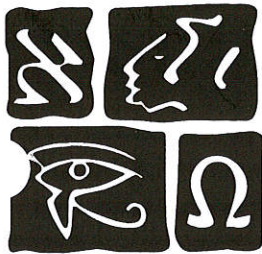




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Transcript

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John W. Welch

Chiasmus in the Book of Mormon

Summary

Research into literary forms in ancient scriptures led John Welch to the original discovery in 1967 of chiasmus in the Book of Mormon. In this lecture, he discusses chiasmus, a poetic form in which the first stanzas descend to a crucial midpoint and the rest of the passage parallels the first part in a mirror-like fashion. This artistic convention, although found in Greek, Latin, and English writings, was more highly developed in Semitic or Hebrew literary works. It was largely undetected until about the middle of the nineteenth century. Welch explains that for the trained eye the Book of Mormon abounds in chiasms ranging from simple to quite complex.

Transcript
Book of Mormon, Literature

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Chiasmus in the Book of Mormon

John W. Welch

Our lecture today deals with the topic of chiasmus in the Book of Mormon. I'll explain what that is as we go along. In 1967 while I was serving as a missionary in Regensburg, Germany, I was fortunate to be in the right place at the right time to make, what has been for me, a very interesting discovery. Over the years it has been a continuing part of my academic interests, and has led me into a number of fascinating contacts with people all around the world who are interested in biblical literature and the composition of ancient texts. I am happy to share it with you briefly today, and in the hour we have this will be a somewhat informal discussion of a number of examples that exist in the Book of Mormon. And I hope to point out further readings and places where you can go to learn more about this subject if you have further interests.

Before getting started let me remind you of a significant thing in approaching the Book of Mormon. I think it is important for us to read the Book of Mormon for a number of different purposes. The book is a very rich book, and it contains many different sorts of things, so we have to read it from different angles and for different purposes. Indeed we understand it at different points in our life, in different ways as we go along. There are different academic tools that we can use to understand different parts of the book. It is one of those books that, I think, fits the definition of a classic; namely, the kind of book that is going to wear us out long before we will ever wear it out!

Sometimes I read the book simply for its clear statement of essential doctrines, and for the gospel principles that are represented there in its text. Other times I enjoy reading it for the true-to-life spiritual experiences of the great prophets whose words are on its pages. Other times I enjoy it because of its great historical accounts; especially the otherwise unrecorded and unique events that are told to us in 3 Nephi about the visit of Jesus to the temple in Bountiful. But sometimes I read it just because it is a beautiful book, and that is what we are going to be talking about today: some of its literary aspects; seeing how it is a beautiful book, written in a way, in many cases, that is quite surprising to us as twentieth-century readers. It contains a great deal of beauty, artistry, and some real gems of great literature.

In this mode I am less interested in generating proofs of the Book of Mormon than searching for appreciation and for understanding. Although, Joseph Smith himself said that it would be by circumstantial evidence that the world would prove him to be a true prophet, as they did Moses and other prophets. It is in the details that much of our greatest appreciation for Joseph Smith, and for the Book of

Mormon, emerges. And so, in order to look at the literary composition of the Book of Mormon, we have to turn to some of the specific details and see what we find there.

Now, of course, not all people have viewed the Book of Mormon in this light, as great literature. Mark Twain, for example, you'll remember, once said, that if you take all the *and it came to passes* out, you simply have a small pamphlet. On another occasion he said that the Book of Mormon is chloroform in print. He missed a good one; he could have added, it even has a book called Ether! Others have seen the style of the Book of Mormon as stilted, awkward, random, boring, and repetitive. And, in some ways, they are right; especially judged by nineteenth-century literary standard. Now, the book is not great literature by those standards; but when it is judged against the standards of the source and the origins that it claims for itself, namely, those of the ancient world, we get a much different and a much better assessment of the book.

Of all the details in the Book of Mormon that enhance my appreciation of its beauty and artistic achievement, none is more impressive to me than the presence of chiasmus. It contains very extensive and precise examples of this literary form. Chiasmus (spelled CHIASMUS) is a literary art form; it is a variety of parallelism. A parallel couplet would be two lines where the order of the events, or the words, is in one sequence and then is repeated in the same order the second time. This would be a form of direct parallelism. A chiasm—and by the way, the word *chiasm* comes from the Greek letter *chi*, which many of you know looks like an X—represents a kind of criss-crossing, and it is a kind of form where you go through a list, or a series, in one order and then turn around and go through the same list or something very comparable to it in parallel structure, but in the opposite order. English poets may have chosen to write in a sonnet form with its specific line structure; of course we find no sonnets in the Book of Mormon. But many Israelite prophets and poets chose to write in parallelism and in chiasm.

Let me give you a couple of examples of a direct parallelism. If you turn to Proverbs 15:1 (and the Proverbs are full of good examples of direct parallelism) it says, "A soft answer turneth away wrath: but grievous words stir up anger." You can see how in those three elements, those two lines are parallel to each other; each element having a corresponding part in the parallel line that matches it precisely.

A good example of an Old Testament chiasm is a relatively substantial 5-part chiasmic structure in Psalms 3:7-8.

Save Me
 God
 Smitten
 Enemies
 Cheek
 Teeth
 Wicked
 Broken
 Yhwh
 Salvation

There the poet pleads, and notice these five elements as we go, "Save me, O my God: for thou hast smitten all mine enemies upon the cheek bone, [we have those five elements, and then he reverses himself]; the teeth of the wicked thou has broken, to Jehovah, the salvation." You can see this graphically because *save me* and *salvation*, the first and the last, correspond with each other. *God*, in the first part corresponds with the name *Jehovah* in the second half. In the first part it is the enemies that are smitten, and notice the intensification that occurs in the second part, where it is the enemies who are broken, the wicked who are broken. At the center we have the cheek bone which is being smitten in the first half, which is a grievous insult, but it is nothing quite so injurious as the teeth being broken, as you have in the second part. You can see in a structure like this how each element in the first portion has its corresponding element in the second; and how they occur in exactly the opposite order. Now, I suppose judged by twentieth-century standards these couple of lines would not be acclaimed as the greatest poetry ever written. But, to the ancient mind these lines are composed with beautiful form and in a pleasing, formal manner.

Let me point out just a couple other features of this passage from the Psalm. First of all its length—here we have five elements that are repeated in exactly the opposite order. We find a number of shorter chiasms; such as, "the first shall be last and the last shall be first." They are less significant than the longer ones, because the more extensive and complex the structure is, the more likely it is that the text writer intentionally composed the passage the way that he did. Notice how tight it is. There is no word that is really out of order. There are no random omissions that we have had to make in order to see this form emerging from the text. Virtually every word in these sentences figures into the passage in an important way; and each element unambiguously mirrors the other. We don't have to sit and explain very much to see that this is exactly what is going on. In other words, it is very objectively present in this particular text.

Judged by criteria that biblical scholars and others have developed, we can certainly conclude that the passage in Psalm 3 is a chiastic passage. We will talk a little bit more about some of the less significant factors later, but this chiasm is certainly a very good one. You have to have criteria in order to judge whether a

passage is chiasmic or not; otherwise we could talk about chiasm in the telephone book! You could go along looking for a Tom, Dick, and Harry, and keep finding them, and pretty soon you will find a Harry, Dick, and Tom, but, we wouldn't call that a chiasm. There is more to it than simply inverted, random repetition. I also like in this particular psalm the great feeling of unity that the form gives, and a sense of completeness that you have as you emerge out of this text at the end of it. You have intensification—a lot of very skillful things that work here in the hand of a good poet. David was not only a great king and prophet, but also a very skillful writer, and we see that in the way in which we can dissect this poem and see that it truly is a great work of literary art.

Let me give you another example that I think is even more astonishing; it is one of the better examples in the Old Testament. This is Leviticus 24:13-23. Here we have the example, or the law given, of what should be done when someone has committed blasphemy. It is the story about the son of an Egyptian man and a Hebrew mother, who got into a brawl, and in the middle of the fight spoke the ineffable and unspeakable name of Jehovah. There wasn't a law at the time telling the Israelites what they should do under these circumstances, and so they went to Moses asking for a ruling in the case. This text gives us the holding, which as you will see was that the man should be taken out and stoned! This was a capital offense. The text reads (I won't go through it all):

- A And the Lord spake unto Moses
- B Bring forth him that hath *cursed without the camp*
Let all that heard him . . . *stone him*
- C Thou shalt speak unto the children of Israel
- D Whosoever curseth his God shall bear his sin, . . . the *stranger*
as well as he that is *born in the land*
- E And he that killeth *any man* shall surely be put death
- F And he that killeth *a beast* shall make it good, beast for
beast
- G and if a man cause a *blemish* in his neighbour so shall
it be done to him
Breach for breach
- H Eye for eye
Tooth for tooth
- G' As he hath caused a *blemish* in a man, so shall it be
done to him
- F' And he that killeth *a beast*, he shall restore it
- E' And he that killeth *a man*, he shall be put to death
- D' Ye shall have one manner of law for the *stranger* as well as *one*
of your own country
- C' And Moses spake to the children of Israel
- B' Bring forth him that had *cursed out of the camp* and *stone him* with
stones
- A' They did as the Lord commanded Moses.

Now we have a list there: killing a man, killing a beast, and causing a blemish. And then we have at the very center of this text, breach for breach, eye for eye, tooth for tooth; and then it begins to revert. He that causes the blemish in a man, so shall it be done unto him; and he that killeth a beast shall restore it; and he that killeth a man, he shall be put to death. For ye shall have one law for the stranger as well as one of your own country. Notice that that was in the prologue, the prelude material to this text. "And Moses spake to the children of Israel, . . . bring forth him that had cursed out of the camp, and stone him with stones. And . . . they did as the Lord commanded Moses."

That is a complete text. Even though it is a legal text where we wouldn't expect to find great literary works of art emerging, we have here a very clear example of this repetition. And I think it serves an important purpose, in this particular case, because what Moses is teaching the people is a principle of God's justice: that justice should be balanced, that it should match the nature of the crime and should be applied even-handedly. The chiasmic form gives that kind of balance; it shows the nature of the reciprocal, what we call 'talionic' justice, which is a part of the Israelite jurisprudence. That is a very interesting and perfect example of this form being used to convey even jurisprudential material. And although perfectly obvious once it is pointed out to a person, this pattern and mode of composition in Leviticus has not been frequently noticed. When I presented a paper to the Jewish Law Association in Boston a few years ago (this is a very eminent body of Jewish legal scholars), they were all quite intrigued and somewhat surprised to have this pointed out to them for the first time.

The use of chiasmus is not exclusively Hebrew. It appears in other ancient literatures. My Master's thesis on this subject dealt with the use of chiasm in the Euclidian text, by classical Greek and Latin authors. It can also appear in some modern texts, but it does not appear nearly as extensively nor as purposely as we find it in the ancient world. Let me give you an example from the Odyssey. When Odysseus comes to meet his mother, Anticlea, in the underworld, she asks him a series of seven questions. Interestingly, Odysseus turns around and answers those seven questions in exactly the opposite order. Once again we see here a pattern, or a structuring device, that gave order and system to the way in which words and ideas were presented. It was something that the ancient mind had grown accustomed to. In fact, one classical author commented that chiasmus was as natural to these writers as mothers' milk. I don't know about that, but it was certainly something that came familiarly to them. It was something that I think they were trained in and they did with a great degree of precision and purposefulness. That little passage from the Odyssey, by the way, is explained in the book *Rediscovering the Book of Mormon*, and a few other places like that, if you are interested in reading more about that.

Now let me tell you a little bit about my discovery of chiasmus in the Book of Mormon. As I mentioned it was in Regensburg, Germany, in 1967, when I was

serving there as a missionary that I first learned about chiasmus in biblical studies and then came to find it also in the Book of Mormon. Regensburg is a beautiful town, a well preserved medieval city, situated on the northernmost bend of the Danube river in Bavaria. In this town, which has been a center of German Catholicism for many years, there were a number of Catholic bookstores and theological seminaries. My companion and I decided that it would be worthwhile to spend a little time getting to know some of the people who taught and worked in the theological seminaries and in these bookstores; so we took our free day (we had what we called in those days a diversion day) to attend some lectures at one of the theological seminaries that was primarily geared for training young Catholic priests.

One of the first lectures that we heard dealt with the New Testament and literary forms there. The scholar was very excited about just having read a book by a man named Paul Gaechter. He is a Jesuit from Innsbroo, and the book was called *The Literary Art in the Gospel of Matthew*. The lecture dealt with the quest that New Testament scholars have been involved in for a number of years, trying to sort out whether Mark or Matthew is closer to the original voice of Jesus. Now the problem here is that the four gospels, Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, were all written in Greek, but Jesus and Peter and all of the original disciples were Hebrew—they were Jewish. And so their thought patterns and their culture were fundamentally Jewish. In trying to go back and rediscover the Jewish elements and the more original, should we say, primitive portions of Christianity from the earliest days, scholars are interested in detecting Jewish elements wherever they can. And chiasmus proved to be one of those elements that helped to find Jewish thought in the gospel of Matthew.

This particular scholar was convinced, although this is certainly debatable, that Matthew uses chiasmus more than Mark, and therefore, he thought this was some support for the primacy of the writing of the gospel of Matthew. Like I say, that is debatable, but the effect on me was very clear. This was an exciting new bit of information that I had never heard anything about, and I went over to the bookstore quickly and bought this book and began reading a few items and talking to some of the professors to get a few other articles and references that I might check on. A couple of weeks later, as I had been pondering about this Hebrew element in the New Testament, I suppose it is only fair that about four o'clock in the morning I woke up. I don't usually wake up early in the morning, but I woke up with the words distinctly impressed upon me, that if this was something that was evidence of Hebrew style in the Bible there had to be evidence of Hebrew style in the Book of Mormon.

Well, the surprising thing to me about that morning was that I got out of bed. I stumbled over to the desk, it was still dark, went over to where my companion and I had been reading in the Book of Mormon the night before. Every night we read to each other in German out of the Book of Mormon. One of the main reasons we did that was to reinforce each other's bad German accents, but we had been reading the night before in King Benjamin's speech. I had no idea where to start looking for

something like this, so I said, "Well I guess where the book is open is just about as good a place as any." I read through the first part of King Benjamin's speech and didn't see anything. I read through chapter 3, chapter 4. I was about ready to go back to bed when I turned the page on chapter 5, and in fact, I have here the book that I was reading that morning. I think that if it hadn't been for a fluke in the typesetting I would never have spotted this.

As you can see right here in Mosiah 5:11 there are two German words—*über tretung*, which happened to get typeset right on top of each other, and they happen to be the central two words in the chiasm of Mosiah 5:10-12. If you will take out your text and just read through this there are six elements; let's count them as we go along, and look how Benjamin then retraces his steps in order to complete his thought through the use of chiasmus.

Verse 10 begins: "And now it shall come to pass, that whosoever shall not take upon him the *name* of Christ [that's #1—the name] must be *called* [that's #2] by some other name; therefore, he findeth himself on the *left hand of God* [that's #3—the left hand].

"And I would that ye should *remember* [that's element #4—remember] also, that this is the name that I said I should give unto you that never should be *blotted out* [that's #5] except it be through *transgression* [that's #6]."

He even gives us a marker that we are now at the center; he says, "Therefore," which is the turning point, "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* [that's element #3] but that ye hear and know the voice by which ye shall be *called* [which was element #2] and also, the *name* by which he shall call you."

Name
 Called
 Left hand
 Remember
 Blotted out
 Transgression
 Transgress
 Blotted out
 Remember
 Left hand
 Called
 Name

Well, this is the first example of chiasmus that was found in the Book of Mormon. Notice several things about it: its length is admirable; six elements is longer than average. It certainly has a very precise repetition. And its objective, which is right there in the text as you look at it, is unmistakable. Anybody being asked to see if there is a repetition or an inverted order in there will come up with the same one that we have just gone through. There are six perfectly matched elements throughout.

I think that there is fairly strong evidence here that Benjamin is doing this consciously. The phrase *left hand of God*: the ones who do not take upon them the name of Christ will be found on the *left hand of God*. That phrase appears only twice in all of the Book of Mormon; once in Mosiah 5:10 and the second time in Mosiah 5:12. And so I think the repetition there is quite intentional.

The intensification that occurs is interesting to note as well. Notice the first time that he just says I would that ye should remember that this is the name that I said I would give you; but in the second half he wants you to remember something a little more important, and that is that you should always retain this name written in your heart. It becomes a little bit more of a personal and intense thing.

Well, this is a fine utilization and really gives double emphasis, kind of a double warning, almost with legal effect. You remember the two-witness rule of the Israelite law, that you shall always hear things twice by two witnesses in order for it to be legally binding. I wonder if that is what Benjamin is doing as he repeats twice here, almost precisely, the legal consequences of those who fail to make the covenant and keep the covenant that he is asking his people and inviting his people to enter into. In fact, there is a passage in Job, Job 33:14, that says, "Yea the Lord speaketh once, yea, twice, and man still perceiveth it not." So, I think that there is intentionality in the use of this form; especially in very solemn and important circumstances.

Well, you can imagine how excited we were as missionaries to find something like this. We even went out and used it as a door approach that day. I've often wondered what those hausfraus and workmen thought as we told them that there was chiasmus in the Book of Mormon. They didn't know what the Book of Mormon was, let alone chiasmus. So I am sure they thought we were crazier than ever, but it was an exciting thing for us; one of the most thrilling parts of my life.

Let me show you another one from Benjamin's speech because it is such a masterful address. This is Mosiah 3:18-19. In fact, if you put into the computer the words in King Benjamin's entire speech and count the number of words, just using his words, and not the editorial introductions and so on, and then divide by two and figure out where the exact center of the speech is, it is right here. This particular turning point is a focal point of all of King Benjamin's masterful speech in Mosiah 2-5.

Notice the elements here. He begins by saying:

"Men drink damnation unto their own souls except [and here is the important proviso] they *humble* themselves and become as little *children* [*humble* is #1 and *children* #2], 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 [that is the turning point, *has been* and *will be*], unless he yieldeth to the enticing of the Holy Spirit [that is the contrast to the enemy of God], putteth off the natural man [*natural man* had been mentioned earlier], becometh a Saint through the atonement of Christ, the Lord [that was mentioned at the end of verse 18] and becometh as a *child*, submissive, meek, *humble*," etc. Notice how fluently Benjamin goes through that, so that he has worked his way in and out of the chiasm, but to the point at which it is not drawing attention to itself; it's not intrusive into the thought. This is truly a mark of a great master; someone who, as an artist, can use a form without the form drawing undo attention to itself, but still having the form work its magic as the reader understands at a second level the thrust of the great point that is being made, especially at the turning point.

Humble
Children
Atoning-Christ
Natural Man
God
Has Been
Will Be
Holy Spirit
Natural Man
Atonement-Christ
Child
Humble

Now look at the content of this passage. What is this all about? It is about the necessity of taking advantage of the atoning blood of Christ, the Lord Omnipotent. That is the central point, the turning point of all the gospel. Benjamin makes it the turning point, the mid-point, of his entire speech. And the entire speech revolves around his testimony of the atoning mission of Jesus Christ. What more fitting center point could possibly be given to a speech than this one. The way that it is structured pinpoints it through the chiastic middle there.

Look at another one. Helaman 6:7-13.

- A "And behold, there was *peace* in all the land" (6:7)
- B [Freedom of travel and trade in *both lands* is discussed (6:7-8).]
- C "And it came to pass that they became exceedingly *rich*, both the Lamanites and the Nephites;
- D 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*" (6:9)
- E "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*" (6:10).
- D "And behold, there was *all manner* of *gold* in *both* these *lands*, and of *silver*, and of *precious ore* of *every kind*;
- C and there were also curious workmen, who did work all kinds of ore and did refine it; and thus they did become *rich*" (6:11).
- B [Economic prosperity in *both lands* is discussed (6:12-13).]
- A "And thus the sixty and fourth year did pass away in *peace*" (6:13).

I like this one and you can read about this in more detail in the book called *Reexploring the Book of Mormon*. This is chapter 66 in this particular book. I like this one because it embraces the entire annual record for the 64th year of the reign of Judges. The whole thing is written, I think, as a gem. As a literary gem, a little chiasm. The great event of that year was that there was peace and prosperity for the first time, for over several generations, in both the land to the north and the land to the south. People were able to travel, for the first time, between these lands freely. This was an incredibly important event in the lives of these people, and the monument that they left to that great year of peace was a chiastic structure that balanced the land to the north and the land to the south to show that a degree of equality and interchange between the two had truly been created and succeeded there.

I won't go through the entire thing, but it begins in verse 7 of Helaman 6: "And behold, there was peace in all the land." It then mentions that both the Lamanites and the Nephites had become rich. They had plenty of gold, and silver, and all manner of metals, both in the land to the south and the land to the north. And then, in verse 10, at the end of verse 9, you have this interesting center point:

"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 to the land north, and Lehi into the land south." (You follow how that goes: south/Lehi, north/Mulek and then Mulek/north and then Lehi/south, right through the opposite order.)

And right at the turning point is the identification of Mulek as the son of Zedekiah, and that *iah* ending on the end of Zedekiah's name is a "theophoric suffix" which, I think, would have paralleled the next word for the Lord which would have been *Jehovah*. So you have right at the turning point a double mention of the name of Jehovah. Divinity often appears at the center of these very important chiasm. The message is that it was only through the Lord that this great peace was brought into the lives of these people in the 64th year of the reign of the Judges. Now that little chiasm is hardly even—well, parts of it are perfectly obvious in English, but that last little point wouldn't have been obvious except for someone reading the text in Hebrew. Following that, you then retrace your steps to the end of the annual entry, "For behold there was all manner of gold in both of these lands and all manner of precious ore," and so on, and they did become rich; prosperity in both lands is discussed, and thus the 64th year did pass away in peace. So you end exactly where the annual record began. So that's, I think, a choice little piece there.

How about 1 Nephi. Sometimes, these structuring devices can be used to embrace and give order to a larger composition. The story that we have in 1 Nephi was not written by Nephi until later in his life. This is not his first time through the story; and I think as he sat down to give us the final version he had had time to reflect on some of the very interesting nuances of his own experiences with his brothers, and so on. He wanted to couch the great spiritual experiences that he had had in beautiful, artistic terms. He does so with great balance and with artistry throughout 1 Nephi.

There are different ways in which this text can be analyzed. The larger the texts get the more subject they are to possible interpretations and various ways of doing the text. These texts that we have been looking at so far are very tight and very concise. There is not much room for debate about the structure there, but one way in which to look at the passage, the whole text of 1 Nephi, is to simply think of the number of things that occur twice in the book and then build the structure around some of those.

How many times does Nephi get tied up? He gets tied up twice. Once in chapter 7 out in the desert, and again in chapter 18 in the ship. How many brass things are mentioned? Well, there are two. First of all, there are the brass plates in the first half of the book, which are a great spiritual guide from the Lord; and in the second half, you have the brass ball, which is also another form of spiritual director from the Lord. How about steel objects? Well, we have two of those as well. In the first half we have the steel sword; the sword of Laban. And in the second half a steel bow that breaks. How many times does Nephi succeed at something that his brothers say couldn't happen? And how many times do his brothers try to thwart him

physically at these two great missions? Well, we have the attempt to get the plates; where the brothers object to that and Nephi succeeds in doing that, where his brothers said it couldn't be done. And then in chapter 17, at the end, he builds the ship; also something they said simply couldn't happen.

And notice there, chapter 3, verse 7, the very famous verse, "I will go and do the things which the Lord hath commanded," has a parallel that we have almost always overlooked. Chapter 17:3, the second story of Nephi succeeding where his brothers failed, also begins with a text that is almost word for word the same.

So as you look at this you do have framing elements that center around the very middle of the book. Now what's at the middle? Lehi's vision of the Tree of Life, Nephi's experience of that same vision, and then finally, Nephi's interpretation of Lehi's dream. Well, little things like that.

Ishmael, for example, is mentioned twice in the book. In chapter 7, when they go up to get the daughters of Ishmael, and in chapter 16 when they marry the daughters of Ishmael and Ishmael died. Now, I don't believe for a minute that Laban and Lemuel waited all that time to marry the daughters of Ishmael. I think once they got them they married them, and they didn't wait until chapter 16 came along to have that happen. In other words, what we have in the Book of Mormon in 1 Nephi, is not chronologically based so much as artistically and literarily. And chiasmus may be a factor in the way in which that is being presented.

Well, one other quick one to mention is a recently discovered passage from Alma 33:4-11. This is a very archaic poem by the Israelite prophet, Zenos, which is quoted by Alma in Alma 33. Notice how this poem begins with the poet out in the desert, in the remote wilderness because of his enemies. He comes home, through the fields, to his house, and into his most intimate closet. And in all of those places the prophet affirms that the Lord had heard his prayer. The poet then turns around, and from his closet speaks of children, moving outwardly toward the congregations, and finally the poem ends, once again, with the Lord still hearing him even though he is an outcast, presumably in the wilderness, outcast because of his enemies.

So you have, I think, a very beautiful illustration of the way in which prayer is heard. If you are out in the wilderness, in the most remote place, God will hear you there, or in the most intimate closet; from one extreme to the other, the Prophet is telling us the Lord will hear and answer. And notice how that two-way composition also, I think, adds to the two-way nature of prayer. It is a communication between the Lord and the prophet, and any time you have this bi-part structure in a text, you have dialogue going on right within the text. I think that may be an element of it also.

Let's turn next to Alma 41. Here we have in verses 13-15 one of the most creative uses of chiasmus anywhere in world literature. Alma is speaking on this occasion to his son Corianton. You remember he needed to teach Corianton

something about the principles of justice. After all, Corianton had transgressed some important commandments and misunderstood the nature of the restoration of God. Somehow, Corianton had been taught and had believed that God would restore all people to a state of paradise and happiness. And Alma had to say, no, the meaning of the word *restoration* does not mean to restore you all to happiness; but, bring back good for good, evil for evil, and so on.

Restoration		
Good	Good	
Right	Right	
Just	Just	
	Mercy	Mercy
	Mercy	Mercy
	Just	Just
	Right	Right
Good	Good	
Restoration		

What is going on here is very similar to what we saw in Leviticus 24. This is, once again, teaching something about the reciprocal nature of the concept of chiasm, to impress upon the minds of readers that point. Alma will do the same, using chiasm here to make a very powerful point to his son Corianton. In fact, he says—and look at how this works out—the meaning of the word *restoration* is to bring back good for good, justice for justice, and mercy for mercy. Therefore, he says, see that thou art merciful, “deal justly, judge righteously, and do good continually; and, if ye do these things ye shall have your reward,” yea, ye shall have mercy restored unto you, ye shall have justice rewarded unto you, ye shall have a righteous judgment rewarded unto you, and, ye shall have good rewarded unto you. Therefore, “the meaning of the word restoration more fully condemneth the sinner, and justifieth him not at all.”

Look what Alma has done here. First of all, he gives us a list of pairs: good for good, righteous for righteous, just for just, and mercy for mercy. Then he turns around and gives us a pair of lists in the opposite order. And, in the process, he says, if you want to have good, you must be good, therefore, be good and you will get good. So, he reverses the substantives and the predicative in the first list of pairs, and (this is very confusing, I know) in the second half in the pair of lists he gives you first the “be good” predicative and then you will “get good,” the substantive. These four elements all appear in the opposite order.

This is very, very creative. I have never seen anything like this in ancient or modern uses of a form. I think this is consistent with what is going on in Nephite civilization at this time. Alma lived at a great time of renaissance in Nephite culture. This is a time of individual rights; people are given legal protections that they had never been given before; there are new weights and measures and military innovations. A lot of political change is going on at this time. An emphasis on

reading and writing had been renewed under King Benjamin who was emphatic about his sons needing to learn the old texts and languages. Alma is a real renaissance man, and he is able to take these old classical forms and use them in an extremely creative way to teach the point that he wants his son to understand: that the meaning of the word *restoration* is you better be good if you want to get good rewards from the Lord.

But the greatest chiastic composition that I know of anywhere, that we want to spend our last few minutes on here, is Alma 36, the entire chapter. Once again, this is a text written by Alma and it is consistent with his overall style to see him using this form so extensively, as he does here in Alma 36. Here chiasmus is used not only as a framing and organizing device, but as a powerful means to focus the reader's attention precisely on what constituted the turning point, of not only Alma's chapter, but of his entire life.

So let's take a look at this in some detail. Let me just read this through. You follow along in the text beginning with verse 1 of Alma 36. (Alma, by the way, here is speaking to his firstborn son, Helaman, and the firstborn son was always entitled to a double blessing. Perhaps the repetition here is Alma's own very creative way of giving his son the double birthright blessing that would belong to Helaman.) He says:

"My son, give ear to *my words*; [you can just underline some of these as we put them in for emphasis] . . . for in as much as ye shall keep the commandments of God ye shall prosper in the land.

"I would that ye should do *as I have done* [that *as I* will show up later as well], in remembering the captivity of our fathers," for God did deliver them and surely none could deliver them, he says, save it be the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

[Therefore, he admonishes] "Whosoever shall put their *trust* in God [underline the word *trust*] shall be *supported*" [notice *supported*] in their trials, troubles, and afflictions.

In the next couple of verses Alma then explains that he knows this, not of the carnal mind, but of the spiritual mind; for he has been born of God. Take special note of that word *born*. He then explains how it was that he was converted. How he had gone about persecuting the *Church* (underline *Church* or something of that nature), but then an angel had appeared to him and after making certain statements to him, Alma reports how his limbs had become paralyzed. For three days Alma lost the use of his limbs, and while in this state his soul was tormented. First of all, he feared coming into the presence of God to be judged for the wrongs that he had done. My mind suffered the pains of the damned soul, he says, and says that he was "harrowed up" (underline the words *harrowed up*) to the greatest degree.

While Alma was suffering in that very extreme state he says his mind caught

upon the fact that his father had spoken about one *Jesus* Christ, a son of God, who would come to atone for the sins of the world. And that was the turning point of his life. And at that point he cried out, "O *Jesus*, thou Son of God, have mercy on me, who am in the gall of bitterness." Notice that "Jesus, a Son of God" occurs twice right at the center turning point of that chapter.

Well, as he did that, he says he could feel no more pain. I was *harrowed up* by my sins no more. He says, "Oh, what joy, and what marvelous light." He even makes an explicit contrast between his joy then and his prior pain. "Yea, my joy was as exceeding as had been my pain." This is one of the rare occasions where I think the writer almost tells us, "By the way notice that I am doing this. I am repeating myself purposely," drawing an explicit comparison between the prior pain and the present joy.

What is the next thing he wishes for? He now wants to come into the presence of God. Before, he had feared standing before God, but, now quoting Lehi from 1 Nephi 1:8 (and by the way there is an extensive quote there verbatim of Lehi's words), he now wishes to come into the presence of God and to join the choirs in singing and praising the Lord. He then backs out, repeating himself throughout, as the use of his limbs returns. He explains how he spent the rest of his life preaching to people, building up the *Church*; that they might become *born* of God as he had been born, and, therefore, that they might know, as he knows, that whosoever shall put their trust in God shall be *supported* in all of their trials and troubles.

Now remember in the first half he said trials, troubles, and afflictions. Here in the second half he says, "supported in all of their trials, troubles, yea, in all of their afflictions." He is not going to miss even that word. And he puts the *yea* in for emphasis, as if again to call attention to the fact that this is an explicit repetition.

Therefore, he says, I will put my *trust* in God (that word was up there above as well) and he shall deliver me just as he delivered our fathers. For they were in captivity in Egypt, and in Jerusalem, and in the land of Nephi. Therefore, he says, my son do *as I have done*; for, inasmuch as ye keep the commandments ye shall prosper in the land, and this is according to God's word. He ends with the *word*, which is where he began.

Words
 Keep commands, Prosper
 As I
 Captivity
 Deliver
 Trust
 Support, trials, troubles, afflictions
 Know
 Born
 Church
 Limbs
 Presence
 Pain
 Harrowed up
 Jesus-son
 Jesus-son
 Harrowed up
 Joy
 Presence
 Limbs
 People
 Born
 Know
 Support, trials, troubles, afflictions
 Trust
 Deliver
 Captivity
 As I
 Keep commands, Prosper
 Word

Well, this chapter is simply amazing. It truly is one of the great masterpieces of literature, perfectly consistent with the ancient form. I think it is one of the ultimate developments of the use of this style of writing. I cannot imagine an author taking this to a more perfect implementation than what Alma has done here. It is simply an exquisite implementation of all of the chiastic principles. As a framing mechanism, it tells you exactly what embraced the conversion of Alma. With precision and length and turning point, it is simply a marvelous way in which Alma has been able to capture the turning point when he called upon Jesus Christ, the Son of God. That was the turning point of his life. He wanted us all, and his son especially, to know that that was the turning point of his entire life and he makes it, then, the turning point of this chapter and his blessing.

Well as you might imagine with things as interesting as this, there are quite a

number of questions people might have about chiasmus and what else has happened in years since then. Do any of you have any questions that you would like to ask?

Question: How often does chiasmus occur in the Book of Mormon and do all authors use it equally?

Answer: That is a good question. Chiasmus does not occur everywhere. We shouldn't go looking for it in every verse or chapter. It occurs very infrequently in some authors. Some authors, like Mormon, seem to have very little use for it. Perhaps it was because he was a military man, who was out there in the field at a fairly young age. Other authors, like Alma as I have indicated, were really these renaissance people in a lot of ways and seemed to have a great deal of interest in using it. So, as you are looking for these things in your own reading, first of all don't overdo it, and secondly, once you begin finding it in a certain author then you may have justification for looking more closely in some of his other writings. But, it certainly isn't everywhere.

Question: How can we be sure that these patterns were in the original text, because the Book of Mormon is simply a translation?

Answer: Well, that is right. What we have in the Book of Mormon is just an English translation, but interestingly, as you think of all the different poetical devices that writers might use—like rhyme, meter, alliteration, and other things—this basic organizational structure is the most likely to survive a fairly literal translation at least one that is constructed concept for concept. We can't be sure. I would love to see what the original underlying texts were. We always have to caveat our studies in the Book of Mormon by not knowing for sure what the underlying text was, but every indication that we have is that at least the passages that I have given you today and others like them were probably very readily discernable in the underlying text.

I think something like the use of the Zedekiah and the name of the Lord at the center of the passage in Helaman shows that we are talking about something that was in the original text. That only works in Hebrew. So there again. Any other?

Question: Were ancient people conscious of this pattern of writing? Did they write this way on purpose?

Answer: Well, intentionality is always a difficult thing for us to judge. In a few cases, like I have mentioned with Alma, it is almost like he is leaving us a little marginal note saying, "Notice that this comparison is intentional." But we always have to be subjective, and we have to evaluate the degree of plausibility that an author was doing this intentionally. It is possible for some of these things, especially the short ones, to simply occur inadvertently, or perhaps it is like a musician, who

knows how to ad-lib, a musician who can just sit down and play something by ear. Are they doing that intentionally? Well, sometimes they do some wonderful things that they haven't sat down and planned out in advance, but because of their great training and familiarity with the instrument and the music, things just come out that way.

Now, it is interesting that some of the commentators in Alexandria, Egypt, in the second century BC, called the "scholiasts," gave us commentaries on some of the early classical writers and they had a term for this. They called it *hysteron proteron*, which means "the last first." And when they noted it in Homer or in Sophocles, or other writers, they would indicate that this was something that was being done.

So, there was certainly a fair degree of awareness of this in the ancient world. It helps people so much in memorizing a text; if you know this organization it is so easy to sit down and memorize these passages, even long passages. I think that we ought to give the ancients credit for intentionally knowing what they were doing, and using it for the many great uses that it was worth.

Question: How much chiasm was known in Joseph Smith's day?

Answer: In Joseph Smith's day, not very much. In the 1820s there were a couple ecclesiastical writers in the Church of England—a man named John Jeb and another one named Thomas Voys—who began writing books based on some Latin texts that had been produced in the 18th century dealing with chiasm in the Bible. Now, their texts, for the most part, were interested in all varieties of parallelism. The John Jeb book called *Sacred Literature*, for example, only has a few pages on chiasm. We can see the emergence of scholarly awareness of this.

Those books are very rare. I have looked around and have not found copies of them in libraries in this country. I was able to find the Thomas Voys material in the Bodleian library at Oxford; but I really seriously doubt that those books had made their way to the United States by 1830. And, if they had, I even more seriously doubt that Joseph Smith had read them. And if he had, he would still be left with the very formidable task of taking a form that was quite undeveloped, and at that stage really quite debatable. This wasn't something that people just latched on to immediately.

It took several years and in fact, it wasn't until the 1950s and 1960s in our own lifetimes that biblical scholars have really understood the extent and proper use of chiasmus. So, I think that there was really very, very little chance—what should we say, a statistically insignificant chance—that Joseph Smith had any awareness of this through regular scholarly channels. When he translated the Book of Mormon he was down in Harmony, Pennsylvania. He was, as far as I know, quite a number of miles from any library. People have looked at the Palmyra library as a possible source of Joseph Smith's ideas, but he is 110 miles away from Palmyra at the time he is doing this work. So, I think that there wasn't very much known about this at that time.

Question: Do you think there is a connection between Nephi's statement, "The Lord's work is one eternal round," and the chiasmus? It seems to be the same sort of structure where you start, you know?

Answer: I think there may be a distant connection there. The ancient world's view saw more things in cyclical patterns than we do. Cycles of history repeating itself, patterns where life's annual cycles went through an eternal round. It may well be that chiasm is somehow an indirect, perhaps subconscious reflection of that. No indication that that particular phrase was ever used in a literary mode.

Question: Recognizing that Joseph Smith would not likely have had access to scholarly studies on chiasm, he was a student of the Bible. Might he not have noticed it and been impressed with it from there? And if so, might one not expect him to have made use of it in his own writings and sermons?

Answer: That is an interesting observation. Joseph Smith, of course, did know the Bible, the King James Bible, very, very well. It is interesting to me that some of these chiasm, some of them that I have given you like the 3rd Psalm, are obscured by the English translators, because this inverted word order is not a natural word order for good English.

And so he would have had to have had an incredible sense of literary astuteness in order to have picked this up by some kind of subconscious osmosis or assimilation. There are no patterns anywhere nearly as precise or purposeful as Alma 36 or Alma 41, or Mosiah 5, anywhere else in Joseph Smith's writings or revelations. Some people have suggested that there might be some of these in the Doctrine and Covenants, but in my judgment, if you apply objective criteria, I believe that the degree of chiasm, if it exists at all in those other texts, is minimal to insignificant.

There again, further study may be necessary, but I don't see anything like Alma 36 anywhere else in Joseph Smith's writing. And that one is really an important test case. That sort of thing just doesn't happen accidentally.

This book has been a great joy and delight in my life. The Book of Mormon is a wonderful text; it is a precious treasure. I pray that it will be a fully realized blessing in each of your lives, in the name of Jesus Christ, Amen.

