Lord commanded him that he should arise. And he arose and stood before him.

The following example from verse 27 of the same chapter provides a powerful focus on deity:

> that the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Ghost are one; and I am in the Father, and the Father in me, and the Father and I are one.

Easily recognizable, polysyndeton was a tool frequently used by Hebrew writers and is an obvious support for the Book of Mormon’s Hebraic roots.

For additional examples of polysyndeton, see Genesis 8:22; 22:9—11, 13; Exodus 1:7; 1 Samuel 17:34—35; 2 Kings 5:26; Isaiah 2:12—19; Haggai 1:11; Matthew 24:29—31; Mark 3:31—35; Luke 7:11—18; 1 Nephi 2:4; 4:9; Enos 1:23; Alma 7:27; 8:21—23; 9:21; 4 Nephi 1:5—7; Mormon 8:37; Ether 9:17—19, 21—27. Sometimes for converse rhetorical effect, ancient authors deliberately left conjunctions out. This form is called asyndeton, meaning “without conjunctions.” Asyndeton is not commonly found in the Book of Mormon, although it may occasionally exist.

**Paradiastole: The Disjunctive Form**

Wherever many disjunctives, such as either/or and neither/nor, are located at the beginning of successive phrases, sentences, or series of words, the writing structure is called a paradiastole. In this form, "one word is repeated at the beginning of successive sentences." This form of repetition, a type of anaphora, "separates and distinguishes"
phrases rather than connects their similarities. Thus it can also be defined as a “putting together of dissimilar things.” It often serves to establish a contrast or opposition.

In particular, H. Clay Gorton finds that the conjunction or seems to have four applications, each of which is used extensively in the Book of Mormon. These four are as follows:

1. To identify opposites: “They are free to choose liberty and eternal life . . . or to choose captivity and death” (2 Nephi 2:27).
2. To identify equivalents: “Favored above every other nation, kindred, tongue, or people” (Alma 9:20). This is the most frequent application in the Book of Mormon.
3. To restate: “I have dreamed a dream; or, in other words, I have seen a vision” (1 Nephi 8:2).
4. To aid in correcting a statement: “Thus we see that they buried their weapons of peace, or they buried the weapons of war, for peace” (Alma 24:19). In this form, the author makes a statement and then restates the idea using similar words because he is correcting or clarifying his original thoughts.

In the examples that follow in this section, with a little effort one can identify which of the uses of or applies in each case. A classic example of paradiastole is found in Deuteronomy 13:6:

*If thy brother, the son of thy mother,*
*or thy son,*
*or thy daughter,*
*or the wife of thy bosom,*
*or thy friend, which is as thine own soul,*
*entice thee secretly, saying, Let us go and serve other gods*

This writing form is quite popular in the writings of Paul. Perhaps one of the most quoted instances of paradiastole is found in Romans 8:35:

*Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? shall tribulation,*
*or distress,*
*or persecution,*
*or famine,*
*or nakedness,*
*or peril,*
*or sword?*

Joseph Smith, as he translated literally the Book of Mormon, included these Hebrew writing forms because the plates were inscribed by ancient prophets who utilized this style of communicating in their writings. He knew nothing explicit of these forms, however. In 3 Nephi 29:6 we find a clear example:

*worketh by revelation,*
*or by prophecy,*
*or by gifts,*
*or by tongues,*
Interestingly, the Old Testament contains relatively few examples of paradiastole. One is found in Exodus 22:10 (see also Deuteronomy 14:26):

If a man deliver unto his neighbour an ass,
or an ox,
or a sheep,
or any beast, to keep; and it die,
or be hurt,
or driven away, no man seeing it

An example of paradiastole with neither/nor is found in Judges 1:31:

Neither did Asher drive out the inhabitants of Accho,
nor the inhabitants of Zidon,
nor of Ahlab,
nor of Achzib,
nor of Helbah,
nor of Aphik,
nor of Rehob

As with other forms of Hebrew writing, we could supply many more examples of paradiastole. The few that are listed help to increase our understanding that the translation of the Book of Mormon is of divine origin and that it is a Hebrew book of ancient scripture.


**Epibole: Irregular Repetition**

Epibole occurs when “the same sentence or phrase is cast upon or laid upon (like layers or courses of bricks) several successive paragraphs.” Expressed another way, an epibole is several words repeated close together in an irregular way. Furthermore, epibole may involve the appearance of words in a text as if they had been thrown into it or layered in. Note that this layering effect is also common in chiasmus (see pages 100–110).

A double example from the Old Testament is observed in Leviticus 21:6:

They shall be holy unto their God.
and not profane the name of their God:  
for the offerings of the Lord made by fire, and the bread of their God, they do offer:  
therefore they shall be holy.

In an irregular manner, they shall be holy appears twice, and their God is written three times. If we were to look at the next two verses as well, we would find the bread of their God mentioned in both the sixth verse and the eighth verse.

Another highly interesting epibole is found in Leviticus 22:2—16: either holy thing or holy things occurs twelve times in this series of verses. This frequent repetition acts as a powerful reinforcement of the Lord’s instructions to Moses that priests and their families are to honor their sacred calling by separating themselves from worldly and unholy things. Even modern readers cannot read this passage and mistake how the Lord feels about those who bear his priesthood. Though specific instructions have changed, the feeling created by this epibole lasts through generations in order to instruct us today.

Turning to the New Testament, we find epibole in the writings John penned while on the isle of Patmos. The phrases I know thy works and he that hath an ear irregularly occur multiple times in Revelation 2:2—26 and 3:1—2, 8, 15.

In the Book of Mormon, house of Jacob is repeated four times at irregular intervals in 3 Nephi 5:21 and 25, tying those sentences together most impressively. A somewhat more complicated and intricately designed example of a double epibole is found in 2 Nephi 29:8:

Know ye not that the testimony of  
two nations is a witness unto you that I am God, that I remember  
one nation like unto another? Wherefore, I speak the same words unto  
one nation like unto another. And when the  
two nations shall run together the testimony of the  
two nations shall run together also.

Note that two nations is repeated three times and one nation like unto another is repeated twice, as is two nations shall run together.

Perhaps the most interesting example in the Book of Mormon is found in 1 Nephi 13:23—24 and 14:23. Forty-one verses separate close variations of the highly distinctive phrase proceeded forth from the mouth of a Jew, which appears three times in 1 Nephi 13:23—24 and three more times in 1 Nephi 14:23. Interestingly, it is also located once in 1 Nephi 13:38, probably to tie these verses together, like a cycloides (see the next section in this chapter). It could also be considered an inclusio (see pages 110—114).

The first book of Nephi in the Book of Mormon seems in my experience to use epibole more than other books in the Book of Mormon. For example, into the ship is used four times in 1 Nephi 18: once in verse 5, twice in verse 6, and once again in verse 8. Nephi wrote the epibole used most frequently in scripture when, from 1 Nephi 4:34 to 1 Nephi 7:6, he layered in the wilderness or into the wilderness eighteen times, tying those experiences together in a most effective way.
Cycloides: Regularly Circulating Repetition

Cycloides, a moderately common form of Hebrew writing, is beautifully and cleverly designed. Its name implies “resembling a circle.”18 Cycloides “is so called because the sentence or phrase is repeated at intervals, as though in regular circles.”19 It is quite easy to identify because the same words at a somewhat noticeable but not always predictable frequency circulate throughout a passage to delineate and connect a specific message. A block of text containing a cycloides almost always has an exact beginning and ending. The word or phrase creating the cycloides is not used in proximity before or after that block of text.

In Psalm 42:5—6 and 11 we find first the inquiry, “Why art thou cast down, O my soul?” followed by the statement, “O my God, my soul is cast down within me,” and then again the question, “Why art thou cast down, O my soul?” The answer finally comes after this cyclical approach and ends with “hope thou in God” in verse 11. Anyone who has sought solace from a loving Heavenly Father recognizes that this pattern is typical of such searching prayers. Another biblical example of cycloides appears in Psalm 80. In verses 3, 7, and 19 we find a close variation of the phrase turn us again, O God, and cause thy face to shine three times woven through this psalm.

The longest cycloides I have found in the Old Testament is in the writings of Ezekiel, in which the phrase slain by the sword circulates twelve times through twelve verses (see Ezekiel 32:20—32). A word alone can be a cycloides if it occurs at regular intervals, leading the reader through a specific message. In this same thirty-second chapter of Ezekiel, the word uncircumcised appears ten times, and terror appears seven times. In a more complete example of cycloides, down to the pit shows up five times and land of the living, six. A close variation of slain by the sword ties the last fifteen chapters of the book of Ezekiel together through its appearance eighteen times in chapters 21—35, with ten of those concentrated in chapter 32 alone.

Cycloides is also well attested in the Book of Mormon. Often, however, a cycloides is not the only Hebrew form in a passage and can be identified only because the words or phrases are the same, although often intermittent and sometimes seemingly incomplete until the other words or phrases are located to make a message whole. In 1 Nephi 19:6—7 we see a clear example of this form:

And now, if I do err, even did they err of old; not that I would excuse myself because of other men, but because of the weakness which is in me, according to the flesh, I would excuse myself. For the things which some men esteem to be of great worth, both to the body and soul, others set at naught and trample under their feet. Yea, even the very God of Israel do men trample under their feet; I say, trample under their feet but I would speak in other words— they set him at naught.

It is interesting to note that would excuse myself is used only these two times in all of scripture. Trample under their feet is used these three times in 1 Nephi, three times in Helaman (6:31, 39; 12:2), and only once in 3 Nephi (14:6).
The longest single-word cycloides I have found is in 3 Nephi 11:21—12:2, where the Lord discusses baptism at length. A variation of baptize is mentioned nineteen times, father sixteen times, and doctrine nine times. Incidentally, I have found that there are at least seven other Hebrew writing forms found in these verses: chiasmus, simple alternate, repeated alternate, extended alternate, inclusio (and there shall be no disputations among you), anabasis, and polysyndeton.

Another very interesting cycloides is located in 3 Nephi 29:4—8, a text that contains many forms of parallelism and repetition. Here a form of the word spurn is located in the five verses four times. Three of these instances are extended to include the phrase doings of the Lord in some form. Spurn and spurneth are not found anywhere else in scripture, and this supports the idea that the ancient authors purposely used this unique word in composing this cycloides.

In a very short cycloides near the ending of the Book of Mormon, Mormon writes in despair of the sinning everywhere about him:

_O my beloved son, how can a people like this, that are without civilization—(And only a few years have passed away, and they were a civil and a delightful people)_

_But O my son, how can a people like this, whose delight is in so much abomination—How can we expect that God will stay his hand in judgment against us?_

(Moroni 9:11—14)

Other examples of cycloides include Deuteronomy 18:1—2 (inheritance); 2 Samuel 1:19, 25, 27 (how are the mighty fallen); Mosiah 4:9—10 (believe); 5:10—12 (name); Alma 5:3—6 (I say unto you); 32:12—16 (humble). There are many others.

_Epistrophe: Similar Sentence or Clause Endings_

Donald Parry writes, “Epistrophe, or ‘like sentence endings,’ is the repetition of an identical word and/or expression at the end of successive sentences.” E. W. Bullinger states, “It is a figure in which the same word or words are repeated at the end of successive sentences or clauses, instead of at the beginning.” Similarly, it is defined as “a figure of speech in which each sentence or clause ends with the same word.” Epistrophe is a characteristic of poetry rather than prose.

In Deuteronomy 27:16—26, each clause ends with the words _And all the people shall say, Amen_. In this passage, Moses, or those who helped him, say “amen” twelve times to end the various thoughts and add unquestioned emphasis.

Perhaps the most significant epistrophe in scripture is found in Psalm 136:1—26, in which the repetition of _for his mercy endureth for ever_ is found at the end of each of the twenty-six verses. This impresses all who read it with the message of God’s eternal love while simultaneously depicting a perfect example of this Hebrew writing form.

Generally speaking, translators, not knowing Hebrew writing forms, unfortunately would versify the Bible text without understanding what was originally conveyed by the structure of Hebrew writing forms. This often
resulted in a case of cycloides but did away with the beautiful epistrophe that had originally been designed into the revelation. Psalm 118:10—12 is an excellent epistrophe:

    And all nations compassed me about: but in the name of the Lord will I destroy them.  
    They compassed me about; yea, they compassed me about: but in the name of the Lord I will destroy them.  
    They compassed me about like bees; they are quenched as the fire of thorns: for in the name of the Lord I will destroy them.

We find in Psalm 115:9—11 another beautiful epistrophe:

    O Israel, trust thou in the Lord: he is their help and their shield.  
    O house of Aaron, trust in the Lord: he is their help and their shield.  
    Ye that fear the Lord, trust in the Lord: he is their help and their shield.

I believe that these identical phrase endings were skillfully included to make a strong point, add variety because of their rarity, and improve the concept flow of the passage.

In Ether 2:17 we find a well-constructed epistrophe that communicates clearly that the Jaredite boats were constructed "like unto a dish":

    And they were built after a manner that they were exceedingly tight, even that they would hold water like unto a dish;  
    and the bottom thereof was tight like unto a dish;  
    and the sides thereof were tight like unto a dish;  
    and the ends thereof were peaked; and the top thereof was tight like unto a dish;  
    and the length thereof was the length of a tree; and the door thereof, when it was shut, was tight like unto a dish.

In Mosiah we find two verses that make up an epistrophe. This epistrophe has been disrupted by modern versification, a common "enemy" that sometimes obscures these writing forms (see pages 8—9).

    And now ye have said that salvation cometh by the law of Moses.  
    I say unto you that it is expedient that ye should keep the law of Moses as yet;  
    but I say unto you, that the time shall come when it shall no more be expedient to keep the law of Moses.  
    And moreover, I say unto you, that salvation doth not come by the law alone;  
    and were it not for the atonement, which God himself shall make for the sins and iniquities of his people, that they must unavoidably perish, notwithstanding the law of Moses.  
    (Mosiah 13:27—28)

An interesting example of epistrophe is found in Ether 1:6—32, where the phrase son of is used twenty-six times in this fascinating genealogy of Ether, who was a descendent of Jared through these many generations.

Other examples of epistrophe include the following: Joel 2:26—27 (my people shall never be ashamed); Mosiah 1:6 (are true); Alma 62:18 (Nepihiah).
Amoebaeon: Like Paragraph Endings

Amoebaeon contains "a recurring identical phrase or sentence found at intervals, always at the end . . . of successive paragraphs."^23 ^Cycloides may occur at the beginning, or middle, or any part of [a passage,] but amoebaeon only at the end."^24 Hebrew prophets, wanting to reinforce their message to their students, often punctuated the very end of the message with identical or nearly identical phrases. Amoebaeon is often difficult to distinguish from epistrophe, because the Hebrews did not define sentences or paragraphs the way we do today. Amoebaeon is found in narrative writings, often indicated by the phrase and it came to pass, while epistrophe applies to poetry, which may be divided into lines, or strophes. It is difficult to determine how Hebrew strophes and narrative sections should be identified and arranged.

For an example of amoebaeon, let us turn to the Old Testament. These words describe a time that messengers came bearing tragic news signaling that Satan had begun to torment Job:

*And the Sabeans fell upon them, and took them away; yea, they have slain the servants with the edge of the sword; and I only am escaped alone to tell thee.*

While he was yet speaking, there came also another, and said, The fire of God is fallen from heaven, and hath burned up the sheep, and the servants, and consumed them; and I only am escaped alone to tell thee.

While he was yet speaking, there came also another, and said, The Chaldeans made out three bands, and fell upon the camels, and have carried them away, yea, and slain the servants with the edge of the sword; and I only am escaped alone to tell thee.

While he was yet speaking, there came also another, and said, Thy sons and thy daughters were eating and drinking wine in their eldest brother’s house: And, behold, there came a great wind from the wilderness, and smote the four corners of the house, and it fell upon the young men, and they are dead; and I only am escaped alone to tell thee.

(Job 1:15—19)

In the book of Amos we learn of the Lord’s great disappointment when the people, though blessed in many ways, did not return to their devotion to him. It is easy to observe how amoebaeon can be used as a tool to accentuate the message:

*And I also have given you cleanness of teeth in all your cities, and want of bread in all your places: yet have ye not returned unto me, saith the Lord.*

And also I have withholden the rain from you, when there were yet three months to the harvest: and I caused it to rain upon one city, and caused it not to rain upon another city: one piece was rained upon, and the piece whereupon it rained not withered. So two or three cities wandered unto one city, to drink water; but they were not satisfied: yet have ye not returned unto me, saith the Lord.

I have smitten you with blasting and mildew: when your gardens and your vineyards and your fig trees and your olive trees increased, the palmerworm devoured them: yet have ye not returned unto me, saith the Lord.

I have sent among you the pestilence after the manner of Egypt: your young men have I slain with the sword, and have taken away your horses; and I have made the stink of your camps to come up unto your nostrils: yet have ye not returned unto me, saith the Lord.

I have overthrown some of you, as God overthrew Sodom and Gomorrah, and ye were as a firebrand plucked
out of the burning: yet have ye not returned unto me, saith the Lord.

(Amos 4:6—11)

On several occasions the authors of the Book of Mormon used amoebaeon, usually in short bursts of two or three similar paragraph endings. In Helaman 7:23—24 we see a typical example:

For behold, thus saith the Lord: I will not show unto the wicked of my strength, to one more than the other, save it be unto those who repent of their sins, and hearken unto my words. Now therefore, I would that ye should behold, my brethren, that it shall be better for the Lamanites than for you except ye shall repent.

For behold, they are more righteous than you, for they have not sinned against that great knowledge which ye have received; therefore the Lord will be merciful unto them; yea, he will lengthen out their days and increase their seed, even when thou shalt be utterly destroyed except thou shalt repent.

Time and circumstance alter the preference for certain writing forms just like other aspects of culture. Book of Mormon prophets seem to have used amoebaeons fairly frequently, but often together with another form. The book of Helaman employs this practice in the following example, in which it shall be done is mentioned twice, but in the final passage the closely similar expression it shall come to pass is substituted:

And thus, if ye shall say unto this temple it shall be rent in twain, it shall be done.

And if ye shall say unto this mountain, Be thou cast down and become smooth, it shall be done.

And behold, if ye shall say that God shall smite this people, it shall come to pass.

(Helaman 10:8—10)

I believe that Alma is the unquestioned champion user of amoebaeons in all scripture. He mastered the form to the extent that he could comfortably substitute words, tense, circumstance, and time frames and still maintain the form in all its usefulness. He usually used short amoebaeons, however, which were not more than two or three similar endings. Following is a series of like paragraph endings that significantly add interest to the text:

Who art thou? Suppose ye that we shall believe the testimony of one man, although he should preach unto us that the earth should pass away?

Now they understood not the words which they spake; for they knew not that the earth should pass away.

(Alma 9:2—3)

And also because I said unto them that they were a lost and a fallen people they were angry with me, and sought to lay their hands upon me, that they might cast me into prison.

But it came to pass that the Lord did not suffer them that they should take me at that time and cast me into prison.

(Alma 9:32—33)

But it came to pass that they did not; but they took them and bound them with strong cords, and took them before the chief judge of the land.

And the people went forth and witnessed against them—testifying that they had reviled against the law, and their lawyers and judges of the land, and also of all the people that were in the land; and also testified that there was but one God, and that he should send his Son among the people, but he should not save them; and
many such things did the people testify against Alma and Amulek. Now this was done before the chief judge of the land.
(Alma 14:4—5)

And when they had been cast into prison three days, there came many lawyers, and judges, and priests, and teachers, who were of the profession of Nehor; and they came in unto the prison to see them, and they questioned them about many words; but they answered them nothing.
And it came to pass that the judge stood before them, and said: Why do ye not answer the words of this people? Know ye not that I have power to deliver you up unto the flames? And he commanded them to speak; but they answered nothing.
(Alma 14:18—19)

Now behold, we can look forth and see the fruits of our labors; and are they few? I say unto you, Nay, they are many; yea, and we can witness of their sincerity, because of their love towards their brethren and also towards us.
For behold, they had rather sacrifice their lives than even to take the life of their enemy; and they have buried their weapons of war deep in the earth, because of their love towards their brethren.
(Alma 26:31—32)

Yea, and I also remember the captivity of my fathers; for I surely do know that the Lord did deliver them out of bondage, and by this did establish his church; yea, the Lord God, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, did deliver them out of bondage.
Yea, I have always remembered the captivity of my fathers; and that same God who delivered them out of the hands of the Egyptians did deliver them out of bondage.
(Alma 29:11—12)

Yea, I say unto you, were it not for these things that these records do contain, which are on these plates, Ammon and his brethren could not have convinced so many thousands of the Lamanites of the incorrect tradition of their fathers; yea, these records and their words brought them unto repentance; that is, they brought them to the knowledge of the Lord their God, and to rejoice in Jesus Christ their Redeemer.
And who knoweth but what they will be the means of bringing many thousands of them, yea, and also many thousands of our stiffnecked brethren, the Nephites, who are now hardening their hearts in sin and iniquities, to the knowledge of their Redeemer?
(Alma 37:9—10)

And it came to pass that when the men of Moroni saw the fierceness and the anger of the Lamanites, they were about to shrink and flee from them. And Moroni, perceiving their intent, sent forth and inspired their hearts with these thoughts—yea, the thoughts of their lands, their liberty, yea, their freedom from bondage.
And it came to pass that they turned upon the Lamanites, and they cried with one voice unto the Lord their God, for their liberty and their freedom from bondage.
(Alma 43:48—49; see Alma 29:11—12)

These verses are just a fraction of the many two-paragraph endings found in the great book of Alma.
A rather fascinating use of like paragraph endings is found in Alma 48:1—3. Mormon inscribes against the Nephites at the end of verse 1, then moves to the second verse, where Nephites as well as the Lamanites is written. He then goes to the third verse and writes the same phrase that is found in the first verse.

And now it came to pass that, as soon as Amalickiah had obtained the kingdom he began to inspire the hearts of the Lamanites against the people of Nephi; yea, he did appoint men to speak unto the Lamanites from their towers, against the Nephites.

And thus he did inspire their hearts against the Nephites, insomuch that in the latter end of the nineteenth year of the reign of the judges, he having accomplished his designs thus far, yea, having been made king over the Lamanites, he sought also to reign over all the land, yea, and all the people who were in the land, the Nephites as well as the Lamanites.

Therefore he had accomplished his design, for he had hardened the hearts of the Lamanites and blinded their minds, and stirred them up to anger, insomuch that he had gathered together a numerous host to go to battle against the Nephites.

In Alma 39:16—40:2 we find a quadruple occurrence of the concept that Jesus Christ is coming. In this case, for final effect, the concluding paragraph ending is stated more definitively:

And now, my son, this was the ministry unto which ye were called, to declare these glad tidings unto this people, to prepare their minds; or rather that salvation might come unto them, that they may prepare the minds of their children to hear the word at the time of his coming.

And now I will ease your mind somewhat on this subject. Behold, you marvel why these things should be known so long beforehand. Behold, I say unto you, is not a soul at this time as precious unto God as a soul will be at the time of his coming?

Is it not as necessary that the plan of redemption should be made known unto this people as well as unto their children? Is it not as easy at this time for the Lord to send his angel to declare these glad tidings unto us as unto our children, or as after the time of his coming?

Now my son, here is somewhat more I would say unto thee; for I perceive that thy mind is worried concerning the resurrection of the dead. Behold, I say unto you, that there is no resurrection—or, I would say, in other words, that this mortal does not put on immortality, this corruption does not put on incorruption—until after the coming of Christ.

Perhaps when an amoebaeon is focused on Jesus Christ, it becomes the most powerful. This amoebaeon, found in Alma 33:11—18, does just that:

And thou didst hear me because of mine afflictions and my sincerity; and it is because of thy Son that thou hast been thus merciful unto me, therefore I will cry unto thee in all mine afflictions, for in thee is my joy; for thou hast turned thy judgments away from me, because of thy Son.

And now Alma said unto them: Do ye believe those scriptures which have been written by them of old? Behold, if ye do, ye must believe what Zenos said; for, behold he said: Thou hast turned away thy judgments because of thy Son.

Now behold, my brethren, I would ask if ye have read the scriptures? If ye have, how can ye disbelieve on the Son of God?

For it is not written that Zenos alone spake of these things, but Zenock also spake of these things—For behold, he said: Thou art angry, O Lord, with this people, because they will not understand thy mercies which thou
hast bestowed upon them because of thy Son.
And now, my brethren, ye see that a second prophet of old has testified of the Son of God, and because the people would not understand his words they stoned him to death. But behold, this is not all; these are not the only ones who have spoken concerning the Son of God.

Additional examples of amoebaeon are as follows: Psalm 118:10—12 (in the name of the Lord I will destroy them); Isaiah 9:12, 17, 21; 10:4 (but his hand is stretched out still); Joel 2:26—27 (and my people shall never be ashamed); 1 Nephi 10:12—13 (scattered upon all the face of the earth); Alma 14:8—14 (forms of fire/burn); 31:7—8 (preached unto them); 35:1—2 (land of Jershon); 40:18—20 (resurrection of Christ).

Notes

1. See Donald W. Parry, The Book of Mormon Text Reformatted according to Parallelistic Patterns (Provo, Utah: FARMS, 1992), xxxv—xlvi. As expressed in the acknowledgments, I am deeply indebted to Donald Parry, whose expertise in the field of Hebrew literary forms has been immensely helpful.


4. Parry, Book of Mormon Text Reformatted, xxxvi.

5. See Robert F. Smith, “It Came to Pass’ in the Bible and the Book of Mormon” (FARMS, 1984), 1.

6. Ibid., 2.

7. OED, s.v. “polysyndeton.”


11. Ibid., 238.

12. Ibid.

13. OED, s.v. “paradiastole.”


18. OED, s.v. “cycloid.”


22. OED, s.v. “epistrophe.”
