

Climactic Forms in the Book of Mormon

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Moroni 8:25-26 "And the first fruits of repentance is baptism; and baptism cometh by faith unto the fulfilling the commandments; and the fulfilling the commandments bringeth remission of sins; and the remission of sins bringeth meekness, and lowliness of heart;

and because of meekness and lowliness of heart cometh the visitation of the Holy Ghost, which Comforter filleth with hope and perfect love, which love endureth by diligence unto prayer, until the end shall come, when all the saints shall dwell with God."

Studies thus far have identified more than twenty different types of parallelistic and poetic structures in the Book of Mormon. Examples include anabasis, catabasis, synonymous, antithetical, and synthetic parallelism; simple, extended, alternate forms, and chiasmus.¹ Another parallelistic type of exceptional quality in its beauty, style, and structural significance is a figure identified as *climax*.

Climactic composition occurs when, in successive clauses or sentences, the same word or words are found at the end of one expression and at the beginning of the next. It is a form of staircase parallelism, demonstrating to the reader a gradual ascent through the recurrence of several identical words. This duplication of words creates a continuation of thought from one sentence to the next, which adds power through repetition to the discourse, while at the same time connecting the lines into an inseparable body.

Biblical climactic forms have been identified by E. W. Bullinger.² An example of climax is recorded in the book of Joel:

Tell ye your children of it, and let your children tell their children, and their children another generation. That which the palmerworm hath left hath the locust eaten; and that which the locust hath left hath the cankerworm eaten; and that which the cankerworm hath left hath the caterpillar eaten. (Joel 1:3-4)

Other biblical examples of climax could be cited. Of special interest to students of the Mormon scriptures, however, are climactic forms attested within the Book of Mormon. Like its Old World counterpart, the New World scripture contains a varied and beautiful selection of climactic forms. Many of the prophets and inspired writers chose to employ this method of expression to expound the doctrines and principles of the gospel. Following is a climactic passage composed by Mormon:

And the first fruits of repentance is baptism; and baptism cometh by faith unto the fulfilling the commandments; and the fulfilling the commandments bringeth remission of sins; and the remission of sins bringeth meekness, and lowliness of heart; and because of meekness and lowliness of heart cometh the visitation of the Holy Ghost, which Comforter filleth with hope and perfect love, which love endureth by diligence unto prayer, until the end shall come, when all the saints shall dwell with God. (Moroni 8:25-26)

Accompanying climax is the idea of an ascension of expression, from a beginning point to a climactic situation. Through the employment of the figure we call climax, the first principles and ordinances of the gospel are

reiterated by Mormon in a powerful teaching manner. Mormon mentions each of the first principles—faith, repentance, baptism, and receiving the Holy Ghost. These, coupled with “meekness,” “lowliness of heart,” “love,” and “prayer,” ensure that the faithful are able, in the end, to “dwell with God.”

In more than a score of instances, the climactic pattern emerges from the pages of the Book of Mormon. Other examples of climax include 1 Nephi 15:13-20, 33-35; 2 Nephi 1:13; Mosiah 2:17-19; Alma 42:17-20; Helaman 5:6-8; Ether 3:15-16; Mormon 9:11-13; Moroni 9:11-13. Due to the care taken by Joseph Smith, who was true to his trust as translator of the Book of Mormon, each of these passages are found to be structurally intact. Each plays its role in detailing the doctrines and teachings of Jesus Christ.

Based on research by Donald W. Parry, August 1989.

Footnotes

1. See Donald W. Parry, “Poetic Parallelisms of the Book of Mormon,” in three parts (Provo: F.A.R.M.S., 1988); Angela Crowell, “Hebrew Poetry in the Book of Mormon,” F.A.R.M.S. Reprint, 1986; John W. Welch, “Chiasmus in the Book of Mormon,” F.A.R.M.S. Reprint, 1969.
2. E. W. Bullinger, *Figures of Speech Used in the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1987), 256-59.