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Biblical merismus in Book of Mormon gospel references

Abstract

This study is an extension of previously published work that identifies three *inclusios* in the Book of Mormon, each of which presents the same six-element definition of the doctrine or gospel of Jesus Christ. However, the six elements are not presented as a straightforward list, but rather in a series of smaller combinations intended to gradually deepen and extend the reader's understanding of each one and of its role in the larger gospel process. This mode of presentation makes something else clear: Whenever some pair or selection from these six elements is mentioned, the entire set is implicitly invoked. Each is an essential part of *the way*, and there is no shorter way. Only two elements are explicitly stated when Nephi quotes the Father as saying, 'he that endureth to the end, the same shall be saved' (2 Nephi 31:15), but the reader knows that four other elements—faith in Jesus Christ, repentance, and baptism of water and of the Holy Ghost—are necessarily implied.

In this paper it will be argued that the biblical rhetorical device of *merismus*, in which parts of a known list are mentioned as a way to invoke the entire list in the reader's mind, provides the best explanation for this rhetorical approach. Seventy-nine passages, each of which includes a reference to salvation, are shown to be two-, three-, or four-element merisms for the six-element gospel formula. The persistent use in the Book of Mormon of this rhetorical technique for presenting the gospel does not seem to have a New Testament counterpart.

Key words: merismus, gospel, Book of Mormon, way, doctrine, salvation

This study extends concepts presented in two previously published works¹ that identify three *inclusios* in the Book of Mormon (2 Nephi 31, 3 Nephi 11–15, and 3 Nephi 27), each *inclusio* presenting the same definition of the doctrine or gospel of Jesus Christ. However, none of the three statements of the definition is presented in the way that modern readers might expect. Each offers a series of statements focusing on different actions or events that are related to each other as parts of *the way* that leads to eternal life. On first reading, the statements could easily seem disconnected or even contradictory. But, as the two earlier studies demonstrate, when all the statements and their repeated elements are examined cumulatively, a well-defined account of the gospel emerges. The process by which men and women can come to Christ and be saved is clear and multi-stepped, though the picture of the whole is almost never fully articulated in one place. Instead, we find a series of partial statements of this gospel—each of which is designed to add detail and complexity.

My 1991 study presented preliminary evidence that this pattern of presentation corresponds to the rhetorical pattern of *merismus*, particularly as it

1 See Noel B. Reynolds, “The Gospel of Jesus Christ as Taught by the Nephite Prophets,” *BYU Studies* 31, no. 3 (1991): 31–50; and Noel B. Reynolds (2015). *The Gospel according to Mormon*. *Scottish Journal of Theology*, 68, pp 218–234 doi:10.1017/S003693061500006X.

occurs in the Bible.² In this paper, I will show that this same meristic approach to defining or describing the gospel occurs not only in these three definitional passages, but that it permeates the entire text of the Book of Mormon. From Nephi at the beginning to Mormon and Moroni at the end, hundreds of references to the gospel occur in meristic form. As I have wrestled with this textual phenomenon over the years, I have found that the rhetorical device of merismus provides the most helpful explanation of how these passages work together to convey and reinforce a single message. This is consistent with the fact that students of the Book of Mormon have for many decades been finding striking evidences of rhetorical complexity in the text.³

Merismus as a Rhetorical Device

When E. W. Bullinger identified *merismos* as a biblical figure of speech in 1898, he saw it principally as enumeration of the parts of a whole, following the model of Greek rhetoric.⁴ That understanding has been extended considerably by

2 I continue to be grateful to Paul Y. Hoskisson who first suggested that I consider merismus as a possible explanation for this pattern in the Book of Mormon.

3 Two publications that inspired this growing literature are John W. Welch, “Chiasmus in the Book of Mormon,” *BYU Studies* 10, no. 1 (1969): 69–84; and Donald W. Parry, *Poetic Parallelisms in the Book of Mormon: The Complete Text Reformatted* (Provo, UT: Neal A. Maxwell Institute for Religious Scholarship, 2007).

4 E. W. Bullinger, *Figures of Speech used in the Bible Explained and Illustrated* (London: Eyre and Spottiswoode, 1898; repr. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1968), 435. See the evidence for Greek rhetoric under *merismos* in H. Liddell and R. Scott, *A Greek-English Lexicon*, s.v. “*meris*”

later Bible scholars; the classic treatment recognized today was published by A. M. Honeyman in 1952.⁵ The small list of subsequent studies is acknowledged in Wilfred G. E. Watson's 1984 guide to classical Hebrew poetry, but he still acknowledges Honeyman's analysis of merismus as fundamental.⁶ In the Hebrew Bible, merismus occurs as concise or condensed expressions that, by mentioning two or more prominent elements of a series, invoke the larger entity implicitly. Honeyman explains,

Merismus, which is a figure of speech akin in some respects to synecdoche, consists in detailing the individual members, or some of them—usually the first and last, or the more prominent—of a series, and thereby indicating either the genus of which those members are species or the abstract quality which characterises the genus and which the species have in common. Symbolically expressed, merismus is the brachylogous [elliptical] use of A+Y or A+B+Y or A+X+Y in place of the complete series A+B+C . . . +X+Y to represent the collective Z of which the individuals A to Y are members, or the abstract z which is their common characteristic.⁷

(Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1968), 1104. While the growing school of rhetorical analysis has pointed to the dangers of relying on the categories of Greek rhetoric in biblical interpretation, the studies of merismus invoked here are drawn from biblical studies. See Roland Meynet, *Rhetorical Analysis: An Introduction to Biblical Rhetoric* (Sheffield, England: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998). The Book of Mormon examples I will identify may suggest some distinctive features of merisms occurring in that text.

5 See A. M. Honeyman, "Merismus in Biblical Hebrew," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 71, no. 1 (March, 1952): 11–18.

6 Wilfred G. E. Watson, *Classical Hebrew Poetry: A Guide to its Techniques* (Sheffield, England: JSOT Press, 1984, 1986), 321–22.

7 Honeyman, "Merismus in Biblical Hebrew," 13–14.

Watson elucidates,

When a totality is expressed in abbreviated form, we are dealing with merismus. . . . The significant point is that in merismus, of whatever form, it is not the individual elements themselves that matter but what they amount to *together*, as a unit. . . . Merismus, then, belongs to metonymy (the part for the whole) and is a form of ellipsis, akin to hendiadys. . . . It is the total concept that is important; the components are not significant in isolation. Merismus, then, is an abbreviated way of expressing a totality.⁸

Merismus in the Book of Mormon

Of the various forms of merismus identified by scholars, the most common, and the one that best matches the Book of Mormon presentations of the gospel, is the “meristic list,” which tends to have three characteristics: (1) brevity, (2) an implied or expressed totality, and (3) that “the items enumerated belong to the same level.”⁹ When understood as a formula composed of six ordered elements, the gospel presented in the Book of Mormon lends itself well to this rhetorical device. By mention of two or more of the six elements, and by frequently including the sixth element—salvation or eternal life, a writer can immediately invoke all six components of the formula in the minds of readers. The six elements that define the gospel or doctrine of Jesus Christ are:

8 Watson, *Classical Hebrew Poetry*, 321.

9 Watson, *Classical Hebrew Poetry*, 322.

1. Faith in Jesus Christ (F);
2. Repentance (R);
3. Baptism of water (W);
4. Baptism of fire and of the Holy Ghost (H);
5. Enduring to the end (E); and
6. Salvation or eternal life (S).

A typical Book of Mormon merism, like the one found in 2 Nephi 33:4, states that believing in Jesus (#1) and enduring to the end (#5) is life eternal (#6). While repentance (#2), water baptism (#3), and baptism of fire and the Holy Ghost (#4) are not mentioned here, these are all treated as additional essential elements in closely related passages. The presentation of the gospel in the text features abbreviated statements that only reveal the full six elements when the separate statements are considered cumulatively. When we fail to recognize these abbreviated statements as merisms that point to each other and that are intended to invoke the full six-element formula in the minds of hearers and readers, we can rush to the conclusion that the text is not clear or even consistent with itself.

The 2015 *SJT* paper, which updates the 1991 study, identified 150 references to the six gospel elements in the three core passages—as is summarized in Table

1.¹⁰

Table 1. Six gospel elements found in the three core passages

Gospel element	2 Nephi 31	3 Nephi 11–15	3 Nephi 27	TOTALS
Faith	8	15	3	26
Repentance	14	5	9	28
Baptism	19	10	7	36
Holy Ghost	9	8	4	21
Enduring	8	4	7	19
Saved	6	6	8	20
TOTALS	64	48	38	150

Table 1 reports the items that were repeated in these three passages.

Accumulating repeated items made it possible to identify six essential elements, and then to see that any statement specifying one or more of them implicitly invokes the full six-element formula as an implied context for understanding that statement. In this paper, I will extend the analysis beyond these three passages to show that this same pattern of meristic (sometimes termed elliptical) reference to the full list of gospel elements characterizes gospel discourse throughout the Book of Mormon.

10 This table was published first in “The Gospel according to Mormon,” 234.

Another Level

The way meristic statements of this gospel formula are combined in these three definitional passages goes beyond any use of merismus that has been noted in the Bible. In each of these passages, and especially in 2 Nephi 31, the varied combinations of gospel elements are used artfully by the writer to add meaning to the formula itself and to enrich understanding of the interconnections between the six elements. By using merismus, the writer is able to focus attention in any sentence on two or three specific gospel elements while expecting the reader to keep the whole formula in mind as context for each specific statement. This goes beyond the shorthand or abbreviating function of most biblical merismus by enlisting the technique intensively and pedagogically to expand the reader's understanding of the shared formula—thereby taking merismus to a whole new level of rhetorical effect.

The first and foremost of these passages is 2 Nephi 31 in which the prophet Nephi quotes repeatedly from a vision he had received over forty years earlier. Here, at the end of his writing, he expands his earlier brief description of the baptism of Jesus Christ, as it had been shown to him centuries before the fact, to now include his previously unreported experience of being taught the gospel or doctrine of Jesus Christ by the Father and the Son, as he heard their voices

explaining to him the baptismal scene he was seeing.¹¹ In a series of 23 meristic statements of the gospel, the now mature Nephi interweaves six quotations from these deities with his own conclusions and understandings to produce what becomes the foundational account of Christ’s gospel as it would be taught by Nephite prophets throughout the Book of Mormon.

The analysis of 2 Nephi 31 yielded insights about the Book of Mormon’s six-part conception of the gospel of Jesus Christ that apply readily to the other two *inclusios*, and, as will be shown below, to the rest of the book.

While these six basic elements of the doctrine or gospel of Christ are each mentioned multiple times in Nephi’s brief exposition, it is only at the end that he brings them all together. In all previous discussions, these elements are stated in terms of a multitude of interconnections between different combinations of two or three of them, repetitions which gradually deepen and extend the reader’s understanding of each one and of its role in the larger process. This mode of presentation makes something else clear: whenever some pair or selection of these six elements is mentioned, the entire set is implicitly invoked. Each is an essential part of *the way*, and there is no shorter way. When Nephi quotes the Father saying, ‘he that endureth to the end, the same shall be saved’ (v. 15), the reader knows that four other elements—faith in Jesus Christ, repentance, and baptism of both

11 This chapter is analyzed both in context and in detail in Noel B. Reynolds, “The Gospel According to Nephi,” *Religious Educator* 16, no. 2 (2015): 51-75. By withholding this key element from the initial report of his great vision, Nephi is able to use it later to anchor his larger rhetorical strategy—both for 2 Nephi itself, and for the relationship he designs between the books of 1 and 2 Nephi.

water and of the Holy Ghost—are necessarily implied.¹²

Gospel Merisms throughout the Text

For this study, we have re-examined the entire text of the Book of Mormon looking for examples of meristic references to the gospel formula.¹³ The most complete one-sentence statements of the formula usually name only four or five elements explicitly. Examples include:

3 Nephi 11:32–33 The Father commandeth all men everywhere to repent (R) and believe in me (F). And whoso believeth in me (F) and is baptized (W), the same shall be saved (S).

3 Nephi 27:16 Whoso repenteth (R) and is baptized in my name (W) shall be filled (H). And if he endureth to the end (E), behold, him will I hold guiltless before my Father (S) at that day when I shall stand to judge the world.

3 Nephi 30:2 Turn, all ye Gentiles, from your wicked ways . . . and from all your wickedness and abominations, and come unto me (F, R) and be baptized in my name (W), that ye may receive a remission of your sins and be filled with the Holy Ghost (H), that ye may be numbered with my people which are of the house of Israel (S).

12 Reynolds, “Gospel According to Mormon,” 223.

13 Most of the work in compiling these examples was performed by Gage Love who worked with me as a student research assistant.

Already in these clear examples, we note the need for some interpretation. Relying on other examples of Book of Mormon usage, we can interpret “come unto me” as a reference to faith and repentance. And those that are held “guiltless before the Father” at the judgment day are saved. And we know that when the repentant are “filled,” this refers to the Holy Ghost. And it is the saved who are “numbered with my people.” As it turns out, a very large glossary is required to identify all the alternative terminology that is used to refer to the basic six gospel elements. This predominant use of multiple synonyms may help explain why the large numbers of meristic statements of the gospel in the Book of Mormon text go largely unnoticed. The meristic character of the examples is clear. The absence of one or two of the basic gospel elements in each could never be taken as a suggestion that all six are not implied in this particular reference.

Glossary of Gospel Terminology

The following preliminary glossary will facilitate interpretation of the examples that appear in the remainder of this paper. Note that negatives of these terms are often used to evoke the same element by reverse implication (indicated with ~).

Faith in Jesus Christ (F): relying upon the merits of him who is mighty to save; believing in Christ and the Father; believe on his name; giving heed to the

Lord's servants

Repentance (R): humbling oneself before the Father; covenanting to obey the commandments; being unclean (not repentant)

Baptism of Water (W): witnessing to the Father that one has repented and will obey his commandments; taking the name of Christ upon one's self

Baptism of Fire and of the Holy Ghost (H): being filled; receiving the remission of sins; receiving these things

Enduring to the End (E): following the straight and narrow path; faithfulness to the end; living with faith, hope, and charity; pressing forward in faith, becoming as a little child

Salvation (S): eternal life; being found guiltless (or spotless) at the judgment; being numbered with the Lord's people; inheriting the kingdom of God; living in the future; or negatively, being damned; hewn down and cast into the fire

It must also be recognized that a large number of terms refer to combinations of these basic elements. Here are some examples:

Come unto me (F, R)

Look unto me (F, R, W)

Wash their garments in my blood (F, R, W, and H)

The gate by which you enter (R, W)

Getting into the straight and narrow path (R, W, E)

With these explanations in hand, we can now look at some of the clearer examples of brief meristic statements of this gospel—statements that may only include two or three of the six elements, but which are clearly not meant to exclude any of the others.

1 Nephi 13:40 All men must come unto him (R, W) or they cannot be saved (S).

1 Nephi 14:5 Whoso repenteth not ($\sim R$) must perish ($\sim S$).

2 Nephi 2:9 They that believe in him (F) shall be saved (S).

2 Nephi 25:13 All they that shall believe on his name (F) shall be saved in the kingdom of God (S).

3 Nephi 15:9 Unto him that endureth to the end (E) will I give eternal life (S).

Listing Book of Mormon Merisms

We have identified hundreds of statements in the Book of Mormon that could be interpreted as gospel merisms. Because many of these involve interpretations that could be controversial, this paper only offers more obvious examples grouped on three charts according to whether they include four, three, or only two gospel elements.¹⁴ These charts are selective in that they only present the more typical merisms—those that include the final element of eternal life or salvation.

¹⁴ After reviewing this collection multiple times, it is clear that the same person may get somewhat different totals each time the exercise is performed.

In table 2, seventeen passages clearly illustrate the pattern of gospel merisms identified in the three definitional chapters leaving little doubt but what the entire six-part formula is implied in each one.

Table 2: Merisms containing four gospel elements—including salvation (S)

Reference	Text	F	R	W	H	E	S
2 Nephi 9:23	And he commandeth all men that they must repent , and be baptized in his name, having perfect faith in the Holy One of Israel, or they cannot be saved in the kingdom of God.	x	x	x			x
2 Nephi 9:24	And if they will not repent and believe in his name , and endure to the end , they must be damned ;	x	x			x	x
2 Nephi 31:14	After ye have repented of your sins , and witnessed unto the Father that ye are willing to keep my commandments , by the baptism of water , and have received the baptism of fire and of the Holy Ghost , and can speak with a new tongue, yea, even with the tongue of angels, and after this should deny me , it would have been better for you that ye had not known me.		x	x	x		x
2 Nephi 31:17-18	(17) For the gate by which ye should enter is repentance and baptism by water ; and then cometh a remission of your sins by fire and by the Holy Ghost. (18) And then are ye in this strait and narrow path which leads to eternal life ;		x	x	x		x
Mosiah 18:13	Helam, I baptize thee, having authority from the Almighty God, as a testimony that ye have entered into a covenant to serve him until you are dead as to the mortal body; and may the Spirit of the Lord be poured out upon you ; and may he grant unto you eternal life , through the redemption of Christ, whom he has prepared from the foundation of the world.		x	x	x		x

Alma 5:13	And behold, he preached the word unto your fathers, and a mighty change was also wrought in their hearts , and they humbled themselves and put their trust in the true and living God . And behold, they were faithful until the end ; therefore they were saved .	x			x	x	x
Alma 7:15-16	(15) Yea, I say unto you come and fear not, and lay aside every sin, which easily doth beset you, which doth bind you down to destruction, yea, come and go forth, and show unto your God that ye are willing to repent of your sins and enter into a covenant with him to keep his commandments , and witness it unto him this day by going into the waters of baptism . (16) And whosoever doeth this, and keepeth the commandments of God from thenceforth , the same will remember that I say unto him, yea, he will remember that I have said unto him, he shall have eternal life , according to the testimony of the Holy Spirit, which testifieth in me.		x	x		x	x
Alma 32:13	And now, because ye are compelled to be humble blessed are ye; for a man sometimes, if he is compelled to be humble, seeketh repentance ; and now surely, whosoever repenteth shall find mercy ; and he that findeth mercy and endureth to the end the same shall be saved .		x		x	x	x
3 Nephi 11:32-33	(32)...and I bear record that the Father commandeth all men, everywhere, to repent and believe in me . (33) And whoso believeth in me , and is baptized , the same shall be saved ; and they are they who shall inherit the kingdom of God .	x	x	x			x
3 Nephi 11:37	And again I say unto you, ye must repent , and become as a little child, and be baptized in my name , or ye can in nowise receive these things .		x	x	x		x
3 Nephi 27:16	And it shall come to pass, that whoso repenteth and is baptized in my name shall be filled; and if he endureth to the end , behold, him will I hold guiltless		x	x		x	x

	before my Father at that day when I shall stand to judge the world.						
3 Nephi 27:19	And no unclean thing can enter into his kingdom; therefore nothing entereth into his rest save it be those who have washed their garments in my blood, because of their faith , and the repentance of all their sins , and their faithfulness unto the end .	X	X			X	X
3 Nephi 27:20	Now this is the commandment: Repent , all ye ends of the earth, and come unto me and be baptized in my name , that ye may be sanctified by the reception of the Holy Ghost , that ye may stand spotless before me at the last day .		X	X	X		X
3 Nephi 30:2	Turn , all ye Gentiles, from your wicked ways; and repent of your evil doings, of your lyings and deceivings, and of your whoredoms, and of your secret abominations, and your idolatries, and of your murders, and your priestcrafts, and your envyings, and your strifes, and from all your wickedness and abominations, and come unto me, and be baptized in my name , that ye may receive a remission of your sins , and be filled with the Holy Ghost , that ye may be numbered with my people who are of the house of Israel .		X	X	X		X
Mormon 7:10	And ye will also know that ye are a remnant of the seed of Jacob; therefore ye are numbered among the people of the first covenant; and if it so be that ye believe in Christ , and are baptized , first with water , then with fire and with the Holy Ghost , following the example of our Savior, according to that which he hath commanded us, it shall be well with you in the day of judgment .	X		X	X		X
Ether 4:18	Therefore, repent all ye ends of the earth, and come unto me, and believe in my gospel , and be baptized in my name ; for he that believeth and is baptized shall be saved ; but he that believeth not shall be damned ; and signs shall follow them that believe in my name .	X	X	X			X

Moroni 7:34	And he hath said: Repent all ye ends of the earth , and come unto me, and be baptized in my name , and have faith in me , that ye may be saved .	x	x	x			x
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TOTALS 8 15 13 9 6 17

The passages in table 3 feature three gospel elements, but all appear to be teaching the same thing as the group from table 2.

Table 3: Merisms with three gospel elements—including salvation (S)

Reference	Text	F	R	W	H	E	S
1 Nephi 13:37	And blessed are they who shall seek to bring forth my Zion at that day, for they shall have the gift and the power of the Holy Ghost ; and if they endure unto the end they shall be lifted up at the last day , and shall be saved in the everlasting kingdom of the Lamb .				x	x	x
2 Nephi 33:4	and it speaketh of Jesus, and persuadeth them to believe in him , and to endure to the end , which is life eternal .	x				x	x
Jacob 6:11	then, my beloved brethren, repent ye , and enter in at the strait gate , and continue in the way which is narrow , until ye shall obtain eternal life .		x			x	x
Mosiah 3:12	But wo, wo unto him who knoweth that he rebelleth against God! For salvation cometh to none such except it be through repentance and faith on the Lord Jesus Christ .	x	x				x

Mosiah 3:21	And behold, when that time cometh, none shall be found blameless before God , except it be little children, only through repentance and faith on the name of the Lord God Omnipotent .	x	x				x
Mosiah 4:6-7	(6) I say unto you, if ye have come to a knowledge of the goodness of God, and his matchless power, and his wisdom, and his patience, and his long-suffering towards the children of men; and also, the atonement which has been prepared from the foundation of the world, that thereby salvation might come to him that should put his trust in the Lord , and should be diligent in keeping his commandments , and continue in the faith even unto the end of his life , I mean the life of the mortal body— (7) I say, that this is the man who receiveth salvation , through the atonement which was prepared from the foundation of the world for all mankind, which ever were since the fall of Adam, or who are, or who ever shall be, even unto the end of the world.	x				x	x
Alma 5:62	Come and be baptized unto repentance , that ye also may be partakers of the fruit of the tree of life .		x	x			x
Alma 7:14	Now I say unto you that ye must repent, and be born again ; for the Spirit saith if ye are not born again ye cannot inherit the kingdom of heaven ;		x		x		x
Alma 12:15	he has all power to save every man that believeth on his name and bringeth forth fruit meet for repentance .	x	x				x
Alma 12:34	Therefore, whosoever repenteth , and hardeneth not his heart, he shall have claim on mercy through mine Only Begotten Son, unto a remission of his		x		x		x

	sins; and these shall enter into my rest.						
Alma 26:35	(35) and he is a merciful Being, even unto salvation , to those who will repent and believe on his name.	x	x				x
Alma 34:15	And thus he shall bring salvation to all those who shall believe on his name ; this being the intent of this last sacrifice, to bring about the bowels of mercy, which overpowereth justice, and bringeth about means unto men that they may have faith unto repentance.	x	x				x
Helaman 8:14-15	(14) Yea, did he not bear record that the Son of God should come? And as he lifted up the brazen serpent in the wilderness, even so shall he be lifted up who should come. (15) And as many as should look upon that serpent should live, even so as many as should look upon the Son of God with faith , having a contrite spirit , might live , even unto that life which is eternal.	x	x				x
3 Nephi 11: 34	And whoso believeth not in me , and is not baptized , shall be damned.	x		x			x
3 Nephi 11:38	And again I say unto you, ye must repent , and be baptized in my name , and become as a little child, or ye can in nowise inherit the kingdom of God.		x	x			x
3 Nephi 23:5	And whosoever will hearken unto my words and repenteth and is baptized , the same shall be saved . Search the prophets, for many there be that testify of these things.		x	x			x
3 Nephi 27:5-6	(5) Have they not read the scriptures, which say ye must take upon you the name of Christ , which is my name? For by this name shall ye be called at the last day; (6) And whoso taketh upon him my name , and endureth to the end , the same shall be saved at the last day.					x	x

Mormon 3:2	Cry unto this people— Repent ye, and come unto me, and be ye baptized , and build up again my church, and ye shall be spared .		x	x			x
Mormon 9:23	And he that believeth and is baptized shall be saved ,	x		x			x
Moroni 8:10	yea, teach parents that they must repent and be baptized , and humble themselves as their little children, and they shall all be saved with their little children .		x	x			x

TOTALS 10 14 7 3 5 20

Once we are familiar with these more comprehensive examples, we can now review table 4 listing some two-element merisms. Again, the evident similarity to the more comprehensive examples would confirm the view that they should be read as meristic statements intended to invoke the full six-element gospel formula.

Table 4: Merisms containing two gospel elements—including salvation (S)

Reference	Text	F	R	W	H	E	S
1 Nephi 22:31	Wherefore, if ye shall be obedient to the commandments, and endure to the end , ye shall be saved at the last day .					x	x
2 Nephi 2:9	and they that believe in him shall be saved .	x					x
2 Nephi 25:13	and all those who shall believe on his name shall be saved in the kingdom of God .	x					x
2 Nephi 31:15	He that endureth to the end , the					x	x

	same shall be saved .						
2 Nephi 31:16	unless a man shall endure to the end , in following the example of the Son of the living God, he cannot be saved .					x	x
Omni 1:26	Yea, come unto him, and offer your whole souls as an offering unto him, and continue in fasting and praying, and endure to the end ; and as the Lord liveth ye will be saved .					x	x
Mosiah 2:41	And moreover, I would desire that ye should consider on the blessed and happy state of those that keep the commandments of God. For behold, they are blessed in all things, both temporal and spiritual; and if they hold out faithful to the end they are received into heaven , that thereby they may dwell with God in a state of never-ending happiness . O remember, remember that these things are true; for the Lord God hath spoken it.					x	x
Mosiah 3:9	he cometh unto his own, that salvation might come unto the children of men even through faith on his name ;	x					x
Mosiah 4:18	But I say unto you, O man, whosoever doeth this the same hath great cause to repent; and except he repenteth of that which he hath done he perisheth forever , and hath no interest in the kingdom of God .		x				x
Mosiah 23:22	Nevertheless — whosoever putteth his trust in him the same shall be lifted up at the last day .	x					x
Mosiah 26:23	and it is I that granteth unto him that believeth unto the end a place at my right hand .					x	x
Alma 5:51	Repent , for except ye repent ye can in nowise inherit the kingdom of heaven .		x				x
Alma 9:12	Behold, now I say unto you that he commandeth you to repent ; and except ye repent, ye can in nowise		x				x

	inherit the kingdom of God.						
Alma 11:40	he shall take upon him the transgressions of those who believe on his name ; and these are they that shall have eternal life ,	x					x
Alma 13:13	And now, my brethren, I would that ye should humble yourselves before God, and bring forth fruit meet for repentance , that ye may also enter into that rest .		x				x
Alma 13:30	And may the Lord grant unto you repentance , that ye may not bring down his wrath upon you , that ye may not be bound down by the chains of hell , that ye may not suffer the second death .		x				x
Alma 22:6	if ye will repent ye shall be saved ,		x				x
Alma 22:6	and if ye will not repent , ye shall be cast off at the last day?		x				x
Alma 36:3	for I do know that whosoever shall put their trust in God shall be supported in their trials, and their troubles, and their afflictions, and shall be lifted up at the last day .	x					x
Alma 38:5	And now my son, Shiblon, I would that ye should remember, that as much as ye shall put your trust in God even so much ye shall be delivered out of your trials, and your troubles, and your afflictions, and ye shall be lifted up at the last day .	x					x
Alma 39:9	Now my son, I would that ye should repent and forsake your sins , and go no more after the lusts of your eyes, but cross yourself in all these things; for except ye do this ye can in nowise inherit the kingdom of God . Oh, remember, and take it upon you, and cross yourself in these things.		x				x
Helaman 3:28	Yea, thus we see that the gate of heaven is open unto all , even to those who will believe on the name of Jesus Christ , who is the Son of God.	x					x

Helaman 5:11	And he hath power given unto him from the Father to redeem them from their sins because of repentance ; therefore he hath sent his angels to declare the tidings of the conditions of repentance , which bringeth unto the power of the Redeemer, unto the salvation of their souls .		x					x
Helaman 12:22	therefore, for this cause, that men might be saved , hath repentance been declared.		x					x
Helaman 13:39	And I pray that the anger of the Lord be turned away from you, and that ye would repent and be saved .		x					x
Helaman 14:2	then cometh the Son of God to redeem all those who shall believe on his name .	x						x
Helaman 14:8	whosoever shall believe on the Son of God , the same shall have everlasting life .	x						x
Helaman 14:29	And this to the intent that whosoever will believe might be saved ,	x						x
3 Nephi 9:22	Therefore, whoso repenteth and cometh unto me as a little child, him will I receive , for of such is the kingdom of God .		x					x
3 Nephi 9:22	Behold, for such I have laid down my life, and have taken it up again; therefore repent , and come unto me ye ends of the earth, and be saved .		x					x
3 Nephi 15:9	Behold, I am the law, and the light. Look unto me, and endure to the end , and ye shall live;						x	x
3 Nephi 15:9	for unto him that endureth to the end will I give eternal life .						x	x
3 Nephi 27:17	And he that endureth not unto the end , the same is he that is also hewn down and cast into the fire , from whence they can no more return, because of the justice of the Father.						x	x
Mormon 7:3	Know ye that ye must come unto repentance , or ye cannot be saved .		x					x
Mormon 9:6	O then ye unbelieving, turn ye unto the Lord ; cry mightily unto the Father in the name of Jesus, that		x					x

	perhaps ye may be found spotless, pure, fair, and white , having been cleansed by the blood of the Lamb, at that great and last day.						
Mormon 9:23	but he that believeth not shall be dammned;	x					x
Ether 3:14	I am the Father and the Son. In me shall all mankind have life , and that eternally , even they who shall believe on my name; and they shall become my sons and my daughters.	x					x
Ether 4:19	And blessed is he that is found faithful unto my name at the last day , for he shall be lifted up to dwell in the kingdom prepared for him from the foundation of the world.					x	x
Ether 5:5	And if it so be that they repent and come unto the Father in the name of Jesus, they shall be received into the kingdom of God.		x				x
Moroni 7:26	And after that he came men also were saved by faith in his name; and by faith , they become the sons of God.	x					x
Moroni 7:38	For no man can be saved , according to the words of Christ, save they shall have faith in his name;	x					x
Moroni 7:41	Behold I say unto you that ye shall have hope through the atonement of Christ and the power of his resurrection, to be raised unto life eternal , and this because of your faith in him according to the promise.	x					x

TOTALS 16 16 0 0 10 42

Although I do not yet know what to make of it, there is a bit of a pattern in which elements of the gospel formula are included or omitted in longer and shorter merisms as can be seen in table 5. None of the two-element merisms included baptism or the Holy Ghost. These two were included less often than repentance or

baptism in the three-element merisms as well. Only in the group of four-element merisms does baptism surpass most of the other elements in frequency as the formula “repent and be baptized” asserts itself. And in these longer merisms, the references to the Holy Ghost also rise above faith and enduring in frequency of occurrence. While enduring to the end appears in one fourth of the two–element merisms, its relative frequency drops off in the longer examples.

Table 5. Frequency of the repetition of each element

Number of elements included	Faith	Repent	Baptism	Holy Ghost	Endure to the end	Saved
Two	16	16	0	0	10	42
Three	10	14	7	3	5	20
Four	8	15	13	9	6	17
Totals	34	45	20	12	21	79

It should be noted that almost one third of the hundreds of merisms we have identified illustrate an interesting variation on the gospel formula in that the promise alluded to is a promised land or gathering of Israel or other tangible blessing in this world rather than eternal life in the world to come. These biblical promises seem to serve as metaphors or surrogates for the eternal promises of the gospel message. This linkage is explicit in both the language and the chiasmic

structure of Alma 37:44–46:

- A For behold, it is as easy to give heed to **the word of Christ**,¹⁵
which will point to you a straight course to **eternal bliss**,
- B as it was for our fathers to give heed to **this compass**, which
would point unto them a straight course to the **promised land**.
- C And now I say, is there not a type in this thing?
- B* For just as assuredly as **this director** did bring our fathers,
by following its course, **to the promised land**,
- A* shall **the word of Christ**, if we follow its course, carry us beyond this vale
of sorrow **into a far better land of promise**.

While this will be an interesting topic for further research, the point of including some reference to it here is to show that the gospel message itself provided Book of Mormon writers with a formula that they were able to adapt for other distinct, though related, content.

Gospel merisms and the New Testament

One challenge facing New Testament scholars is the absence of a single, clear and authoritative passage that provides a comprehensive account of the gospel of Jesus Christ. There is no passage that gives the clear foundation for New

15 The Book of Mormon uses four principal terms to refer specifically to this gospel teaching: “the doctrine of Christ” is used 25 times; different formulations of “the gospel of Christ” are used 42 times; versions of “the way” are used 82 times; and phrases featuring “the word” are used 79 times explicitly to refer to the gospel—and, by my count, another 199 times implicitly. For a detailed discussion of this terminological variation see Noel B. Reynolds, “This is the Way,” *Religious Educator* 14, no. 3 (2013): 71–83.

Testament gospel students that 2 Nephi 31 provides for students of the Book of Mormon. Of course, Latter-day Saints see the same gospel being taught in both these volumes of scripture, so for them it may be of some interest to see whether Jesus may have used the same meristic approach in teaching his gospel in his Palestinian ministry as he did in the Book of Mormon. Even a very aggressive effort to identify this kind of gospel merism in the four New Testament gospels yielded only 151 potential examples. But none of these display sufficient similarity of form or language to encourage further comparison.

Acts chapter 2 offers the closest thing to a full statement of the six elements listed in the Book of Mormon version of the gospel of Christ. Here we have Peter, speaking for the rest of the apostles, instructing “all that believed (F) (v. 44)” that they should “repent (R) and be baptized (W) . . . in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins,” with the promise that they would then “receive the gift of the Holy Ghost (H) (v. 38).” After he further testified of many things and exhorted them to “save [them]selves (S) (v. 40),” we are then told that three thousand “gladly received his word (F, R)” and were baptized (W) and “continued steadfastly in the apostles’ doctrine (E) and fellowship (vs. 41–2).” With more aggressive interpretation, Hebrews 10 could also be seen to list all six points. But in the gospels themselves, where Jesus is quoted directly, nothing comes close. And it is clear that neither of these passages employs merismus to develop its

theme. Both are focused on a problem at hand and pretend to no definitional purpose.

Conclusion

This paper develops and documents insights first mentioned in earlier articles. Three authoritative *inclusios* in the Book of Mormon define a consistently presented six-part formula that lists the basic elements of the gospel or doctrine of Jesus Christ as taught in that text. These elements are used in various combinations in a meristic way throughout the volume and invoke the memory or understanding of the full formula in a variety of rhetorical contexts. Even though the language varies with the incorporation of various synonyms or combination terms, the text appears to promote, from the beginning to the end, the doctrine that those who trust in Christ and repent of their sins can be baptized in water as a witness to God that they have made a covenant to obey his commandments and take his name upon them. When he judges their repentance to be sincere, he will send the remission of sins by fire and by the Holy Ghost, which in turn will help converts endure faithfully to the end—at which point they will be rewarded with eternal life.