

Section 10

Word Studies

of the Book of Mormon

Charts 128–35

Chiasmus in Leviticus 24:13–23

Key Scripture Leviticus 24:13–23

Explanation Chiasmus is a style of writing known in antiquity and used by many ancient and some modern writers. It consists of arranging a series of words or ideas in one order, and then repeating it in reverse order. In the hands of a skillful writer, this literary form can serve several purposes. The repeating of key words in the two halves underlines the importance of the concepts they present. Furthermore, the main idea of the passage is emphasized by its placement at the turning point where the second half begins. Thus chiasms, in general, place their most important elements in the center. Chiasmus can be found in biblical texts, as Leviticus 24:13–23 demonstrates. It is one of the clearest examples of chiasmus in the Bible. In this case “breach for breach, eye for eye, tooth for tooth” is the central formulation. Other words important to the structure of the chiasm are italicized.

Source John W. Welch, “Chiasmus in Biblical Law: An Approach to the Structure of Legal Texts in the Hebrew Bible,” in *Jewish Law Association Studies IV*, ed. Bernard Jackson (Atlanta: Scholars, 1990), 5–22.

Chiasmus in Leviticus 24:13–23

And the Lord spake unto Moses, saying,

Bring forth him that hath *cursed without the camp*; and let all that heard him . . . *stone him*.

And thou shalt speak unto the children of Israel, saying,

Whosoever curseth his God shall bear his sin. . . . the *stranger*, as [well as] he that is *born in the land*. . . .

And he that *killeth any man* shall surely be put to death.

And he that *killeth a beast* shall make it good; beast for beast.

And if a man cause a *blemish* in his neighbour; as he hath done, so shall it be done to him;

Breach for breach,
eye for eye,
tooth for tooth:

as he hath caused a *blemish* in a man, so shall it be done to him again.

And he that *killeth a beast*, he shall restore it:

and he that *killeth a man*, he shall be put to death.

Ye shall have one manner of law, as well for the *stranger*, as for *one of your own country*. . . .

And Moses spake to the children of Israel,

that they should bring forth him that had *cursed out of the camp*, and *stone him* with stones.

And the children of Israel did as the Lord commanded Moses.

Chiasmus in Matthew 13:13–18

Key Scripture Matthew 13:13–18

Explanation The Savior used chiasmus on occasion. In this chart Jesus Christ is quoting Isaiah (Esaias), embedding Isaiah’s chiastic structure in his own larger discourse, which is also a chiasm. The Savior here begins and ends with a reference to parables and includes as the center of his chiasm the prophecy of Isaiah that many will close their eyes and refuse to see that Jesus is the Christ.

Source John W. Welch, “Chiasmus in the Book of Mormon,” *BYU Studies* 10 (autumn 1969): 69–84.

Chiasmus in Matthew 13:13–18

Therefore speak I to them in *parables*:

because they seeing *see* not; and hearing they *hear* not, neither do they understand.

And in them is fulfilled the *prophecy* of Esaias, which saith,

By hearing ye shall *hear*, and shall not understand;

and seeing ye shall *see*, and shall not perceive:

For this people's *heart* is waxed gross,

and their *ears* are dull of *hearing*,

and their *eyes*

they have *closed*;

lest at any time they should *see*

with their *eyes*,

and *hear* with their *ears*,

and should understand with their *heart*, and should be converted, and I should heal them.

But blessed are your eyes, for they *see*:

and your ears, for they *hear*.

For verily I say unto you, That many *prophets* and righteous men have desired to *see* those things which ye see, and have not seen them; and to *hear* those things which ye hear, and have not heard them.

Hear ye therefore the *parable* of the sower.

Chiasmus in Mosiah 3:18–19

Key Scripture Mosiah 3:18–19

Explanation King Benjamin’s complex ceremonial speech in Mosiah 2–5 contains several excellent examples of chiasmus. The overall structure of the speech is chiastic and houses smaller chiasms within it. (For a more detailed representation of the speech of Benjamin as a whole, see chart 87.) This chart shows only one of the chiasms found in Benjamin’s speech. Notably, the main chiasms in Benjamin’s speech concern the doctrine of Jesus Christ—the doctrine Benjamin wants to emphasize. This particular chiasm, which comes at the midpoint of the entire speech, concerns the crucial process of being spiritually reborn through the atonement of Christ.

Source John W. Welch, “Chiasmus in the Book of Mormon,” *BYU Studies* 10 (autumn 1969): 69–84; and John W. Welch, “Parallelism and Chiasmus in King Benjamin’s Speech,” in *King Benjamin’s Speech: “That Ye May Learn Wisdom,”* ed. John W. Welch and Stephen D. Ricks (Provo, Utah: FARMS, 1998), 347–54.

Chiasmus in Mosiah 3:18–19

except they *humble* themselves

and become as little *children*, and believe that

salvation was, and is, and is to come, in and through the *atoning blood of Christ, the Lord Omnipotent*.

For the *natural man*

is an enemy to *God*,

and *has been* from the fall of Adam,

and *will be*, forever and ever,

unless he yields to the enticings of the *Holy Spirit*,

and putteth off the *natural man*

and becometh a saint through the *atonement of Christ the Lord*,

and becometh as a *child*,

submissive, meek, *humble*, patient, full of love, willing to submit to all things

Chiasmus in Mosiah 5:10–12

Key Scripture Mosiah 5:10–12

Explanation King Benjamin uses chiasmus several times in his great speech in Mosiah 2–5. In Mosiah 5:10–12 he emphasizes the central importance of taking upon oneself the name of Christ. In this concluding section of his speech, the people enter into a covenant with God and are called the children of Christ. They receive the name of Christ, which will never be blotted out, except by transgression. Transgression therefore receives the focus as the center of this chiasm, which stands at the center of this final section of the entire speech. Benjamin's skillful use of this literary form shows that he carefully and deliberately prepared his masterful oration.

Source John W. Welch, "Chiasmus in the Book of Mormon," *BYU Studies* 10 (autumn 1969): 69–84; and John W. Welch, "Parallelism and Chiasmus in King Benjamin's Speech," in *King Benjamin's Speech: "That Ye May Learn Wisdom,"* ed. John W. Welch and Stephen D. Ricks (Provo, Utah: FARMS, 1998), 369–73.

Chiasmus in Mosiah 5:10–12

And now it shall come to pass, that whosoever shall not take upon him
the *name of Christ*

must be *called* by some other name;

therefore, he findeth himself on the *left hand of God*.

And I would that ye should *remember* also, that this is the
name that I said I should give unto you

that never should be *blotted out*,

except it be through *transgression*;

therefore, take heed that ye do not *transgress*,

that the name be not *blotted out* of your hearts.

I say unto you, I would that ye should *remember* to retain the
name written always in your hearts,

that ye are not found on the *left hand of God*,

but that ye hear and know the voice by which ye shall be *called*,
and also,

the *name* by which he shall call you.

Chiasmus in Alma 36

Key Scripture Alma 36

Explanation In his blessing to his son Helaman, Alma uses chiasmus in recounting his conversion to the gospel of Jesus Christ. This chart illustrates the deep structure of Alma 36. Jesus Christ is the crux of the chiasm, just as he is the center of the gospel and the only means whereby salvation can be attained. The turning point in Alma's conversion was not the appearance of the angel or the fear of eternal banishment, but calling on the name of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. Fittingly, Alma makes this spiritual turning point the literary focal point of this entire chapter, one of the finest examples of chiasmic composition anywhere in world literature.

Source John W. Welch, "A Masterpiece: Alma 36," in *Rediscovering the Book of Mormon*, ed. John L. Sorenson and Melvin J. Thorne (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1991), 114–31.

Chiasmus in Alma 36

My son give ear to my *words* (v. 1)
 Keep the commandments and ye shall *prosper in the land* (v. 1)
 Do as I have done (v. 2)
 Remember the captivity of our fathers (v. 2)
 They were in *bondage* (v. 2)
 He surely did *deliver* them (v. 2)
 Trust in God (v. 3)
 Supported in *trials, troubles, and afflictions* (v. 3)
 Lifted up at the *last day* (v. 3)
 I know this not of myself but of *God* (v. 4)
 Born of *God* (v. 5)
 I sought to destroy the church (vv. 6–9)
 My *limbs* were paralyzed (v. 10)
 Fear of being in the *presence of God* (vv. 14–15)
 Pains of a damned soul (v. 16)
 Harrowed up by the *memory of sins* (v. 17)
 I remembered *Jesus Christ, a son of God* (v. 17)
 I cried, *Jesus Christ, son of God* (v. 18)
 Harrowed by the *memory of sins no more* (v. 19)
 Joy as exceeding as was the *pain* (v. 20)
 Long to be in the *presence of God* (v. 22)
 My *limbs* received strength again (v. 23)
 I labored to bring souls to repentance (v. 24)
 Born of *God* (v. 26)
 Therefore *my knowledge* is of *God* (v. 26)
 Supported under *trials, troubles, and afflictions* (v. 26)
 Trust in him (v. 27)
 He will *deliver* me (v. 27)
 And *raise me up at the last day* (v. 28)
 As God brought our fathers out of *bondage* and captivity (vv. 28–29)
 Retain a *remembrance of their captivity* (v. 29)
 Know as I do know (v. 30)
 Keep the commandments and ye shall *prosper in the land* (v. 30)
 This according to his *word* (v. 30)

Chiasmus in Helaman 6:7–13

Key Scripture Helaman 6:7–13

Explanation Yet another example of chiasmus, in this case a report of the events in a particular Nephite year, is found in Helaman 6:7–13. Because the report is a fine literary unit, the account was most likely originally written as a single entry in the Nephite annals that Mormon copied verbatim into his record from the large plates of Nephi. The sixty-fourth year of the reign of the judges was an unusual year, one in which the Nephites and Lamanites cooperatively enjoyed economic prosperity, peace, and free trade—an unprecedented occurrence. The chiastic form of the report for this year underscores its importance. In the chart, notice that *Zedekiah* and *Lord* are paired together at the center of the chiasm. The *-yah* at the end of *Zedekiah* represents the Hebrew word for “Lord”; thus the chiasm was probably even more evident in its original language than it is today in English.

Source John W. Welch, “Chiasmus in Helaman 6:7–13,” in *Reexploring the Book of Mormon*, ed. John W. Welch (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1992), 230–32.

Chiasmus in Helaman 6:7–13

And behold, there was *peace* in all the land,

[Freedom of travel and trade in *both lands* is discussed]

And it came to pass that they became exceedingly *rich*, both the Lamanites and the Nephites;

and they did have an exceeding *plenty* of *gold*, and of *silver*, and of all manner of *precious metals*, both in the *land south* and in the *land north*.

Now the land *south*

was called *Lehi*, and

the land *north*

was called *Mulek*,

which was after the son of *Zedekiah*;^{*}

for the *Lord*

did bring *Mulek*

into the land *north*,

and *Lehi* into

the land *south*.

And behold, there was *all manner* of *gold* in *both* these *lands*, and of *silver*, and of *precious ore* of every kind;

and there were also curious workmen, who did work all kinds of ore and did refine it; and thus they did become *rich*.

[Economic prosperity in *both lands* is discussed]

And thus the sixty and fourth year did pass away in *peace*.

^{*}The Hebrew word for *Lord* constitutes the theophoric suffix *-yah*, which is at the end of the name Zedekiah.

“It Came to Pass” Occurrences in the Book of Mormon

Key Scripture 1 Nephi 1:4

Explanation This chart compares the frequency of the phrase “it came to pass” and its closely related formulations in books of the Book of Mormon. The number of times the phrase is used (expressed as a total and as a percentage) and the rate of occurrence (expressed as one occurrence every so many words) are listed for each individual book, varying considerably. Some readers wonder why these words occur so often in the Book of Mormon compared with the Bible. Actually, the Hebrew word *wayehi* is translated in the King James Version of the Bible as “it came to pass,” but it is also translated as “it happened, came, had come, became, arose, was, now,” and so forth. Therefore, what was an extremely common phrase in the Bible appears to be less so because it was translated into various phrases instead of a single one. Apparently, Joseph Smith was quite consistent in translating it with the phrase “it came to pass” every time. Incidentally, in much the same way, some books in the Bible have a high frequency of “it came to pass,” while others do not.

Source Robert F. Smith, “‘It Came to Pass’ in the Bible and the Book of Mormon” (Provo, Utah: FARMS, 1984).

“It Came to Pass”

Occurrences in the Book of Mormon

	Instances of “it came to pass” in the 1830 edition	Percentage of total “it came to pass” phrases	Average rate of occurrence (instances/words)
1 Nephi	208	14.1	108.9
2 Nephi	52	3.5	525.4
Jacob	48	3.3	174.7
Enos	6	0.4	164.8
Jarom	4	0.3	164.8
Omni	13	0.9	97.8
Words of Mormon	6	0.4	137.3
Mosiah	168	11.4	170.3
Alma	433	29.3	178.6
Helaman	135	9.2	138.2
3 Nephi	154	10.4	173.4
4 Nephi	20	1.4	89.5
Mormon	63	4.3	137.6
Ether	166	11.3	89.4
Moroni	0	0	0

Wordprints and the Book of Mormon

Key Scripture Helaman 3:13

Explanation Modern computers have given birth to a new science of analyzing word patterns in documents whose authorship is disputed. By wordprint analysis, it is now possible with a high degree of certainty to tell which suspected authors did not write a given work. Wordprinting is based on the somewhat surprising fact that every author that has been studied thus far subconsciously uses sixty-five identifiable patterns, involving words such as *and*, *the*, *of*, and *that*, at rates that, from a statistical standpoint, differ significantly from those of other authors. The higher the number of “rejections” or differences, the less likely it is that the tested samples were written by the same person.

This chart shows the results of tests that were run by John L. Hilton, comparing writings of Nephi and Alma with the words of Joseph Smith, Oliver Cowdery, and Solomon Spaulding. In every set comparing the Book of Mormon texts against these three writers, at least seven (and often many more) rejections were measured. These results yield strong statistical evidence that the wordprints of Joseph Smith, Oliver Cowdery, and Solomon Spaulding are not measurable in the Book of Mormon.

Source John L. Hilton, “Wordprints and the Book of Mormon,” in *Reexploring the Book of Mormon*, ed. John W. Welch (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1992), 221–26.

Wordprints and the Book of Mormon

	Tests	Number of Rejections															
		0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15
Nephi vs. Nephi	3			x		x	x										
Alma vs. Alma	3		x	x	x												
Smith vs. Smith	3	x		xx													
Cowdery vs. Cowdery	1		x														
Spaulding vs. Spaulding	1			x													
Nephi vs. Alma	9			x			xx	xx	x	x	x	x					
Smith vs. Nephi	6					x				xx		x	x	x			
Smith vs. Alma	6				xx	x	x		xx								
Cowdery vs. Nephi	6							x	x				xx		x	x	
Cowdery vs. Alma	6								xx xx	x	x						
Spaulding vs. Nephi	5											x	x	x		x	x
Spaulding vs. Alma	6							xx x		xx				x			
Clearly different author																	