



5-1-2020

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Recommended Citation

Ehat, Stephen Kent (2020) "The Roles of Words, Phrases, and Ideas in Macro-Chiasms," *BYU Studies Quarterly*: Vol. 59 : Iss. 5 , Article 17.

Available at: <https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/byusq/vol59/iss5/17>

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The Roles of Words, Phrases, and Ideas in Macro-Chiasms

Stephen Kent Ehat

What roles do *words*, *phrases*, and *ideas* play in large-scale chiasms and in the analysis of their form? Just as words and phrases play different roles in language generally, so too they may play different roles in their contributions to chiastic forms. In the analysis of the criteria used in evaluating a text for the presence of phrase-based chiasms and conceptual, idea-based chiasms, the analyst may see different roles played by words and phrases, depending on whether the pattern is a word-based or clause-based chiasm or a conceptual, idea-based chiasm. Analysis of texts in light of the general criteria for detecting a chiasm—evaluating the likelihood of its existence and weighing the strength of its form—thus needs to allow latitude for words and phrases to play different roles and to manifest various levels of importance in the form.

This paper will analyze and compare six large-scale chiasms found in the following works: (1) Psalm 23; (2) the book of Genesis; (3) Luke’s Travel Narrative; (4) Lev 24:13–23; (5) Ezek 20:3–31; and (6) Alma 36. The discussion aims to shed light on the interrelated roles that words, phrases, and ideas play in chiastic analysis, especially when implementing the criteria of “density,” “dominance,” and “mavericks.”¹ First, it will be shown that Ps 23 manifests repetition of only one substantive word (stated once at the beginning and once at the end, with a related word uttered once at the center), forming a chiasm based on the reversed repetition of other linguistic features (such as meter²) and constituting a *conceptual* chiasm—even without repetition of any other words, dominant or otherwise. Next, the book of Genesis will be discussed, where a few words and phrases manifest a chiasm within a very large text, which may have

resulted either from the original composition or from later editing. Third, in Luke's Travel Narrative, it will be seen that two or even three chiastic patterns may be simultaneously evidenced in this text. In this example, words that are generally considered dominant may be dominant for one of the patterns and not for the other. Finally, this paper will explore the three additional large-scale chiasms found in Lev 24:13–23, Ezek 20:3–31, and Alma 36. These examples demonstrate that macro-chiasms based on reversed repetition of phrases and ideas may exist in a text with dominant phrases appearing elsewhere in the text outside of the pattern but which neither detract from the existence of the pattern nor constitute mavericks challenging its existence. The discussion of the large-scale chiasm of Alma 36, which is based on reversed repetition of phrases, may be seen to co-exist with and, of course, serve as a foundation for a conceptual chiasm of overarching ideas.

Psalm 23

W. Creighton Marlowe argues that Ps 23 is a conceptual chiasm formed by the repetition of parallel *ideas* stated in reversed order,³ enhanced by a most important inclusio (demarcating the opening and closing of the chiastic pattern with references to “the Lord” in vv. 1 and 6),⁴ and complemented by the central “thou” (*attah*)—referring to the Lord—in v. 4. Interestingly, in the text of Psalm 23, there is otherwise virtually no repetition of identical words. Indeed, only four words are repeated identically in the entire psalm—all other words appear only once. Two of those four repeated words, however, are of utmost significance. *Yahweh* appears in verses 1 and 6 and those two appearances in the extremes are complemented by the word *attah* in the middle—*attah* meaning “thou” or “you” (referring to Yahweh)—part of the central phrase “for thou art with me.” Indeed, the phrase “for thou”—*kî attah*—is the very middle phrase of the entire psalm. “For thou” appears only one other place, also in verse 4 (part of a smaller concentric structure within the central element of the overall chiastic structure). The only other two words that repeat are *lo* (meaning “not”) in verses 1 and 4 and the word *yom* (meaning “days”) in verse 6. The chiasm is structured mainly on ideas instead of on words. The following is Marlowe's proposal:

A **Complete provision:** “Yahweh is my shepherd; [therefore] I shall not want. . . . He makes me lie down in green pastures; he leads me beside still waters.”
(vv. 1–2)

B Purposeful restoration: “He restores me: He leads me in right paths for his name’s sake.” (v. 3)

C No need for fear:

a **Our need for rescue:** “Even though I walk through the darkest valley,”

b **How to wait for rescue:** “I fear no danger, for you are with me;”

a’ **His ability to rescue:** “your rod and your staff—they comfort me.” (v. 4)

B’ Purposeful renewal: “You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; you anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows.” (v. 5)

A’ Continual provision: “Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I shall dwell in the house of Yahweh my whole life long.” (v. 6)⁵

Genesis

Yehuda T. Radday has identified a conceptual chiasm encompassing the entire book of Genesis (A B C D B’ D’ C’ B’ A’) and reports having discerned a further chiastic pattern underlying and co-existing with the conceptual chiasm (1 2 3 4 5 . . . 9 9 . . . 5 4 3 2 1).⁶

A Poetry (ch. 1)

1 “his daughter-in-law” (Tamar) (11:31)

B “Descent” into Egypt (12:10–20)

2 “the land could not support both of them dwelling together” (13:6)

3 “the Canaanite and the Pherizite” (13:7)

4 “which cannot be numbered for multitude” (16:10)

C Solemn change of name: “no longer shall your name be . . . but . . .” (17:5—Abram-Abraham)

D Circumcision (17:23)

5 “the firstborn daughter” (19:31)

6 “last night” (19:34)

7 “seize by force” (21:25)

8 “be a witness” (21:30)

B’ “Ascent” from Egypt (22)

9 “the Lord . . . grant me success” (24:12)

9’ “the Lord . . . grant me success” (27:20⁷)

8’ “be a witness” (31:52)

6’ “last night” (31:29)

5’ “the firstborn daughter” (29:26)

7’ “seize by force” (31:31)

- 4' "which cannot be numbered for multitude" (32:12)
- 3' "the Canaanite and the Pherizite" (34:30)
- D' **Circumcision** (34:14 ff.)
- C' **Solemn change of name: "no longer shall your name be . . . but . . ."**
(35:10—Jacob-Israel)
- 2' "the land could not support both of them dwelling together" (36:7)
- B' **"Descent" into Egypt** (37:36)
- 1' "his daughter-in-law" (Sarah) (38:24)
- A' **Poetry (ch. 49:1–27)**

The reader of Genesis might note that the repeated and reversed phrases (from 1 to 9 and from 9 to 1) do not combine to tell an *account* based on the phrases employed (as also will be seen to be the case with Alma 36, below). Nonetheless, the fact remains that what is repeated and reversed in the repetition are phrases, not ideas. And repetition and reversal of the sequence of the phrases simply cannot be denied: elements 5 and 5' ("the firstborn daughter"), for example, are present both in Gen 19:31 and in Gen 29:6 (and nowhere else in scripture). It should be noted that while the numbered phrases catalogued in the above scheme are repeated and reversed within the text of Genesis as it stands today, that is not proof that the original composition set forth the chiasm so identified, for it may have resulted from later redaction or editing. The point here simply is that the chiasm, based on those phrases, appears in the text as we now have it. The absence of density does not detract from the fact that the chiasm is evident. That is to say, the appearance of hundreds, even thousands, of words between each of the numbered elements constituting the phrase-based chiasm has no impact on the presence of the chiasmic pattern. It is manifestly present in the received text.

Luke's Travel Narrative

H. Douglas Buckwalter's analysis of Luke's Travel Narrative, Luke 9:51–19:27 (see structure below⁸), reveals what he perceives to be an overall seven-element concentric structure for the entire text of those ten central chapters of Luke—A B C D C' B' A'. When we look at each of the larger elements he proposes, we see that Buckwalter also has proposed substructures on lower levels,⁹ such as the directly parallel substructures designated abcd-abcd forming the central element D of his ten-chapter macro-chiasm:

A Mission of Jesus, the rejected Lord, turns toward Jerusalem (9:51–10:37)	a 9:51–56 b 9:57–62 c 10:1–12 d 10:13–16 c' 10:17–20 b' 10:21–24 a' 10:25–37
B Persistent pursuit of God and Christ mandated by gospel (10:38–11:54)	a 10:38–42 b 11:1–13 c 11:14–23 d 11:24–26 a' 11:27–28 b' 11:29–32 c' 11:33–36 d' 11:37–54
C Lessons on money, possessions, and faithful service to Master (12:1–59)	a 12:1–12 b 12:13–34 b' 12:35–48 a' 12:49–59
D Repentance of sin and submission to Jesus (13:1–14:35)	a 13:1–9 b 13:10–17 c 13:18–21 d 13:22–30 a' 13:31–35 b' 14:1–6 c' 14:7–24 d' 14:25–35
C' Lessons on money, possessions, and faithful service to Master (15:1–16:31)	a 15:1–32 b 16:1–13 a' 16:14–18 b' 16:19–31
B' Persistent pursuit of God and Christ mandated by gospel (17:1–18:8)	a 17:1–10 b 17:11–19 a' 17:20–37 b' 18:1–8
A' Mission of Jesus, rejected client king, nears Jerusalem (18:9–19:27)	a 18:9–14 b 18:15–17 c 18:18–30 d 18:31–34 c' 18:35–43 b' 19:1–10 a' 19:11–27

In **b 13:10–17** (in bold above) of Buckwalter's analysis, the text refers to Jesus healing a crippled woman on the Sabbath and in **b' 14:1–6** (also in bold above) the text refers to Jesus healing a man with dropsy on the Sabbath. Both events—and the words associated with them—are

significant to identifying correspondences between elements **b** and **b'** of the abcd-abcd parallel structure (all *within* the central D element of the larger seven-part concentric structure). But those events and the words used to recount those events are not significant to establishing the existence of the overall seven-part A B C D C' B' A' structure that otherwise is proposed to span the entire ten chapters. That second-level, parallel abcd-abcd structure that Buckwalter proposes within D is defined by repeated keywords and key phrases found within the two halves of the abcd-abcd directly parallel structure: **b**, “on the sabbath” (13:10) and **b'**, “on the sabbath day” (14:1); **b**, “behold, there was a woman” (13:11) and **b'**, “behold, there was a certain man” (14:2); **b**, “which had a spirit of infirmity” (13:11) and **b'**, “which had the dropsy” (14:2); **b**, “he laid his hands on her: and immediately she was made straight” (13:13) and **b'**, “and he took him, and healed him” (14:4); **b**, “ought not this woman . . . be loosed from this bond on the sabbath day?” (13:16) and **b'**, “Which of you shall have an ass or an ox fallen into a pit, and will not straightway pull him out on the sabbath day?” (14:5); and so forth. But those keywords and phrases in **b** and **b'** happen *not* to be the keywords and phrases that figure into the makeup of element D itself, the central element of the longer, overall, seven-part A B C D C' B' A' concentric structure.

This point is seen more clearly when two corresponding elements of the proposed overall, seven-part A B C D C' B' A' concentric structure are compared. Take **A** and **A'**, for example. Buckwalter argues that the concentric structure within element **A** is comprised of the following:

- a Samaritan village refuses to give Jesus lodging because he is traveling to Jerusalem; Jesus graciously moves on to another village (9:51–56)
- b Jesus teaches on discipleship (in three separate incidents) (9:57–62)
 - c Jesus sends out seventy-two disciples, two-by-two (10:1–12) . . .
 - d' CENTER: Jesus pronounces woe upon three unrepentant cities in Galilee—Chorazin, Bethsaida, and Capernaum (10:13–16)
 - c' the seventy-two return to Jesus (10:17–20) . . .
- b' Jesus teaches on discipleship (in three comparisons) (10:21–24)
- a' Jesus gives the parable of the compassionate Samaritan to show an inquisitive Jewish lawyer that to behave in this neighborly self-sacrificing way toward others knows no ethnic boundaries or racial borders (10:25–37)¹⁰

However, Buckwalter's reliance on “Samaritan” in **a** and **a'**, on “discipleship” in **b** and **b'**, and on “sending” and “return” of the “seventy-two”

in **c** and **c'** is not matched by any reliance on those words or phrases in his analysis of the second-level structure in the corresponding element **A'**, which he argues is comprised of the following concentric structure (which does not mention “Samaritans,” “discipleship,” or the “sending” or “return” of the “seventy-two”):

- a the parable of the Pharisee and the tax collector is about how the reign of God works: he will justify those who humbly recognize their sinfulness and cry out to him for his mercy and he will withhold his mercy to all the self-righteous (18:9–14)
- b Jesus’ teaching on little children illustrates entrance into God’s kingdom (18:15–17)
 - ends (with a key teaching): “truly I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child, shall never enter it”
- c Jesus encounters a wealthy ruler—ends with the ruler not heeding Jesus’ counsel and Jesus’ teaching on the difficulty of the rich entering the kingdom of God (18:18–30)
 - d **CONTROLLING IDEA:** Jesus’ betrayal, suffering, death, and resurrection in Jerusalem will fulfill all that is written by the prophets—but for the time being[,] its meaning is still providentially hidden from the disciples (18:31–34)
- c’ Jesus encounters a blind beggar—ends with the blind man receiving his sight and following Jesus[,] his healer (18:35–43)
- b’ Jesus’ visit to Zacchaeus’ house illustrates the mission of the Son of Man (19:1–10)
 - ends (with a key teaching): “for the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost”
- a the parable of the ten minas is about how the reign of Jesus works: at his return he will honor those who have faithfully been about his kingdom work and judge those who have rejected him (19:11–27)¹¹

In short, keywords and key phrases that help to define the ideas in corresponding elements of the overall chiasm in the longer text apparently are not themselves significant to the second-level chiasmic or parallel patterns that Buckwalter proposes within those elements. Conversely, some keywords and key phrases that help define some of the second-level chiasmic or parallel patterns that are proposed apparently do not constitute keywords and phrases in the makeup of the larger concentric structure. Therefore, it is apparent that the criterion of mavericks has its limits and place.

Leviticus 24:13–23; Ezekiel 20:3–31; and Alma 36

First, I will here set forth depictions of the chiasms that have been proposed for Lev 24:13–23, Ezek 20:3–31, and Alma 36, accompanied by a few preliminary comments, and then I will discuss the interrelated roles of words, phrases, and ideas in those three macro-chiastic texts.

The chiasm identified by Yehuda T. Radday in Lev 24:13–23 manifests repetitions of identical or almost identical *phrases*:

- A “And the Lord spake unto Moses” (v. 13)
- B “bring forth him that hath cursed without the camp” (v. 14)
- C “and let all the congregation stone him” (v. 14)
- D “thou [Moses] shalt speak unto the children of Israel” (v. 15)
- E “the name of the Lord” (v. 16)
- F “as well the stranger, as he that is born in the land” (v. 16)
- G “he that killeth any man shall surely be put to death” (v. 17)
- H “he that killeth a beast shall make it good” (v. 18)
- I “cause a blemish in his neighbour” (v. 19)
- J “breach for breach, eye for eye, tooth for tooth” (v. 20)
- I’ “caused a blemish in a man” (v. 20)
- H’ “he that killeth a beast, he shall restore it” (v. 21)
- G’ “he that killeth a man, he shall be put to death” (v. 21)
- F’ “as well for the stranger, as for one of your own country” (v. 22)
- E’ “I am the Lord your God” (v. 22)
- D’ “Moses spake to the children of Israel” (v. 23)
- B’ “bring forth him that had cursed out of the camp” (v. 23)¹²
- C’ “and stone him with stones” (v. 23)
- A’ “as the Lord commanded Moses” (v. 23)¹³

Note that the phrases in B and B’ are identical. So, also, the phrases in elements F and F’, which are *nearly* identical, but not exactly, as are, respectively, H with H’ and I with I’. Yet it can be seen in elements A and A’, for example, that the respective phrases are not precisely identical, though some of the individual *words* in those phrases are precisely identical. So, also, with elements C and C’, F and F’, and so forth. The phrases essentially correspond even if all of the words making up the phrases themselves do not repeat precisely verbatim.

Leslie C. Allen,¹⁴ employing chiastic analysis to discern divisions of a passage in Ezekiel, addresses the question of the division of Ezek 20:5–26 into three, four, or five sections. It is Allen’s view that a fivefold division exists, and he states that an “initial clue” in reaching that view is “the parallel repetition of key *terms*.”¹⁵ Allen further proposes that vv. 30–31 add a sixth section, and notes that Ezek 20:3–31 reveals the following chiasm:

- A “To consult me do you come? As I live, I will not be consulted by you, runs the oracle of the Lord Yahweh” (v. 3ayb)
- B “the abominations of their ancestors” (v. 4b)
- C “I lifted up my hand . . . to (the) land” (v. 6)
- D “detested things” (v. 7a)
- E “Do not defile yourselves . . . I am Yahweh” (v. 7ayb)
- F “And I proposed to pour out my wrath upon them, to exhaust my anger against them within the land of Egypt. But I acted for my name’s sake so as not to defile it before the nations . . . before them to bring them out . . . And I gave them my statutes, and my ordinances I made known to them, which humans may do and obtain life by them” (vv. 8b–11)
- G “Moreover, my sabbaths I gave them to be a sign between me and them, so they might know that I am Yahweh who sanctifies them. But they rebelled against me . . . in my statutes they did not walk and my ordinances they rejected, which humans may do and obtain life by them, and my sabbaths they greatly profaned” (vv. 12–13a)
- H “because my ordinances they rejected and as for my statutes they did not walk in them . . . but after their idols their hearts walked.” (v. 16)
- I “in the wilderness” (v. 17b)
- I’ “in the wilderness” (v. 18aa)
- H’ “‘In the statutes of your parents do not walk and their ordinances do not keep, and with their idols do not defile yourselves” (v. 18aβ–b)
- G’ “‘And my sabbaths keep sacred and let them be a sign between me and you, so you may know that I am Yahweh your God.’ But they rebelled against me . . . in my statutes they did not walk and my ordinances they did not keep by doing them, which humans may do and obtain life by them, and my sabbaths they profaned.” (vv. 20–21a)

F' "And I proposed to pour out my wrath upon them, to exhaust my anger against them in the wilderness . . . But I acted for my name's sake so as not to defile it before the nations before whom I had brought them out. . . . Moreover I gave them no-good statutes and ordinances by which they could not obtain life" (vv. 21b–25)

E' "And I defiled them . . . I am Yahweh" (v. 26)

D' "when they acted treacherously" (v. 27b)

C' "to the land I lifted up my hand" (v. 28a)

B' "your ancestors . . . their detested things" (v. 30)

A' "And will I be consulted by you . . . ? As I live, runs the oracle of the Lord Yahweh, I will not be consulted by you." (v. 31aβb)

Note that Allen's parallel presentation of Hebrew and English¹⁶ identifies the double appearance of *bammidbar* in verses 17b and 18aα as presenting a precise match at what he proposes to be the chiasmic center of the passage (at I and I'). But, while he identifies other phrases in other matching elements of his proposed chiasm (such as in F and F') as very closely or even identically corresponding to each other in what they convey ("And I proposed to pour out my wrath upon them" appearing in both elements), his presentation shows other words and phrases, in those very same elements, that are either not precisely the same or are not presented in the same sequence ("within the land of Egypt" in F contrasted with "in the wilderness" in F'). His proposed elements E and E', for another example, cite a precisely identical underlying Hebrew phrase, *ani Yhvh* (I am Yahweh), in a portion of each of those two elements but non-identical underlying Hebrew in the other portion of those two elements (*al tame* in verse 7, which he renders as "do not defile yourselves," and *waatame owtam* in verse 26, which he renders as "And I defiled them").

No doubt, one of the lengthiest examples of a large-scale chiasm is proposed by John W. Welch for the text of chapter 36 of the book of Alma in the Book of Mormon. That chapter is comprised of 1,226 English words (1981 edition),¹⁷ and the following scheme employs sometimes precisely identical and sometimes nearly identical repeated phrases—comprising a total of about 316 English words (about 25 percent of the words in the chapter). Alma 36 clearly forms an impressive example of macro-chiasmus¹⁸ (with two perturbations, at I' and M', bolded below):

- A “My son, give ear to my words” (v. 1)
- B “inasmuch as ye shall keep the commandments of God ye shall prosper in the land” (v. 1)
- C “ye should do as I have done” (v. 2)
- D “in remembering the captivity of our fathers” (v. 2)
 - E “for they were in bondage, and none could deliver them [our fathers]” (v. 2)
 - F “he surely did deliver them” (v. 2)
 - G “put their trust in God” (v. 3)
 - H “supported in their trials, and their troubles, and their afflictions” (v. 3)
 - I “I do know [those who trust in God] shall be lifted up at the last day” (v. 3)
 - J “I know . . . of the spiritual . . . mind . . . of God” (v. 4)
 - K “had not been born of God” (v. 5)
 - L “I went about . . . seeking to destroy the church of God” (v. 6)
 - M Alma is struck to the earth and, hearing the angel’s voice saying Arise, he arises and stands up, is confronted by the angel (vv. 7–9)
 - N Alma falls to earth for three days and three nights, unable to open his mouth; “neither had I the use of my limbs” (v. 10)
 - O “coming into the presence of my God did rack my soul with inexpressible horror” (v. 14)
 - P “now . . . was I racked, even with the pains of a damned soul” (v. 16)
 - Q “I was harrowed up by the memory of my many sins” (v. 17)
 - R “I remembered . . . Jesus Christ, a Son of God” (v. 17)

R' "I cried . . . O Jesus, thou
son of God" (v. 18)

Q' "I was harrowed up by the
memory of my sins no
more" (v. 19)

P' "my soul was filled with joy
as exceeding as was my pain!"
(v. 20)

**M' Alma, on the earth, unable to use his
limbs, sees "numberless concourses
of angels in the attitude of singing
and praising their God" (v. 22)**

O' "my soul did long to be there"
(v. 22)

N' "my limbs did receive their strength
again" (v. 23)

L' "I have labored . . . that I might bring souls
unto repentance" (v. 24)

K' "have been born of God" (v. 26)

J' "I do know; and the knowledge which I have is
of God" (v. 26)

H' "supported under trials and troubles of every kind, yea,
and in all manner of afflictions" (v. 27)

G' "I do put my trust in him" (v. 27)

F' "he will still deliver me" (v. 27)

**I' "I know that he will raise me up at the last day"
(v. 28)**

E' "delivered them [our fathers] out of bondage and captivity"
(v. 29)

D' "retained in remembrance their captivity" (v. 29)

C' "ye ought to know as I do know" (v. 30)

B' "inasmuch as ye shall keep the commandments of God ye shall prosper
in the land" (v. 30)

A' "this is according to his word" (v. 30)

Yet, again, several matching elements use matching words and phrases while others only nearly do. Two observations will be made at this point: (1) In Lev 24:13–23, Ezek 20:3–31, and Alma 36, large-scale chiasms are based on reversed repetitions of *phrases* and may be seen to

exist in the texts while other dominant *phrases* in the chiasm may appear elsewhere in the text but outside of the overriding patterns, and yet these outliers neither detract from the existence of the chiasm nor constitute mavericks challenging the existence of the patterns. And (2) a large-scale chiasm, based on reversed repetitions of *phrases*, can co-exist with and serve as a foundation for a *conceptual* chiasm over the very same text.

The first example examined in this section of this paper is Lev 24:13–23, where it becomes apparent that between the elements of the large-scale chiasm, there are a number of phrases that do not figure into the chiasm. Below, phrases forming the elements of the chiasm are presented in **bold font** and text outside of the pattern in regular font:

- A And **the LORD spake unto Moses**, saying, (v. 13)
- B **Bring forth him that hath cursed without the camp**; and let all that heard him lay their hands upon his head, (v. 14)
- C **and let all the congregation stone him.** (v. 14)
- D And **thou [Moses] shalt speak unto the children of Israel**, saying, Whosoever curseth his God shall bear his sin. (v. 15)
- E And he that blasphemeth **the name of the LORD**, he shall surely be put to death, and all the congregation shall certainly stone him: (v. 16)
- F **as well the stranger, as he that is born in the land**, when he blasphemeth the name of the LORD, shall be put to death. (v. 16)
- G And **he that killeth any man shall surely be put to death.** (v. 17)
- H And **he that killeth a beast shall make it good**; beast for beast. (v. 18)
- I And if a man **cause a blemish in his neighbour**; as he hath done, so shall it be done to him; (v. 19)
- J **Breach for breach, eye for eye, tooth for tooth:** (v. 20)
- I' As he hath caused a **blemish in a man**, so shall it be done to him again (v. 20)
- H' And **he that killeth a beast, he shall restore it:** (v. 21)
- G' And **he that killeth a man, he shall be put to death.** (v. 21)
- F' Ye shall have one manner of law, **as well for the stranger, as for one of your own country:** (v. 22)
- E' for **I am the LORD your God.** (v. 22)

D' And **Moses spake to the children of Israel**, (v. 23)

B' that they should **bring forth him that had cursed out of the camp**, (v. 23)

C' **and stone him with stones**. (v. 23)

A' And the children of Israel did **as the LORD commanded Moses**. (v. 23)¹⁹

Apart from words and phrases like “saying,” “and,” “if a man,” and the like, it should be noted that many of the phrases that appear within the text of Lev 24:13–23, but that are not phrases forming the chiasm, may otherwise be considered to be important phrases: “and let all them that heard him lay their hand upon his head”; “whosoever curseth his God shall bear his sin”; “he shall surely be put to death, and all the congregation shall certainly stone him”; “when he blasphemeth the name of the Lord, shall be put to death”; “beast for beast”; “as he hath done, so shall it be done to him”; “so shall it be done to him again”;²⁰ “ye shall have one manner of law”; and “the children of Israel.” Surely, all of those phrases are important—one is akin to the Golden Rule. The presence of those nonrepeated phrases, important as they otherwise may seem to be, simply does not detract from the inescapable fact that the other phrases, repeated and reversed, do indeed make for an impressive large-scale chiasm.

Similarly, in the second example, numerous words and phrases appear in the text of Ezek 20:3–31 but do not figure into the large-scale chiasm and do not detract from the existence of that pattern. Once again, a number of otherwise seemingly important phrases of the text appear outside of the chiastic elements. Here is the full KJV text of the passage, with phrases forming the chiasm set forth in **bold font**, with phrases not part of the chiasm in regular font, and “maverick” appearances of important phrases are underlined²¹:

A **Are ye come to inquire of me? As I live, saith the Lord God, I will not be inquired of by you**. (v. 3)

B Wilt thou judge them, son of man, wilt thou judge them? cause them to know **the abominations of their fathers**: (v. 4)

C And say unto them, Thus saith the Lord God; In the day when **I chose Israel, and lifted up mine hand unto** the seed of the house of Jacob, and made myself known unto them in **the land** of Egypt, when I lifted up mine hand unto them, saying, I am the Lord your God; (v. 5)

D In the day that I lifted up mine hand unto them, to bring them forth of the land of Egypt into a land that I had espied for them, flowing with milk and honey, which is the glory of all lands: Then said I unto them, Cast ye away every man **the abominations** of his eyes, (v. 6–7)

E and **defile not yourselves** with the idols of Egypt: **I am the Lord your God.** (v. 7)

F But they rebelled against me, and would not hearken unto me: they did not every man cast away the abominations of their eyes, neither did they forsake the idols of Egypt: then I said, **I will pour out my fury upon them, to accomplish my anger against them in the midst of the land of Egypt. But I wrought for my name's sake, that it should not be polluted before the heathen**, among whom they were, in whose sight I made myself known **unto them, in bringing them forth out** of the land of Egypt. Wherefore I caused them to go forth out of the land of Egypt, and brought them into the wilderness. **And I gave them my statutes, and shewed them my judgments, which if a man do, he shall even live in them.** (vv. 8–11)

G Moreover also I gave them my sabbaths, to be a sign between me and them, that they might know that I am the Lord that sanctify them. **But the house of Israel rebelled against me in the wilderness: they walked not in my statutes, and they despised my judgments, which if a man do, he shall even live in them; and my sabbaths they greatly polluted:** then I said, I would pour out my fury upon them in the wilderness, to consume them. (vv. 12–13)

H But I wrought for my name's sake, that it should not be polluted before the heathen, in whose sight I brought them out. Yet also I lifted up my hand unto them in the wilderness, that I would not bring them into the land which I had given them, flowing with milk and honey, which is the glory of all lands; **Because they despised my judgments, and walked not in my statutes, but polluted my sabbaths: for their heart went after their idols.** (vv. 14–16)

I Nevertheless mine eye spared them from destroying them, neither did I make an end of them **in the wilderness.** (v. 17)

I' But I said unto their children **in the wilderness,** (v. 18a)

H' **Walk ye not in the statutes of your fathers, neither observe their judgments, nor defile yourselves with their idols:** (v. 18b)

G' I am the Lord your God; walk in my statutes, and keep my judgments, and do them; **And hallow my sabbaths; and they shall be a sign between me and you, that ye may know that I am the Lord your God. Notwithstanding the children rebelled against me: they walked not in my statutes, neither kept my judgments to do them, which if a man do, he shall even live in them; they polluted my sabbaths:** (vv. 19–21a)

F' then I said, **I would pour out my fury upon them, to accomplish my anger against them in the wilderness. Nevertheless** I withdrew mine hand, and wrought for my name's sake, **that it should not be polluted in the sight of the heathen, in whose sight I brought them forth.** I lifted up mine hand unto them also in the wilderness, that I would scatter them among the heathen, and disperse them through the countries; Because they had not executed my judgments, but had despised my statutes, and had polluted my sabbaths, and their eyes were after their fathers' idols. **Wherefore I gave them also statutes that were not good, and judgments whereby they should not live;** (vv. 21b–25)

E' And **I polluted them** in their own gifts, in that they caused to pass through the fire all that openeth the womb, that I might make them desolate, to the end that they might know that **I am the Lord.** (v. 26)

D' Therefore, son of man, speak unto the house of Israel, and say unto them, Thus saith the Lord God; Yet in this your fathers have blasphemed me, in that **they have committed a trespass against me.** (v. 27)

C' For when I had brought them **into the land, for the which I lifted up mine hand** to give it to them, then they saw every high hill, and all the thick trees, and they offered there their sacrifices, and there they presented the provocation of their offering: there also they made their sweet savour, and poured out there their drink offerings. (v. 28)

B' Then I said unto them, What is the high place whereunto ye go? And the name thereof is called Bamah unto this day. Wherefore say unto the house of Israel, Thus saith the Lord God; Are ye polluted after the manner of **your fathers?** and commit ye whoredom after **their abominations?** (vv. 29–30)

A' For when ye offer your gifts, when ye make your sons to pass through the fire, ye pollute yourselves with all your idols, even unto this day: and **shall I be inquired of by you,** O house of Israel? **As I live, saith the Lord God, I will not be inquired of by you.** (v. 31)

The large-scale chiasm in Ezek 20 is somewhat obscured when one presents the balance of the text of the passage. And yet, a chiasmic structure unmistakably is there.²² And while the phrase “in the wilderness” is repeated at the chiasmic center (in vv. 17 and 18a), it also appears in vv. 10, 13, 15, 21, and 23. I would disagree with Allen about omitting from the proposed pattern the occurrences of the phrase “in the wilderness” in verses 10 and 23,²³ for they could be both considered to be parts, respectively, of elements F and F'. However, the appearances of that phrase in vv. 13, 15, and 21 could be considered “maverick” appearances, though their appearances in those verses still do not detract from the existence of the chiasm.

In the third and final example, while the chiasm of Alma 36 may at first blush seem to lack density (again, only about 25 percent of the English words in the chapter account for the chiasm), that lack of density is more than made up for by the chiasm's remarkable compliance with the *definitional characteristics* of *repetition* and *reversal*. Constituting what perhaps could be termed an extraordinary example of a large-scale chiasm, Alma 36 cannot be attacked as lacking repetition and reversal. The fact that *seventeen* elements, A through Q (as Welch has proposed), or eighteen elements (as I surmise), are *all* repeated is remarkable. And also remarkable is the fact that the reversal in the sequence of the repetition is precisely from Q' to A' in Welch's scheme, with only one “skew”²⁴ (at element I')—or from R' to A' in my scheme, with only two “skews.” That all elements are repeated and that the reversal is so precise, with only one or two perturbations, simply cannot, as a factual matter, be denied. This one observation alone should be kept in mind when any other analysis of the chapter is performed.

And yet, the phrase-based chiasm of Alma 36 can be seen simultaneously as a *conceptual chiasm*, portraying symmetry and balance as a simple seven-part chiasm of *ideas*,²⁵ the elements of which are introduced by the following:

- 1 “My son” (vv. 1–5)
- 2 “For” (vv. 6–9)
- 3 “And it came to pass” (vv. 10–16)
- 4 “And it came to pass” (vv. 17–20)
- 3' “Yea” (vv. 21–23)
- 2' “Yea” (vv. 24–26a)
- 1' “Therefore” (26b–30)

The overall seven-part conceptual chiasm²⁶ (1 2 3 4 3' 2' 1') can be described either by short, topical descriptions (shown in **bold font** in the scheme below) or by lengthier descriptions employing the repeated phrases of the chiasm itself, with each element of the conceptual scheme identified by a numerical scheme (shown below) and with references to the verse numbers and the elements of the large-scale, phrase-based chiasm—A, B, C . . . to C', B', A'—(using my adaptation of Welch's scheme) appended in parentheses:

- 1 **Alma's word to his son regarding obedience, prosperity, remembering the captivity of the fathers, support in trials, and knowledge from God**—Alma's word to his son is not only that in keeping the commandments of God he will prosper in the land, and that as he himself has done, his son also should remember the captivity and bondage of their fathers, from which captivity and bondage God did deliver them, but also that anyone who puts their trust in God will be supported in their trials, troubles, and afflictions and be lifted up at the last day, all of which Alma knows by revelation from God (vv. 1–5, elements A–K)
- 2 **Alma and the sons of Mosiah seek to destroy of the church of God and are confronted by the angel of God**—Only because he has been spiritually born of God does Alma know these things, for with the sons of Mosiah he had sought to destroy the church of God and with them had been confronted by an angel of God who commanded them to seek no more to destroy the church of God (vv. 6–9, elements L–M)
- 3 **Alma suffers anguish of soul**—Alma falls to the earth, loses the use of his limbs, is racked with eternal torment, fears coming into the presence of God, and is racked with the pains of a damned soul (vv. 10–16, elements N–O)
- 4 **Alma's conversion to Jesus Christ**—While Alma is harrowed up by his many sins he remembered his father's prophecy about Jesus Christ, a Son of God, and crying within his heart, "O Jesus, thou Son of God," Alma pleaded for mercy and was harrowed up by the memory of his sins no more (vv. 17–19, elements P–P')
- 3' **Alma experiences joy in his soul**—His soul having been filled with joy as exceeding as had been his pains, Alma stands upon his feet, receives back the use of his limbs, longs to be in the presence of God, and manifests unto the people that he had been born of God (vv. 20–23, elements O'–M')
- 2' **Alma builds up the church of God**—Alma labors that he might bring souls to repentance that they too might be born of God, and he experiences great joy in the fruit of his labors when many of them are born of God (vv. 24–26a, elements L'–K')

1' **God's word regarding obedience, prosperity, remembering the captivity of the fathers, support in trials, and knowledge from God**—According to God's word, Alma states not only that he knows by revelation from God that he has been supported by God in his trials, troubles, and afflictions, and that God has delivered him as he did deliver their fathers from captivity, which captivity he has retained in remembrance, but also that God still will deliver him and that in keeping the commandments of God his son will prosper in the land (vv. 26b–30, elements J'–A')

Two elements of the conceptual chiasm—3 and 1'—each contain what otherwise could be said to be “maverick” phrases (dominant words and phrases falling outside the elements in which they otherwise appear as part of the pattern). Yet when the chiasm of Alma 36 is analyzed as a conceptual or idea-based chiasm, a possible *reason* for the appearance of those phrases in elements 3 and 1' can perhaps be discerned. In element 3 of the conceptual chiasm there appear elements M and N of the pattern, and the large number of words that account for the elemental imbalance of element 3 appear between the phrases of elements M and N of the pattern (namely, in verses 11–14a, italicized below):

10 And it came to pass that I fell to the earth; and it was for the space of three days and three nights that I could not open my mouth, **M** neither had I the use of my limbs. 11 *And the angel spake more things unto me, which were heard by my brethren, but I did not hear them; for when I heard the words—If thou wilt be destroyed of thyself, seek no more to destroy the church of God—I was struck with such great fear and amazement lest perhaps I should be destroyed, that I fell to the earth and I did hear no more.* 12 *But I was racked with eternal torment, for my soul was harrowed up to the greatest degree and racked with all my sins.* 13 *Yea, I did remember all my sins and iniquities, for which I was tormented with the pains of hell; yea, I saw that I had rebelled against my God, and that I had not kept his holy commandments.* 14 *Yea, and I had murdered many of his children, or rather led them away unto destruction; yea, and in fine so great had been my iniquities, that **N** the very thought of coming into the presence of my God did rack my soul with inexpressible horror.*

Those words of verses 11–14a may actually represent a further, lower-level parallelistic scheme, superimposed both on the phrase-based chiasm and on the conceptual chiasm of Alma 36. Those words seem to reflect the following pattern, all preparing for the “rack my soul” language of element N:

And the angel spake more things unto me,

- a which were **heard** by my brethren,
- a but I did not **hear** them;
- a for when I **heard** the words
 - b —If thou wilt be **destroyed of thyself**,
 - c seek no more to **destroy the church of God**—
 - b' I was struck with such great fear and amazement lest perhaps **I should be destroyed**,
- a that I fell to the earth and I did **hear** no more.
 - d But I was racked with eternal torment,
 - e for my soul was harrowed up to the greatest degree
 - d' and racked with all my sins.
 - d' Yea, I did **remember all my sins and iniquities**,
 - d' for which I was tormented with the pains of hell
 - e yea, I saw that **I had rebelled** against my God,
 - e and that **I had not kept his holy commandments**.
 - e Yea, and **I had murdered** many of his children,
 - e or rather **led them away** unto destruction;
 - e yea, and in fine so great had been **my iniquities**,
 - d' that N the very thought of coming into the presence of my God did rack my soul with inexpressible horror.

Similarly, and perhaps more strongly, in element 1' of the conceptual chiasm there appear elements E' and B' of the pattern, in each of which the large number of words accounts for the elemental imbalance of element 1'. In element E' of the chiasm (v. 29), the following parallelism seems to add emphatic repetition to the central idea of deliverance from bondage and captivity (which is element E' of the chiasm):

- for he has brought our fathers out of Egypt, and
- he has swallowed up the Egyptians in the Red Sea; and
- he led them by his power into the promised land; yea, and
- he has E' delivered them out of bondage and captivity from time to time. Yea, and
- he has also brought our fathers out of the land of Jerusalem; and
- he has also, by his everlasting power, delivered them out of bondage and captivity, from time to time even down to the present day;

And element B' of the chiasm (v. 30) is coupled with an antithetical parallelism:

B' keep the commandments of God ye shall prosper in the land;

- and ye ought to know also, that inasmuch as ye will *not* keep the commandments of God ye shall be *cut off* from his presence.

So, an argument can be made to the effect that not only does Alma 36, as a phrase-based chiasm, show remarkable repetition and reversal—which cannot be denied—but also, as a conceptual chiasm, it appears to show a deep level of artistic sophistication.

Summary

This paper has demonstrated that some chiasms may be manifest almost exclusively in the reversed repetition of ideas rather than of words or phrases (Psalm 23). Some chiasms may be manifest in the reversed repetition of very few words or phrases appearing within very large texts (Genesis). In a text with several chiastic structures, different patterns may simultaneously be evidenced with dominant words considered dominant only for one pattern but not for other patterns in the text (Luke's Travel Narrative). Furthermore, large-scale chiastic patterns based on reversed repetitions of dominant phrases may exist in a text while occurrences of those dominant phrases may appear elsewhere in the text outside of the pattern, which neither detract from the existence of the pattern nor constitute mavericks challenging the existence of the pattern (Lev 24:13–23, Ezek 20:3–31, and Alma 36). Finally, a large-scale chiasm, based on reversed repetitions of phrases, may be seen to coexist with and, of course, serve as a foundation for a conceptual chiasm of overarching ideas (Alma 36).

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Notes

1. The criteria of "density," "dominance," and "mavericks" are discussed by John W. Welch in his "Criteria for Identifying and Evaluating the Presence of Chiasmus," *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 4 (Fall 1995): 6–7; see Welch, "Criteria," 1–14, for more criteria

for identifying and evaluating the presence of chiasmus. Each of these definitions is concerned with the “elements” of a chiasm. An “element” of a chiasm is a textual, linguistic, or conceptual feature (such as a sound, syllable, word, phrase, clause, sentence, sequence, speech, scene-part, scene, act, section, cycle, book, composition, or idea), generally identified schematically with a letter or number (e.g., “A” or “B” etc., or “a” or “b” etc., or “1” or “2” etc.), with the chiasm consisting of the reversed repetition of two or more elements. The criterion of “density” can be defined as the quality or state of compactness or crowding together of the elements of a proposed chiasmic structure. The fewer the number of irrelevant textual, linguistic, or conceptual features between the textual, linguistic, or conceptual feature that form the elements of the proposed chiasm, the denser the structure and the more likely the structure can be said to exist in a text. The criterion of “dominance” can be defined as the fact or state of “major incidents, unique phrases, or focal words” constituting the elements dominant in the proposed structure. Welch, “Criteria,” 7. A “powerful chiasmic structure,” says Welch, will not rely on “relatively insubstantial or common words and ideas” or “insignificant or dispensable parts of speech,” but instead will “account for and embrace” what Welch calls “dominant nouns, verbs, and distinctive phrases in the text.” Welch, “Criteria,” 7. The criterion of “mavericks” can be defined as the appearance of a word or phrase that appears not only in corresponding elements of a proposed chiasm but also extraneously outside of the proposed structure. Paraphrasing Welch, “The analyst is open to the charge of selectively picking and choosing among the occurrences of this element [a particular textual, linguistic, or conceptual feature to constitute an element of a proposed chiasm] if some of its occurrences [appearing elsewhere] in the text are arbitrarily ignored.” Welch, “Criteria,” 7.

2. W. Creighton Marlowe, “No Fear!: Psalm 23 as a Careful Conceptual Chiasm,” *Asbury Theological Journal* 57, no. 2 / 58, no. 1 (Fall 2002/Spring 2003): 65–80, at 66.

3. Marlowe, “No Fear!” 70–71.

4. Marlowe, “No Fear!” 70.

5. Marlowe, “No Fear!” 70–71, here adapted to include Marlowe’s idea labels, emphasis added. Marlowe also discusses the metrical balance in the psalm, which contributes to the conclusion that the psalm is a conceptual chiasm (actually a conceptual concentric structure).

6. See Yehuda T. Radday, “Chiasmus in Hebrew Biblical Narrative,” in John W. Welch, ed., *Chiasmus in Antiquity: Structure, Analysis, Exegesis* (Hildesheim: Gerstenberg, 1981): 96–97 (formatting here provided along with more accurate scripture citations).

7. At this chiasmic center, the KJV renders the phrase in 24:12 as “send me good speed” and in 27:20 as “the Lord thy God brought it to me.” Other translations, however, more closely reflect the Hebrew. See, for example, Christoph Levin, *Re-reading the Scriptures: Essays on the Literary History of the Old Testament* (FAT 87; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2013), 92, where Levin renders the phrase in Gen 24:12 as “grant me success today” and renders the phrase in Gen 27:20 as “God granted me success.” The English Standard Version for 24:12 reads “please grant me success” and for 27:20 “Because the Lord your God granted me success.”

8. Based on H. Douglas Buckwalter, “The Hike of Hikes—Luke’s Travel Narrative (Luke 9:51–19:27),” *Evangelical Journal* 33, no. 2 (2015): 68–81.

9. This concept of multiple rhetorical levels in longer texts is masterfully displayed by Noel B. Reynolds in his “Chiastic Structuring of Large Texts: Second Nephi as a Case Study,” herein at pp. 177–92.

10. Buckwalter, “Luke’s Travel Narrative,” 70, emphasis in original. (Buckwalter’s notes about disciples under c and c’ are omitted here, and letters designating elements are rendered in lowercase to match usage in this present paper.)
11. Buckwalter, “Luke’s Travel Narrative,” 70, emphasis in original. (Letters designating elements are rendered in lowercase to match usage in this present paper.)
12. Note the reversion to direct parallelism at D’, B’, C’, A’.
13. Adapted from Radday, “Chiasmus in Hebrew Narrative,” 87. (Here, I complete the phrases and correct the sequence of elements D’ through A’).
14. Leslie C. Allen, “The Structuring of Ezekiel’s Revisionist History Lesson (Ezekiel 20:3–31),” *CBQ* 54, no. 3 (1992): 448–62.
15. Allen, “Structuring,” 452, emphasis added.
16. Allen, “Structuring,” 459–60.
17. The Original Manuscript of the chapter has about 1,247 words. See Royal Skousen, ed., *The Original Manuscript of the Book of Mormon: Typographical Facsimile of the Extant Text* (Provo, UT: Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies [FARMS], 2001): 319–25; and the Printer’s Manuscript has about 1,235 words. See Royal Skousen, *The Printer’s Manuscript of the Book of Mormon: Part Two—Alma 17–Moroni 10* (The Printer’s Manuscript, vol. 2; Provo, UT: FARMS, 2001): 572–76.
18. The scheme portrayed here is my modification of John W. Welch, “Chiasmus in the Book of Mormon,” in Noel B. Reynolds, ed., *Book of Mormon Authorship: New Light on Ancient Origins* (Religious Studies Monograph Series 7; Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 1982): 49–50. My modification adds elements M and M’, which account for the lacuna that otherwise exists in Welch’s scheme (which skips the text of verses 7–9). I find the parallels in my proposed elements M and M’ account for what is set forth in verses 7–9 and the first part of verse 22.
19. Adapted from Radday, “Chiasmus in Hebrew Narrative,” 87. Here, again, I include both the completed phrases of the chiasm and the corrected sequence of elements D’ through A’ but also add, in regular font, the text of the passage that falls outside of the elements of the chiasm.
20. I differ from Radday by not omitting the phrases “as he hath done, so shall it be done to him” and “so shall it be done to him again” from the proposed chiasm, for those phrases, too, are repeated. I would include those phrases within elements I and I’ of his proposed pattern, accounting for them respectively together with the phrases “cause a blemish in his neighbour” in his element I and “caused a blemish in a man” in his element I’.
21. The bold font elements of the chiasm depicted here with phrases quoted from the KJV are based on Allen, “Structuring,” 459–60, where Allen depicts the chiasm using his own English-language translation from the Hebrew.
22. Shorter chiasms generally are immune from challenge for lack of other material competing for attention. See David Noel Freedman, “Preface,” in John W. Welch, ed., *Chiasmus in Antiquity: Structure, Analysis, Exegesis* (Hildesheim: Gerstenberg, 1981), 7. According to Freedman, “Questions are generally raised, at this level, not about the existence or identification of the [chiastic] device. . . .” The same principle could be applied to large-scale chiasms where the phrases are presented as text for each element of the pattern, without any potentially subjective descriptive labeling used to constitute the elements.
23. See Allen, “Structuring,” 459–60.

24. The term “skewed chiasmus” was coined by William L. Holladay and refers to “a chiasmus which, after the midpoint, begins its way back, only to plunge forward briefly once more, and then, in the last line, offers a set of simultaneous balances in several media which psychologically brings us all the way home. It is a striking compromise between the chiastic pattern and sequentiality.” William L. Holladay, “The Recovery of Poetic Passages of Jeremiah,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 85 (1966): 432–33; see also Wildred G. E. Watson, “Chiastic Patterns in Biblical Hebrew Poetry,” in *Chiasmus in Antiquity: Structures, Analyses, Exegesis*, ed. John W. Welch (Hildesheim: Gerstenberg Verlag, 1981), 132 (citing and quoting Holladay and giving examples). Note the “skew” in elements B' and C' (v. 23) in Radday's pattern for Lev 24:13–23 (p. 326 above). I here use the words “skew” and “perturbation” to refer to a reversion to sequentiality or to direct parallelism at some point after the midpoint of a chiasm.

25. The expression of an idea occurs by the expression of words and phrases. Therefore, one could argue that a chiasm based on the reverse repetition of words and phrases could easily account for the existence of an overlaying chiasm based on the reverse repetition of ideas or concepts.

26. I use the word “chiasm” here colloquially. Technically, a pattern with only one central element is a *concentric structure*. The term *chiasm* colloquially is used to include both chiasms (with two central elements) and concentric structures (with one central element). The title of this article similarly uses the word “chiasms” colloquially.