The Structure of the Book of Alma

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Since John Welch discovered chiasmus in the Book of Mormon fifty years ago, students of the volume have paid attention to textual structures.[1] Unfortunately, little attention has yet been paid to book-length structures, structures organizing larger stretches of the Book of Mormon.[2] Analysis of whole books within the Book of Mormon has largely remained in a preliminary phase.[3] In this note, however, I lay out what appears to be the intentional organizational structure of the book of Alma.

The first major clue for the organization of Alma lies in the obvious parallel between the stories of Nehor and Korihor. Some point out that Latter-day Saints misleadingly group these two figures together (along with Sherem) as the Nephite "anti-Christs,"[4] but clear features of the text set the two stories in parallel. The most important of these is the way

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1. See especially John W. Welch, "Chiasmus in the Book of Mormon," in *Chiasmus in Antiquity: Structures, Analyses, and Exegesis*, ed. John W. Welch (Provo, UT: FARMS, 1999), 198–210.

2. There are, of course, some exceptions. See, for instance, Noel B. Reynolds, "Nephi's Outline," in *Book of Mormon Authorship: New Light on Ancient Origins*, ed. Noel B. Reynolds (Provo, UT: BYU Religious Studies Center, 1982), 53–74.

3. Much of the best preliminary work is still that of Sidney B. Sperry, *Book of Mormon Compendium* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1968).

4. See the helpful discussion in John W. Welch, *The Legal Cases in the Book of Mormon* (Provo, UT: Brigham Young University Press and Neal A. Maxwell Institute, 2008), 301–9.

both narratives present their subjects in terms of the trouble they cause for Nephite law. Immediately after his death, Nehor's followers find they have to take care not to run afoul of the law. They can spread their message of priestcraft only by "pretend[ing] to preach according to their belief," since "the law could have no power on any man for their belief" (Alma 1:17).[5] It is important to note how similar this description of the Nehorite movement is to the later description of Korihor's appearance among the Nephites: "There was no law against a man's belief," the text explains, such that "if a man ... did not believe in [God], there was no law to punish him" (Alma 30:7, 9); consequently, "the law could have no hold upon" Korihor (Alma 30:12). These narrative descriptions clearly establish a correspondence between the stories of Nehor and Korihor.

With this first clue in hand, readers might recognize that the larger consequences of Nehor's and Korihor's respective interventions among the Nephites are also parallel. Both figures meet untimely ends because of their disruptive behavior, and each turns out to be connected to a dissenting Nephite movement. Shortly after Nehor's preaching, one of his followers, Amlici, incites a full-blooded rebellion that creates a separatist group. The Amlicites fight the main body of the Nephites, assisted by Lamanites (see Alma 2–3). In parallel, Korihor's connections to the Zoramites introduce the story of their rebellion.[6] The Zoramites end up as another separatist group at war with the Nephites, similarly

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5. All quotations from the Book of Mormon are taken from Royal Skousen, ed., *The Book of Mormon: The Earliest Text* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009). Where it seems appropriate, I have supplied my own rather than Skousen's punctuation to the text.

6. Brant Gardner raises the speculative possibility that, although Alma 30:59–60 reports Korihor's death as having happened among the Zoramites, Mormon as editor may have invented the Korihor-Zoramite connection. Perhaps, he suggests, "Mormon did not resist the satisfaction of supplying poetic justice to Korihor's end or, for literary reasons, placed Korihor's death among the self-righteous and inhospitable Zoramites to introduce them, his next theme." Brant A. Gardner, *Second Witness: Analytical and Contextual Commentary* ... (Salt Lake City: Greg Kofford Books, 2007), ...

assisted by the Lamanites (see Alma 31–35, 43–44). What clinches this correlation between the Amlicite and the Zoramite rebellions is a note Mormon provides in each account. The battle with the Amlicites ends with the victorious Nephites "throwing the bodies of the Lamanites which had been slain into the waters of Sidon" (Alma 2:34), with their bones eventually swept out into "the depths of the sea" (Alma 3:3); Mormon follows the battle against the Zoramites with a report of when the Nephites "cast their dead into the waters of Sidon, and they have gone forth and are buried in the depths of the sea" (Alma 44:22).[7] Just as the Nehor and Korihor stories serve as parallel narratives, so do the subsequent stories of the Amlicite and Zoramite rebellions.

Following the Amlicite rebellion, Alma leaves the judgment seat (see Alma 4). His subsequent preaching in several cities is reported, with emphasis on three cities in particular: Zarahemla, Gideon, and Ammonihah.[8] Zarahemla, Nephite Christianity's headquarters, requires diligent effort from Alma to ensure that the church leaders there attend to their duties—regulating church affairs and revitalizing the members' commitment (see Alma 5). Gideon requires far less from him, with the result that his preaching there is short, but profound (see Alma 7). Ammonihah proves horrifically trying, with Alma's message largely rejected and his followers either exiled or massacred (see Alma 8–15). Does all this find a parallel elsewhere in the book of Alma? In fact it does, in Alma's instruction to his three sons after the Zoramite

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the narratives of Korihor's encounter with Alma and of Alma's preaching among the Zoramites (compare especially Alma 30:43–44 with Alma 32:17–19).

7. Christopher Conkling briefly notes that "both [Alma's] earliest battle and his final battle 18 years later end with the same story: the dead bodies of the enemy soldiers being thrown into the River Sidon, which carried them to 'the depths of the sea' (Alma 3:3; 44:22)." Despite seeing this textual connection, however, Conkling does not note the role it plays in the larger organization of the book of Alma. J. Christopher Conkling, "Alma's Enemies: The Case of the Lamanites, Amlicites, and Mysterious Amalekites," *Journal of Book of Mormon* o, *galico* 1 1 (A/2095 d hl 1owever,

8. The narrathes:)n largc Lamamf the amanitver, of Alma. J and Sim 3–6) and Sidom (see Alma 15:12-11, an 8.15:15:12-   of Almaf Alma. J. Cln Zn Zararah‹g in Zarahemla, Gideon, and Ameon, and A1:

rebellion.[9] Alma's preaching in Zarahemla parallels his instruction to Helaman, who will serve as head of the Nephite church and so requires serious instruction before performing his duties (see Alma 36–37).[10] Alma's preaching in Gideon corresponds to his instruction to Shiblon, an already-dutiful son who requires few words from Alma (see Alma 38). Finally, Alma's preaching in Ammonihah correlates with his instruction to Corianton, his wayward youngest son, whose actions have upset the Zoramite mission (see Alma 39–42). As if to make these parallels perfectly clear, a textual tie between Alma's preaching in Ammonihah and his instruction to Corianton appears in the text, with Alma's theme concluding each time with why Adam and Eve were prevented from eating from the tree of life. Alma draws strikingly similar conclusions in each case, with a parallel emphasis on preventing God's word from being made "void" (Alma 12:23; 42:5). Thus, following the parallel stories of Nehor and Korihor and the parallel stories of the Amlicites and the Zoramites, the text provides the parallel stories of three occasions for Alma's preaching, addressed in turn to (1) a figure of potential responsibility requiring detailed instructions (Zarahemla, Helaman), (2) a faithful figure who appreciates brief adulation (Gideon,

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9. Grant Hardy has noted that Alma's preaching to his three sons seems out of place in the flow of Alma 30–44 since it basically interrupts the Zoramite rebellion. He brilliantly suggests a motivation for this misplacement, however, namely that the placement of Alma 36–42 serves to "disrupt a smooth reading of the Zoramite story, which, taken as a whole, did not go so well. By the time readers get back to the war [after the report of Alma's instructions to his sons], they may have forgotten the rather awkward truth that Alma's preaching to the Zoramites not only did not prevent hostilities [see Alma 31:5] but was itself a major catalyst for the fighting." Grant Hardy, *Understanding the Book of Mormon: A Reader's Guide* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 149. It might be noted that a recent study has shown that there may be reasons to read some of these details somewhat less suspiciously; see Michael F. Perry, "The Supremacy of the Word: Alma's Mission to the Zoramites and the Conversion of the Lamanites," *Journal of Book of Mormon.ite deissl* t (Y l] juddf's Nhare mre may

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Shiblon), and (3) a wayward figure requiring sustained intervention (Ammonihah, Corianton).

Finally, following the stories of Alma's threefold preaching, in each case, is a story about a battle fought between Nephites and Lamanites (see Alma 16; 43–44).

The details covered thus far make clear the parallel presentations of material in Alma 1–16 and Alma 30–44:

Table 1. Parallel material in Alma 1–16 and Alma 30–44

Nehor (Alma 1)	Korihor (Alma 30)
The Amlicites (Alma 2–3)	The Zoramites (Alma 31–35)
Alma in Zarahemla (Alma 4–6)	Alma to Helaman (Alma 36–37)
Alma in Gideon (Alma 7)	Alma to Shiblon (Alma 38)
Alma in Ammonihah (Alma 8–15)	Alma to Corianton (Alma 39–42)
Details about war (Alma 16)	Details about war (Alma 43–44)

These parallels between portions of the book of Alma's first and second halves clearly seem to be deliberate, as if the editor intentionally selected narrative material to give the impression that Nephite history between Nehor and the situation at Ammonihah was in many ways repeated between Korihor and Alma's final words of instruction to his sons. This of course follows what Grant Hardy has identified as a major narrative strategy for Mormon as editor: the use of parallel narratives to underscore the theme of "providential recurrence."[11] It seems this strategy organizes the whole of the book of Alma.

This larger structuring of the book of Alma as two parallel halves continues with Alma 17–29 and Alma 45–63, though somewhat more subtly. Each of these two sequences opens with Alma beginning on a journey that is interrupted before its conclusion—a journey to Manti in Alma 17 that is interrupted when Alma encounters Mosiah's sons (see Alma 17:1) and a journey to Melek in Alma 45 interrupted when Alma mysteriously disappears (see Alma 45:18). In each case, these interrupted journeys set up the larger narrative's shift from Alma's story

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11. See Hardy, He Hare

to someone else's: in Alma 17 to the story of the sons of Mosiah, and in Alma 45 to the story of Moroni and Amalickiah. Importantly, the stories of Mosiah's sons and of Moroni and Amalickiah share broad similarities that indicate their intentionally parallel positions in the book of Alma.[12] The story of Mosiah's sons concerns a few Nephite heirs to the throne who walk away from power to proselytize the Lamanites through Christian preaching (see Alma 17–26), while the story of Moroni and Amalickiah concerns a few Nephites who wish they were heirs to the throne and who walk away from Nephite citizenship to proselytize the Lamanites through power-usurping ideological preaching (see Alma 45–62). Each narrative focuses on two brothers whose stories are told in turn: Ammon and Aaron in the Lamanite mission (see Alma 17–20; 21–26), and Amalickiah and Ammoron in the corresponding story (see Alma 46–51; 52–62).

Numerous parallel details, many antithetical in nature, underscore the parallels between the stories of Ammon and Amalickiah. Both seek out a Lamanite king, the former with a kind of "guile" that proves "wise yet harmless" (Alma 18:22–24) and the latter as "a very subtle man to do evil" (Alma 47:4). After encounters with the king's inferiors (Ammon's service with the king's servants is parallel to Amalickiah's machinations with the king's armies), each ends up in a situation with a dead (or apparently dead) king (see Alma 17–18 and, in turn, Alma 47)—though Ammon is innocent while Amalickiah is guilty. These parallel situations bring the complementary characters into direct contact with the Lamanite queen, Ammon with Lamoni's wife but Amalickiah with the wife of the murdered king (see Alma 19:2–10; 47:32–35). Ammon proves loyal, and Lamoni and his wife secure the conversion of a core group of Lamanites to the Christian faith (see Alma 19:11–36);

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12. In other words, the parallels that organize the relationship between Alma 17–29 and Alma 45–63 are what are called *antithetic* parallels. When antithetic parallelism appears in biblical poetry, it is defined simply in terms of "two lines correspond[ing] with one another by, a ury, woiti ta caf trms us f he ioti o itn erm pau f som "exact contraposition of wo. bf wal poed simply rganize the relations ar a responsma "Parallelism," in *The Anchor Bibotc Brchor Bil* · caaietic parallels. Wheork: rk: Doullisn York: Doubleday, 1992), 5:156.   156.   5:156.

however, Amalickiah lies about his treachery to secure the conversion of Lamanites to ideological anger (see Alma 48:1–4). The results of these antithetically parallel interventions among the Nephites are striking. Ammon's pioneering work with Lamoni's people paves the way for conversion in six other Lamanite territories (see Alma 23:8–13), while Amalickiah's treachery eventually allows him to take six Nephite territories in a blitzkrieg shortly before his death (see Alma 51:26).[13] Ammon's converts bury their weapons of war, while Amalickiah's brandish their weapons dangerously.

Parallels between Aaron's story and that of Ammoron—antithetical or otherwise—are less overt. Both broaden the scope of their respective brothers' efforts, Aaron with an eye to a general Lamanite mission (see Alma 22:27; 23:1–5) and Ammoron in hopes of dividing Nephite forces in a two-front war (see Alma 52:12–14). Certainly, Aaron and Ammoron both have more general success than their brothers (although Aaron does so only because he eventually follows his brother's example, and Ammoron's purposes ultimately fail). Further, only after Aaron's preaching do Lamanite converts determine to bury their weapons, covenanting never to fight again (see Alma 24:5–19), just as it is only under the threat imposed by Ammoron that those same Lamanites' sons determine to take their weapons, covenanting to fight for freedom (see Alma 53:10–21). In a remarkable inversion, where the Nephites give their lives to protect Lamanite converts in the first half of the book of Alma, Lamanite converts offer their lives to protect Nephites in the second half of the book. The organization of the larger narrative in two massive parallels makes this inversion perfectly clear.

One particularly fascinating parallel between the stories of Moroni and his enemies and of the sons of Mosiah concerns their narrative turning points. The turning point in the story of the Lamanite mission occurs

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13. There may be an intentional contrast in the parallel narratives between Ammon's successes, which result in the conversion of Lamanites in six separate territories total, and Amalickiah's success in parallel—Teancum total—Teancum repelling him just preaching) that would have made his oriachireal, preaching.

while Ammon, the missionary, is lying unconscious on the ground. Overcome with joy at the beginnings of success, Ammon collapses, and the chief actor in the story becomes Abish, "one of the Lamanitish women" (Alma 19:16), whose intervention draws the crowd that provides Lamoni and his wife with their first listeners. Abish is prepared for this task because she is already "converted to the Lord," according to the text, "on account of a remarkable vision of her father" (Alma 19:16–17).[14] A parent-child relationship (in this case, a father-daughter relationship) in a Lamanite family thus features the turning point of Alma 17–29. Strikingly parallel to this is the turning point in the Nephite-Lamanite wars recounted in Alma 45–63. This occurs when the stripling warriors, discussed just above, volunteer to join the struggling Nephite armies. Significantly, their conviction—which leads to miraculous deliverance—they attribute to the instruction of their mothers: "We do not doubt; our mothers knew" (Alma 56:48). Here again the turning point in both Lamanite and Nephite fortunes occurs because of parent-child relationships (in this case, mother-son relationships) in Lamanite families.[15] Further underscoring the congruence between these two turning points, each is recounted in connection with a Nephite man announcing his astonishment at Lamanite faith. Ammon

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14. Kim Berkey and I have attempted to draw out some implications of this and other stories about gender in the Book of Mormon, in Joseph M. Spencer and Kimberly M. Berkey, "'Great Cause to Mourn': The Complexity of *The Book of Mormon*'s Presentation of Gender and Race," in *The Book of Mormon: Americanist Approaches*, ed. Elizabeth Fenton and Jared Hickman (New York: Oxford University Press, forthcoming).

15. The parent-child relationships functioning among the Lamanites as displayed in the book of Alma hark back to the words of Jacob at the outset of the Book of Mormon's larger history. According to him, Lamanite "husbands love their wives," just as Lamanite "wives love their husbands"; particularly important is the fact that Lamanite parents "love their children" (Jacob 3:7). Jacob's sermon suggests that there is something deeply right about Lamanite family culture that has gone rather wrong with the Nephites, as well as that there is something right about Lamanite gender roles more generally. The book of Alma seems bent on confirming these claims, underscored not only by the fact that Lamanite romanted ry is sol omch;thaig abildesnid ut siler bn tho fact that fathers are involved wo olved vseems beg these uirming thunders) fathers ot ably) fathers are involved with soed with is scright about on out Lamanite erkey, " " thed Berkey, "'Great Cause to Moureeo Moiou ʌ

says to Lamoni's wife that "there has not been such great faith" as hers "among all the people of the Nephites" (Alma 19:10); Helaman similarly writes in a letter that "never had [he] seen so great courage" as that demonstrated by the stripling warriors, "nay, not amongst all the Nephites" (Alma 56:45). These literary ties make perfectly clear the intentional parallel between the two turning points in the two narratives.

The evidence thus indicates that Alma 17–29 and Alma 45–63 are intentionally parallel, like Alma 1–16 and Alma 30–44. And again the parallel narratives precede parallel narratives of battles between the Nephites and the Lamanites (see Alma 28; 63:15).

Table 2. Parallel material in Alma 17–29 and Alma 45–63

Alma's interrupted journey (Alma 17)	Alma's interrupted journey (Alma 45)
Ammon's mission (Alma 17–20)	Amalickiah's dissension (Alma 45–51)
Aaron's mission (Alma 21–26)	Ammoron's dissension (Alma 52–62)
Aftermath and cleanup (Alma 27–29)	Aftermath and cleanup (Alma 63)

These parallels demonstrate that the whole book of Alma is meant to be read as two large parallel halves. But where the parallels between Alma 1–16 and Alma 30–44 suggest a kind of repetition of history, the parallels between Alma 17–29 and Alma 45–63 suggest something deeper and more theologically provocative. The narrative asks readers to be aware—and to track the sickening implications—of the inverse relationship between what Ammon and Aaron accomplish in their peaceful mission in the first half of the book and what Amalickiah and Ammoron accomplish in their warmongering dissension in the second half. Here, "providential recurrence" indicates the way that history around the time of Alma exhibits profoundly opposed understandings of internecine warfare—profoundly opposed responses to power and violence, as well as to the felt responsibility to enlighten others.[16]

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16. This analysis might suggest a rather different answer than the standard one to the question of v͟q͟u͟e͟s͟h͟y͟a͟l͟y͟s͟a͟l͟y ͟o͟f ͟A͟l͟m͟a ͟a͟n͟d ͟t͟h͟e ͟w͟i͟t͟h ͟r͟a͟t͟o͟u͟l͟r͟o͟t͟'͟s͟v͟account of war. The most c͟o͟m͟m͟u͟s͟i͟e͟s͟t͟ ͟c͟o͟m͟i to a r͟e͟r͟e͟n͟t a͟n͟g͟o͟r͟i͟c͟a͟l͟o͟i͟d͟a͟l͟l͟e͟g͟o͟r͟i͟c͟a͟l per-spective, noting t͟e͟s͟t͟i͟n͟y͟ ͟n͟o͟t͟i͟n͟o a͟n͟s͟w͟i͟t͟u͟a͟l ͟w͟a͟i͟a͟t͟ ͟p͟iritual warfare and that r͟e͟a͟d͟e͟r͟s͟ ͟ ͟t͟h͟a͟t ͟r͟e͟a͟d͟e͟r͟s to defend ͟i͟w͟ ͟t͟o ͟defend the

It seems best, then, to say that the book of Alma is divided into two larger halves, Alma 1–29 and Alma 30–63, intentionally set forth as parallels. Further, it seems that each half is in turn divisible into quarters, with Alma 1–16 in parallel to Alma 30–44 and Alma 17–29 in parallel to Alma 45–63. The parallel between the first and third quarters of the book seems to provide (in Grant Hardy's words) "evidence of God's engagement with humankind," in light of the idea that "certain types of events tend to recur regularly because God is constant."[17] That is, the repetition of historical patterns from Alma 1–16 (Nehor's corrupting influence, the Amlicite rebellion and consequent war, Alma's need to preach to three rather distinct audiences in three different cities) in Alma 30–44 (Korihor's corrupting influence, the Zoramite rebellion and consequent war, Alma's need to preach to three rather distinct sons with three different needs) indeed suggests general patterns of divine-human relations. However, the second and fourth quarters of the book serve a rather different purpose. The point of these parallel sections seems to be to contrast opposing approaches to similar situations (Ammon versus Amalickiah, Aaron versus Ammoron).[18]

In the end, the book of Alma divides naturally into four quarters: (1) Alma 1–16, (2) Alma 17–29, (3) Alma 30–44, and (4) Alma 45–63. The first and third are parallel (and, interestingly, together provide a relatively seamless story: that of Alma's life from the time of his appointment as chief judge to the time of his disappearance). Similarly, the second and fourth quarters are parallel, though the nature of these parallels is fundamentally

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faith or how to be aware of the devil's warlike tactics in temptation. The larger structure of the book of Alma suggests instead that the purpose of the so-called "war chapters" may primarily be to show in remarkable detail and at great length the terrifying contrast between the edifying work of the sons of Mosiah and the destructive efforts of Amalickiah and Ammoron. For a sustained interpretation of Alma 43–62 along such lines, see John Bytheway, *Righteous Warriors: Lessons from the War Chapters in the Book of Mormon* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2004).

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different. By way of conclusion, then, perhaps it is best simply to provide the whole of the larger structure of the book of Alma in one final table.

Table 3. Parallel material in chapters in Alma

First quarter (Alma 1–16)	Third quarter (Alma 30–44)
Nehor (Alma 1)	Korihor (Alma 30)
The Amlicites (Alma 2–3)	The Zoramites (Alma 31–35)
Alma in Zarahemla (Alma 4–6)	Alma to Helaman (Alma 36–37)
Alma in Gideon (Alma 7)	Alma to Shiblon (Alma 38)
Alma in Ammonihah (Alma 8–15)	Alma to Corianton (Alma 39–42)
Details about war (Alma 16)	Details about war (Alma 43–44)
Second Quarter (Alma 17–29)	**Fourth Quarter (Alma 45–63)**
Alma's interrupted journey (Alma 17)	Alma's interrupted journey (Alma 45)
Ammon's mission (Alma 17–20)	Amalickiah's dissension (Alma 45–51)
Aaron's mission (Alma 21–26)	Ammoron's dissension (Alma 52–62)
Aftermath and cleanup (Alma 27–29)	Aftermath and cleanup (Alma 63)

This seems to be the overarching structure of the book of Alma: two parallel histories told in succession, with crucially different purposes underlying the parallel relationships at work in different parts of the structure. I suggest that recognition of this structure ought to guide further interpretive work on the book of Alma—especially where value is granted to larger editorial structure as a kind of guide to theological intention.[19]

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