Foreword

The Book of Mormon can be read—and should be read—in many ways. Generously, it repays close readers who seek to apply its messages to present-day lives as well as those that delve into its ancient origins. It submits itself openly to all kinds of rhetorical analyses, theological discussions, or comparative literary studies. But above all, no matter how it is read, the Book of Mormon welcomes readers. It invites all readers to meet its prophets and to be transformed by its wisdom. It begs to be read.

The present volume superbly facilitates one kind of literary reading of the Book of Mormon by reformattting its complete text in order to display as plainly as possible its most skillful and most beautiful uses of virtually all varieties of parallelism. Learning with this aid to read the Book of Mormon with an eye toward its abundant use of parallelism opens new windows of understanding and appreciation for this richly rewarding scripture.

Donald Parry’s expert introduction thoroughly familiarizes readers with an entire host of parallelistic arrangements. The most famous of these is chiasmus; but chiasmus has a large number of close literary cousins, all of which are well worth getting to know. Examples of them can be found on just about every page of the Book of Mormon, not to mention the related pages of the Hebrew Bible and cognate literatures.

The republication of this revised edition of the reformatted Book of Mormon coincides with the fortieth anniversary of the discovery of chiasmus in the Book of Mormon, which I was led to see on August 16, 1967, while I was serving as a missionary in Regensburg, Germany. That discovery transformed the reading of the Book of Mormon for many people. All of a sudden, readers could see that it was important to notice not only what the Book of Mormon says but how it says it. Chiasmus (or inverted parallelism) led the way and has been studied and utilized extensively in recent decades, but all other forms of parallelism (whether synonymous, synthetic, antithetical, grammatical, or numerical) were not far behind.

Rarely in Book of Mormon studies has a concept captured the imagination of scholars and readers more than the presence of chiasmus. By extension, that fascination is only enhanced by the full array of other kinds of parallelistic structures present on its pages. Many people who have been inclined initially to discount the book as superficial or insubstantial have felt required, when confronted by the presence of

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1. An extensive listing of books, articles, and scripture references, along with a guide to criteria used in identifying the presence of chiasmus, is found in John W. Welch and Daniel B. McKinlay, *Chiasmus Bibliography* (Provo, UT: FARMS, 1999). Many kinds of publications involving chiasmus have continued to appear in various places each year.
sophisticated literary forms in texts such as King Benjamin’s speech,² to back up a few giant steps and think much more deeply about the book, its origins, and its messages.

And indeed, these literary forms in the Book of Mormon prove many things. Much of what has been said in this regard about chiasmus in the Book of Mormon³ can be extended to the panoply of parallelisms in the Book of Mormon:

- Seeing these forms gives a general sense of satisfaction to the reader, proving that the text is more understandable, more beautiful, and more meaningful than previously thought.
- Attention to details in the text enhances the likelihood that interpretations will be provable in the text itself and not just in the eye of the beholder.
- Parallelistic analyses display the orderliness and complexity of the text, proving that the text is not chaotic, random, simplistic, or devoid of form (as some have suggested).
- These structures help readers divide the text into its originally intended segments or units, and to link counterparts in the text properly to each other.
- These literary features give evidence of the stylistic preferences of individual authors, compilers, and abridgers.
- These forms can also, on important occasions, provide evidence that the Book of Mormon was translated accurately from an underlying Hebrew text.⁴ After all, repetition is not a favored element of writing in modern style. Literary critics, such as Mark Twain in the nineteenth century, on quick reading found the style of writing in the Book of Mormon to be unattractive, perhaps because of its obviously un-American repetitiveness.

Thus, the presence of parallelisms in the Book of Mormon demonstrates many things about the Book of Mormon. In my view, the multiple parallelistic phenomena in the Book of Mormon amount to a very strong combination of subtle, interlocking evidences that significantly enhance the likelihood that the book is an ancient record that originated just as its authors and its translator said it did. After reading this book, I hope you will agree.

Donald Parry and many colleagues and contributors are to be thanked and congratulated for detecting and displaying the parallelistic structures of the Book of Mormon in a layout that is easy to read and that rewards deep reflection. After rereading the Book of Mormon this way, I hope all readers will be gratified that they have seen marvelous things that had never occurred to them before.

John W. Welch

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4. For a graphically enhanced, popular presentation of these parallelistic and other Hebrew forms, drawing especially on the works of E. W. Bullinger and the 1992 edition of Donald W. Parry’s The Book of Mormon Reformatted according to Parallelistic Patterns, see Hugh W. Pinnock, Finding Biblical Hebrew and Other Ancient Literary Forms in the Book of Mormon (Provo, UT: FARMS, 1999).