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Chiastic Structuring of Large Texts: 2 Nephi as a Case Study

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Abstract: Noel B. Reynolds, "Chiastic Structuring of Large Texts: Second Nephi as a Case Study," reviews the work of scholars regarding rhetorical criticism in biblical studies, especially with regard to rhetorical structures that give prominence to parallelism and repetition. Many structures consist of large chiasms that contain subordinate units (smaller, inner chiasms or extended parallelisms of some form), and these subordinate units, in turn, "may contain their own subordinate units." According to some scholars, these formations may be composed of eight levels, especially when one considers corresponding philological or grammatical elements. After reviewing biblical rhetorical criticism, Reynolds examines, as a case study, the book of 2 Nephi in the Book of Mormon. He demonstrates that this book features one macro-chiasm with thirteen subunits labeled, A-B-C-D-E-F-G-F′-E′-D′-C′-B′-A′. Each of the subunits, in turn, consists of smaller subordinate units, some of them demarcated with repetitive units, such as inclusio. Reynolds then focuses on the pivotal G element, constituting 2 Nephi 11:2–8, which is Nephi's witness of Jesus Christ.

Chiastic Structuring of Large Texts

2 Nephi as a Case Study

Noel B. Reynolds

In 1967, John W. Welch was serving as a missionary in Germany and noticed a scholar's explanation of chiasmus as a rhetorical structure that recurs in various parts of the Bible. While the penchant for parallelism that characterized Old Testament writers was widely recognized by that time, the discovery that reverse parallelism was also commonly used by New Testament writers was relatively recent and not yet widely accepted. Welch was no ordinary missionary in terms of his scholarly and scriptural preparation, and he immediately saw the possibility that Nephi and his successors may have been familiar with that rhetorical pattern and may have used it in the writings that we know as the Book of Mormon. He went to work immediately and found numerous clear and impressive examples of chiastic structures in the Book of Mormon text. These discoveries fueled Welch's 1970 BYU master's thesis and a long list of subsequent publications that presented additional discoveries and further refinements in his understanding of the phenomenon, addressed both to Book of Mormon readers and to Bible scholars generally.[1]

Rhetorical Criticism in Biblical Studies

About three centuries ago, a few European scholars—sometimes without any awareness of the parallel efforts of others—began to notice rhetorical structures featuring repetition and parallelism in the books of the Hebrew Bible. By the nineteenth century, a few had also begun to notice reverse parallelisms (chiasms) as well.[2] Initially, it was short chiasms where the key terms were close together, as in poetry. But gradually

chiasmus, like parallelism generally, was recognized as an organizational principle that could be used for larger texts—and even for entire books of prose. As a result of this growing body of rhetorical studies and reinterpretations of the books of the Old Testament, it is now widely recognized by biblical scholars that in the eighth and seventh centuries BCE, Hebrew writers shared a highly developed set of rhetorical principles and techniques which distinguish their work dramatically from the ancient rhetorical traditions of Greece and Rome.[3]

These discoveries constitute a powerful step forward in our ability to understand Hebrew writing strategies and the messages their works promote. In this paper, I will apply the basic principles of Hebrew rhetoric, as it has been promulgated by Bible scholars in recent decades, to a new analysis of 2 Nephi. In so doing, I will rely principally on the discovery that when longer texts are organized chiastically, the ordered elements of that concentrically structured text will consist of subordinate units of text that will themselves be delimited and organized according to some rhetorical principle—and will not necessarily be best understood through a listing of all the repeated words, phrases, or topics that may occur in a chiastic order. In fact, these subordinate units may contain their own subordinate units—thus illustrating the principle of subordinating levels of rhetorical structure in Hebrew writing that some analysts have found extending to as many as eight levels when they include grammatical and philological parallels.[4]

Strong confirmation for this insight about rhetorical levels comes from J. P. Fokkelman in his study of narrative patterns in the Hebrew Bible. While he sees the single story as "the first level at which a text may largely be understood as an entity in itself," he sees it fitting into higher levels of narrative organization all the way up to the book or even macro-plots that include multiple books and being composed in turn of lower levels of text down to the sentence and even to words and sounds. Reflecting on the universality of this type of organization in the Bible, he concludes that "the Hebrew storytellers must have received excellent literary training, as time and again they demonstrate a strong preconception of form, and consummate mastery of it at all these levels."[5]

Roland Meynet emphasized the importance of looking for rhetorical organization of longer texts and specifically at the level of an entire book:

> In order to step up in the organization of the book, one can say that the most specific contribution of rhetorical analysis is the bringing to light of textual units composed of several pericopes, which I call sequences. Let me add that rhetorical analysis . . . does not seek to solely identify

> or extract a sequence or another from the book, but to see how the whole of the book is organized in sequences which cover the entirety of the text. The sequences are then organized in sections and the whole of the sections form the book.[6]

Rhetorical analysis does not expect to find the mathematical precision between parallel elements of long texts that is often demonstrated in short segments of poetry. Rather, the analyst looks for the ways that the author might reasonably have expected readers to see connections and parallels between the sequences or pericopes that constitute the larger text.

Nils Lund almost single-handedly launched the renewed interest in scholarly study of biblical chiasmus that grew so rapidly in the second half of the twentieth century. His 1942 publication of *Chiasmus in the New Testament* established beyond question the extensive role that this rhetorical form had played in the writing of both testaments of the Bible.[7] But it was left to the rhetorical criticism that emerged later to show how chiasmus fit in as one significant part of a much larger tool chest of Semitic rhetorical patterns that were developed in the eighth and seventh centuries and that were used extensively in most biblical writings from that period. The prominent leader of the form-criticism movement, James Muilenburg, took the occasion of his presidential address at the 1968 meeting of the Society for Biblical Literature to announce that the form-critical approach had reached its limits and to urge scholars to engage the new and broader approach of rhetorical criticism:

> What I am interested in, above all, is in understanding the nature of Hebrew literary composition, in exhibiting the structural patterns that are employed for the fashioning of a literary unit, whether in poetry or in prose, and in discerning the many and various devices by which the predications are formulated and ordered into a unified whole. Such an enterprise I should describe as rhetoric and the methodology as rhetorical criticism.[8]

Jack Lundbom led and chronicled the subsequent rise of rhetorical criticism among American biblical scholars, while Roland Meynet has performed a similar role for the parallel, though largely independent, continental movement.[9]

The growing understanding of and appreciation for Hebrew rhetoric of the seventh century BCE suggests strongly that we should look at the writings of Nephi, who was born and educated in seventh-century

Jerusalem, and who opens his narrative telling us that "I was taught somewhat in all the learning of my father" (1 Nephi 1:1), to see if the insights of rhetorical criticism might provide us with new insights for Book of Mormon interpretation. In this paper I will make a first attempt to apply the principles of Hebrew rhetoric to an interpretation of the book of 2 Nephi, which to this point has frustrated a number of interpretive efforts, my own included, and about which no consensus in analysis has yet emerged.

There are a few general warnings that scholars of Hebrew rhetoric raise for those who want to develop these new skills. Commentators have noted that the rhetoric we have learned in the western tradition is *hypotactic* in that it is direct, open, and logical. Hebrew rhetoric, in contrast, is *paratactic* in that it tends to be indirect, making important points both through its structure and through words that may have their full meaning provided and adjusted gradually throughout the text.[10]

They also point out that different kinds of parallelism and repetition ground most rhetorical constructions. For example, the repetition of the same word or phrase at the beginning and end of a rhetorical unit forms an *inclusio,* which marks the boundaries for that unit.[11] Parallelism can take many forms and is often reversed, making the rhetorical unit chiastic. Further, parallelism can occur in the repetition of words, synonyms, concepts, grammar, or even opposites (antithetical parallels). One of the most important guidelines offered is the necessity of locating the boundaries of rhetorical units, boundaries which can be signaled in verbal or structural terms, such as the inclusio—which is the device most frequently used in many texts.[12] Finally, Hebrew rhetoric is notable for its extensive resort to multiple rhetorical levels in longer texts. All rhetorical units may be subdivided into second-level rhetorical units with their own structures. And these can be subdivided again and again—going down several levels—all of which can employ any of the usual rhetorical structures. The clearest and most comprehensive explanation of this multiplicity of rhetorical levels is provided by Roland Meynet.[13]

Rhetorical Analysis of the Book of 2 Nephi

All rhetorical writing is designed to persuade, and Nephi's writings are no exception. While most Old Testament writings have provided modern scholars with bottomless opportunities for speculation about their true purposes, Nephi seems anxious to make his motives perfectly clear. In 1 Nephi he assures his readers that "the fullness of mine intent is that

I may persuade men to come unto the God of Abraham and the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob and be saved" (1 Nephi 6:4). And in 2 Nephi he says the same thing in a different way: "For we labor diligently to write, to persuade our children and also our brethren to believe in Christ and to be reconciled to God" (2 Nephi 25:23).[14]

In 1980 I published a proposed rhetorical outline of 1 Nephi.[15] While that effort will now require significant revision in light of these new developments in Hebrew rhetoric, I will focus this paper on a proposed rhetorical outline of 2 Nephi. Should this exploratory outline prove persuasive, suggesting that 2 Nephi does seem to be informed by the principles of Hebrew rhetoric, it would then be appropriate to proceed with a comprehensive rhetorical analysis of the entire book at all levels. In this experimental paper, only the central chapter will be analyzed at all four levels.

I will be following the procedure outlined by Muilenburg in his 1968 launch of rhetorical criticism as a sub-field of biblical studies regarding the delimitation of literary units in the text: "The first concern of the rhetorical critic . . . is to define the limits or scope of the literary unit, to recognize precisely where and how it begins and where and how it ends." Further, "the literary unit is . . . an indissoluble whole, an artistic and creative unity, a unique formulation. The delimitation of the passage is essential if we are to learn how its major motif . . . is resolved."[16] He then goes on to explain the second major concern of the rhetorical critic—recognizing the structure of a composition and discerning "the configuration of its component parts." This will require a delineation "of the warp and woof out of which the literary fabric is woven" and identification of "the various rhetorical devices that are employed" for marking (1) "the sequence and movement of the pericope," and (2) "the shifts or breaks in the development of the writer's thought."[17]

Following Muilenburg's guidelines, the first task is to establish the boundaries of the principal rhetorical units in 2 Nephi. It may be surprising to some that there has actually been some controversy about the appropriate rhetorical dividing line between 1 and 2 Nephi. I will not give here all my reasons for rejecting the 1994 proposal of Fred Axelgard that the real dividing line is between 2 Nephi chapters 5 and 6, even though his theory has been revived recently by Joseph Spencer.[18] Rather, I will assume herein that Nephi's division of his writings into two books was intended to guide his readers in a straightforward way to see that one major rhetorical structure had ended and that a new structure was beginning. His intentionality in this division is emphasized

by the obvious fact that there is no break in the story between the last verses of 1 Nephi and the opening verses of 2 Nephi. An important principle of rhetorical interpretation is that one must let the author organize the material as he sees fit, without attempting to force it into interpreters' preconceived rhetorical forms or making it convey messages preferred by the interpreters. There is no question that the division into two books as we have it in today's Book of Mormon was present in the original translation, and presumably was taken directly from the very plates engraved by Nephi himself. In my judgment, it would take an extraordinarily powerful argument to undermine that presumption—far more powerful than what has been offered. I take, therefore, the entire book of 2 Nephi as the top level of rhetorical organization to be considered and proceed to divide it into subunits according to cues provided in the text. The hypothesis guiding these divisions is that Nephi, having been educated in seventh-century Jerusalem, may have incorporated the principles of Hebrew rhetoric in vogue in that time and place into his own writing.

The following analysis finds thirteen level-2 text units identified principally by inclusios. Furthermore, these units appear to be organized chiastically at this level. Table 1 lists the boundary markers or reasons for seeing each of these thirteen units as separate principal subunits of the text. Table 2 will then list the key language or other characteristics of each pair of units in the proposed thirteen-element chiasm that structures 2 Nephi. It will be seen that this chiasm focuses the entire text on the gospel promise of salvation through Jesus Christ in this life and in the next.

Table 1

Label	*Text*	*Rhetorical boundary markers***
A	2 Nephi 1:1–1:30	"out of the land of Jerusalem"
B	2 Nephi 1:31–2:4a	Zoram and Jacob "blessed"
C	2 Nephi 2:4b–30	"know good"/"have chosen the good part"
D	2 Nephi 3:1–4:12	Lehi "speaks"—to Joseph/all his household
E	2 Nephi 4:13–5:34	Laman and Lemuel angry/wars and contentions
F	2 Nephi 6–11:1	words/things "Jacob spake"
G	2 Nephi 11:2–8	"the words of Isaiah"
F*	2 Nephi 12–24	Lord's house established/Zion founded
E*	2 Nephi 25:1–6	"Isaiah spake"/"hath spoken"
D*	2 Nephi 25:7–31:1	"mine own prophecy"/"my prophesying"

C*	2 Nephi 31:2–21	"the doctrine of Christ"
B*	2 Nephi 32:1–8a	"ponder in your hearts"
A*	2 Nephi 32:8b–33:15	Nephi "must speak"/"commanded to seal" words

**Note that these phrases are all thematic somewhere in Nephi's writings.

Table 2

A Lehi's final testimony and call *to his family* to repentance.

B The Spirit—Jacob redeemed—in the service of God.

C Lehi's explanation of *the way* of salvation based on "the things which [he] had read."

D Lehi's last blessings (prophecies) *to his people*.

E Historical detailed interlude on the founding of "the people of Nephi," "my soul delighteth"/"grieveth."

F Jacob's teachings witness of Christ.

G Nephi's witness of Christ.

F* Isaiah's prophecies witness of Christ.

E* Historical interlude—the education of "my people"—"my soul delighteth"/"grieveth."

D* Final restatement of Nephi's prophecies—*to all people*.

C* Nephi's detailed explanation of *the way or doctrine* of Christ based on what he learned from the Father and the Son directly.

B* The Spirit—the Holy Ghost will show you what to do.

A* Nephi's final testimony and call *to all people* to repentance.

Commentary on This Structure

Even in this exploratory analysis a few observations are suggested. First, it may be noticed that the first four elements identified (A–D), when compared to the final four (D*–A*), remind us of the division of 1 Nephi between Lehi's account (chs. 1–9), so labeled by Nephi, and Nephi's own account (chs. 10–22). The first four feature Lehi's testimony, preaching, teachings, and prophecies. The last four focus on the testimony, preaching, teachings, and prophecies of Nephi. Second, while 1 Nephi initially focused on ways in which the Lord delivered Lehi, Nephi, and their people from their enemies and the trials of their journeys, leading them to a promised land in this world and evoking an Exodus typology,[19] 2 Nephi next focuses on the Lord's ability—through the atonement of Christ—to deliver the faithful from the devil and lead them to eternal

life in the next world. Third, the chiastic organization of 2 Nephi reveals how the first half of the book focuses on specific accounts of specific people—usually Lehi and his family—and on the teachings, blessings, and prophecies directed to them. But the second half takes those same teachings and prophecies in turn and universalizes them by applying them to "all people." The story of Lehi and his people becomes a surrogate for the Lord's plan of deliverance for all peoples, in the same way that chosen Israel is an exemplar for all nations of how they can be blessed by Israel's god or punished—according to their willingness to repent and take up his covenants and endure to the end.

Finally, the language and organization of Nephi's writing explicitly invokes the biblical motif of the Two Ways.[20] While it was thought for some time by scholars that this motif was mostly a development of early Christians derived from the Savior's reference to himself as "the way," it is now widely understood that its significant usage in the Dead Sea Scrolls and its appearance in Old Testament writings such as Deuteronomy and Jeremiah and even more obviously in the wisdom literature demonstrates its firm origins in the Jewish traditions.[21] Both Lehi in his exposition of the plan of salvation and Nephi in his detailed presentation of the gospel or doctrine of Christ, as taught to him by the Father and the Son, deliberately speak of these as God's ways for man. Further, Lehi develops the contrast between God's way and the devil's way, as he develops his teaching on the necessity of opposition in all things and his account of human beginnings. As suggested above, 1 Nephi details how God fulfilled his covenant with Lehi and Nephi (like Abraham) by protecting their growing posterity and leading them to a promised land. And 2 Nephi turns the journey motif into an account of the gospel as a path or "the only way" that leads to eternal life.[22] Just as the miraculous director was given to Lehi to point the way for his party to travel toward the promised land, so Nephi will explain that as one progresses on "this straight and narrow path" that leads to eternal life (2 Nephi 31:18–19), "the Holy Ghost . . . will shew unto you all things what ye should do" (2 Nephi 32:5).

Analyzing Lower Rhetorical Levels

If the division of 2 Nephi into thirteen sub-units that are organized chiastically is correct, we might expect some or all of these to exhibit additional subordinate levels of rhetorical organization. To test this hypothesis further, I will focus in this paper on the seventh or central element G from the first analysis. Again, to the extent this proves

successful, 2 Nephi would seem to invite similar analyses for the other twelve level-2 text units. Table 3 outlines the central unit G of the level-2 chiasm as an eight-element chiasm at level 3. Tables 4a–4d will provide a rhetorical analysis of each of those eight elements at level 4. The entire text of G is included in the analysis and in these tables.

Table 3: 2 Nephi 11:2–8

2 A And now I Nephi write more of the words of Isaiah,

3 B Wherefore I will send their words forth unto my children to prove unto them that my words are true. [a proof by citing three witnesses]

4 C Behold, my soul delighteth in proving unto my people the truth of the coming of Christ

5 D And also my soul delighteth in the covenants of the Lord which he hath made to our fathers

D* yea, my soul delighteth in . . . the great and eternal plan of deliverance from death.

6 C* And my soul delighteth in proving unto my people that save Christ should come all men must perish.

7 B* For if there be no Christ there be no God. And if there be no God we are not, for there could have been no creation. But there is a God and he is Christ, and he cometh in the fullness of his own time. [a proof by logical reasoning]

8 A* And now I write some of the words of Isaiah.

In Tables 4a–4d, the complete text of the four pairs of chiastic elements from table 3 will be analyzed as pairs to examine their internal rhetorical structures and the various ways in which their parallel characters can be described at rhetorical level 4.

Table 4a: 2 Nephi 11:2, 8

2 A a And now I Nephi write more of the words of Isaiah,

b for my soul delighteth in his words.

c For I will liken his words unto my people.

==========

8 A* a And now I write some of the words of Isaiah,

b that whoso of my people which shall see these words may lift up their hearts and rejoice for all men.

c Now these are the words, and ye may liken them unto you and unto all men.

The eight-element chiasm of G is framed by two parallel triplets—A and A*. But as with Hebrew poetry generally, the second element in a parallel structure provides added or intensified meaning by adding phrases or changing some of the words. The first lines (a/a) of each triplet are virtually identical, providing this central text unit G with an easily recognizable inclusio, which frequently signals that the material within the inclusio may be structured as another chiasm—as G indeed turns out to be. But line b in the second triplet (A*) adds meaning as Nephi's personal delight in Isaiah's words becomes the rejoicing of his people *for all men.* And in lines c/c, just as Nephi could "liken" Isaiah's words unto his people in A, so his readers are invited in A* to liken these words unto themselves "and *unto all men*." In this way, the first pair of parallel elements in G introduces us to the universalizing theme of the second half of 2 Nephi.

Table 4b: 2 Nephi 11:2–3, 7

2 B a And I will send them [his words] forth unto all my children,
b for he (Isaiah) verily saw my Redeemer,
c even as I have seen him.
3 b* And my brother Jacob also hath seen him
c* as I have seen him.
a* Wherefore I will send their words forth unto my children

aa to prove unto them that my words are true.
bb Wherefore by the words of three, God hath said,
cc* I will establish my word.
bb* Nevertheless God sendeth more witnesses,
aa* and he proveth all his words.

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7 B* a For if there be no Christ
b there be no God;
c and if there be no God we are not,
c* for there could have been no creation.
b* But there is a God,
a* and he is Christ,

Ballast line: and he cometh in the fullness of his own time.

The second pair of parallel elements (B/B*) presents a more complicated text and might escape notice were not the following two pairs (C/C* and D/D*) so obvious—driving us to look more carefully for B/B*. As analyzed above, B presents us with two very different but closely linked rhetorical structures. The first and last lines of the first structure are nearly identical, forming an inclusio, and setting the first structure off from the second—the difference between a and a* being that *them* (the words of Isaiah) in a becomes *their words* (the words of Isaiah *and* Jacob) in a*. But inside the inclusio, we find not another chiasm but instead a form known by biblical rhetoricians as alternating parallels. Lines b and b* are obviously similar, as each reports that a different prophet—Isaiah and Jacob respectively—has seen the Redeemer. Lines c and c* each contain Nephi's personal witness that he also has seen the Redeemer.

The second rhetorical structure contained in B turns out to be a short chiasm that steps aside from the historical facts Nephi has just reported to explain why those facts amount to a proof to Nephi's children that his witness of the Redeemer is true. God has given the standard that the word of three witnesses is proof of his word—possibly alluding to Deuteronomy (4:26 and 17:6)—and Nephi has provided three eyewitnesses. And God has sent and will send more witnesses. The theme of proving the prophecies of Christ's future coming is what binds B and B* together as parallel elements in this level-4 chiasm.

B* picks up the "proof" theme—but in a new way—offering a logical proof from theological reasoning. While this brief passage composed of seven very short clauses may not satisfy a modern reader's learned preference for syllogisms, it is clearly framed rhetorically as a chiasm composed principally of antithetically parallel elements. Line a* positively contradicts the negative hypothesis raised in a, and b* positively negates the negative conclusion proffered in b. The central lines c/c* state and restate the counterfactual conclusion to be drawn from a and b that neither we nor creation itself could exist without God—a fundamental premise that was likely accepted universally in seventh-century Israelite and quite possibly in all Middle Eastern cultures. It should be noticed here that this proof constitutes a simple expansion of the briefer argument for the existence of God that Lehi had proffered in the course of his blessing to Jacob—adapting it to serve as a proof of the future Christ as well—and reuses precisely some of Lehi's phrasings.[23]

The final independent clause in B* is not part of its chiastic structure. It does extend the teaching about Christ with Nephi's affirmation that he

will come "in the fullness of his own time"—the important additional information drawn from the visions received by Nephi, Lehi, Jacob, and Isaiah that has not yet been articulated in the series of proofs. By completing or rounding out what has been said in the rhetorical form, this line fills the role that biblical rhetorician Jack Lundbom recognizes as a "ballast line"—as he and others find these frequently bringing balance at the conclusion of small rhetorical structures in biblical writing.[24]

Table 4c: 2 Nephi 11:4, 6

4 C a Behold, my soul delighteth in proving unto my people
b the truth of the coming of Christ,
c for for this end hath the law of Moses been given.
b* And all things which have been given of God from the beginning of the world unto man
c* are the typifying of him (Christ).

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6 C* a And my soul delighteth in proving unto my people
b that save Christ should come
c all men must perish.

The repetition of the opening line (a) in C and C* supplemented by the common content of b in each is more than sufficient to establish the parallelism of these two short elements in the level-3 chiasm—even though the two have rather different internal rhetorical structures at level 4. C begins with a normal triplet reiterating Nephi's sense that his writing will prove the truth of the prophesied coming of Christ for his people in a and b, but adding in c the further connection between the law of Moses and the coming of Christ. Nephi has already informed us that the Nephites "did observe to keep the judgments and the statutes and the commandments of the Lord, in all things according to the law of Moses" (2 Nephi 5:10). And now he explains their understanding that the law of Moses was given to remind Israel of the future coming of Christ in c. The next sentence goes on to restate and expand b and c in b* and c* respectively, producing another example of alternate parallelism. C* begins with the same statement as C but develops into a simple triplet with the added conclusion in c that without Christ's coming "all must perish."

Table 4d

5 D a And also my soul delighteth
b in the covenants of the Lord
c which he hath made to our fathers.

==========

D*a Yea, my soul delighteth
b in his grace and his justice and power and mercy,
c in the great and eternal plan of deliverance from death.

With D and D* we have finally arrived at the rhetorical center of 2 Nephi. Here, two simple triplets face each other in the chiastic structure of G. Their equivalence in a parallel structure is provided once again by starting each triplet with the same principal clause: "my soul delighteth." To the extent this pair of triplets constitutes a turning point for all of 2 Nephi, and simultaneously for its central text unit G, we are led once again to the comparison between 1 and 2 Nephi. The first triplet (D) expresses Nephi's delight in the covenants the Lord made with "our fathers," which we should understand to include specifically Abraham, Moses and all Israel at Sinai, and Lehi most recently. The second turns our focus to the atonement of Christ, which Lehi, Nephi, and Jacob now understand as the mechanism through which the Lord has established his gospel as part of "the great and eternal plan of deliverance from death" and as the fuller understanding of the ancient covenants as demonstrated in the forward-looking significance of the law of Moses as just discussed.

Conclusions

The experiment conducted in this paper has been the application of the principles of Hebrew rhetoric—as that has come to be understood by biblical scholars over the last half century—to the book of 2 Nephi, self-described as personally written by Nephi, who was educated in Jerusalem at the end of the seventh century BCE, a time and place where these writing principles are now thought by scholars to have been *de rigeur.* The experiment did not refute the hypothesis, but instead did produce a plausible division of the book into thirteen subunits that are demarcated by inclusios and that readily organize themselves chiastically as a whole. The experiment also took the central rhetorical subunit G and explored its internal rhetorical structure down two more levels. That

analysis has produced a plausible chiastic structure in which every word of the passage fits comfortably into yet another lower level of rhetorical structures. In addition, this passage (2 Nephi 11:2–8) turns out to feature the principal theses of Nephi's writings at the same time that it explains the inclusion and placement of the long excerpts from Lehi, Jacob, and Isaiah, even though it is a passage that has rarely been featured in Book of Mormon analyses. These results are sufficiently positive and justify moving the project forward to the much larger task of providing rhetorical analyses for the twelve remaining major textual subdivisions of the book.

We have also learned that, contrary to my 1980 assessment, 2 Nephi is not a random collection of teachings and prophecies that didn't fit into 1 Nephi's structure.[25] Rather, the book appears as a matching structure which required its own book. Both structurally and thematically, the two books appear to be designed as a pair—each with its own message and emphases. While 1 Nephi provides Nephi's proofs based on Lehi's travels to the promised land that "the tender mercies of the Lord are over all them whom he hath chosen, because of their faith, to make them mighty, even unto the power of deliverance" (1 Nephi 1:20), 2 Nephi elevates the traditional meaning of the Abrahamic/Lehitic promises for this life into a focus on the atonement and gospel of Jesus Christ which provide the way of deliverance to eternal life. And so God's prophecies and covenants with Israel turn out to be surrogates for the eternal promises he offers to all his children—in all times and in all places (2 Nephi 30:2).

Noel B. Reynolds is professor emeritus of political science at Brigham Young University where he taught courses in political and legal philosophy, Book of Mormon, and American heritage. He has published scholarly papers and books in a number of subfields including Mormon studies, authorship studies, political and legal philosophy, and ancient studies. Among Reynold's published writings are several articles about rhetorical techniques and chiastic structures in the Hebrew Bible and the Book of Mormon. Some of his current work explores the implications of new discoveries in Hebrew rhetoric for chiastic analysis.

This paper began as a slide presentation to the Society for Mormon Philosophy and Theology at Brigham Young University, Provo, Utah, October 8, 2015, entitled "All the Learning of My Father." The first published version with this same title was included in "*To Seek the Law of the Lord:" Essays in Honor of John W. Welch* (ed. Paul Y. Hoskisson and Daniel C. Peterson; Orem, UT: Interpreter Foundation, 2017), 333–49. This current version includes significant revisions and updates.

Notes

1. The first publication was John W. Welch, "Chiasmus in the Book of Mormon," *BYU Studies* 10, no. 1 (1969): 69–84, which was followed by his thesis: John W. Welch, "A Study Relating Chiasmus in the Book of Mormon to Chiasmus in the Old Testament, Ugaritic Epics, Homer, and Selected Greek Authors" (master's thesis, Brigham Young University, 1970). Examples of additional significant studies would include "Chiasmus in Biblical Law: An Approach to the Structure of Legal Texts in the Hebrew Bible," *Jewish Law Association Studies* 4 (1990): 5–22, and John W. Welch, ed., *Chiasmus in Antiquity: Structure, Analysis, Exegesis* (Hildesheim: Gerstenburg, 1981; repr., Provo, UT: Research Press, 1994).

2. This early history is helpfully summarized by Roland Meynet in the first two chapters of his volume, *Rhetorical Analysis: An Introduction to Biblical Rhetoric* (Sheffield, Eng.: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998), 44–130.

3. See Noel B. Reynolds, "The Return of Rhetorical Analysis to Bible Studies," *Interpreter: A Journal of Mormon Scripture* 17 (2016): 91–98, for a brief introduction to the current state of understanding as represented in Hebrew rhetorical studies. The two works selected for this review were Jack R. Lundbom, *Biblical Rhetoric and Rhetorical Criticism* (Sheffield, Eng.: Sheffield Phoenix, 2013); and Roland Meynet, *Rhetorical Analysis: An Introduction to Biblical Rhetoric* (Sheffield, Eng.: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998). Meynet has subsequently produced an updated and more comprehensive *Treatise on Biblical Rhetoric* (trans. Leo Arnold; Leiden: Brill, 2012).

4. For the most detailed explanation of rhetorical levels, see Meynet, *Rhetorical Analysis,* 199–308. It should be mentioned that Meynet represents a formalistic extreme in his approach when compared to other rhetorical analysts.

5. J. P. Fokkelman, *Reading Biblical Narrative: An Introductory Guide* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 1999), 161–162.

6. Meynet, *Rhetorical Analysis,* 171.

7. Nils Wilhelm Lund, *Chiasmus in the New Testament: A Study in the Form and Function of Chiastic Structures* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1942).

8. James Muilenburg, "Form Criticism and Beyond," *JBL* 88 (1969): 8.

9. See note 4.

10. See the discussion in Lundbom, *Biblical Rhetoric,* 73–74.

11. For a helpful explanation of *inclusio*, the history of this usage in studies of biblical rhetoric, and biblical examples of its use, see Lundbom, *Biblical Rhetoric,* 325–27.

12. In *Biblical Rhetoric,* 25–36, Lundbom provides general principles and common patterns by which texts can be delimited into sub-units. He provides an instructive example when he goes on in chapter 4 to apply these to his analysis of Jeremiah (pp. 37–59).

13. Meynet, *Rhetorical Analysis,* 199–308.

14. Book of Mormon quotations are taken from the 2009 Yale critical edition: Royal Skousen, ed., *The Book of Mormon: The Earliest Text* (New Haven, CN: Yale University Press, 2009).

15. Noel B. Reynolds, "Nephi's Outline," *BYU Studies* 20, no. 2 (1980): 1–18; also in *Book of Mormon Authorship: New Light on Ancient Origins* (ed. Noel B. Reynolds; Provo, UT: BYU Religious Studies Center, 1982), 53–74.

16. Muilenburg, "Form Criticism and Beyond," 9.

17. Muilenburg, "Form Criticism and Beyond," 10.

18. See Frederick W. Axelgard, "1 and 2 Nephi: An Inspiring Whole," *BYU Studies* 26, no. 4 (1986): 53–65; and Joseph M. Spencer, *An Other Testament: On Typology* (Salem, OR: Salt Press, 2012), 34–35. In "On Doubting Nephi's Break between 1 and 2 Nephi: A Critique of Joseph Spencer's *An Other Testament: On Typology,*" *Interpreter: A Journal of Mormon Scripture* 25 (2017): 85–102, I explain why I see that approach as seriously misguided.

19. The deployment of Exodus typology in the Book of Mormon was initially displayed in George S. Tate, "The Typology of the Exodus Pattern in the Book of Mormon," in *Literature of Belief: Sacred Scripture and Religious Experience* (ed. Neal E. Lambert; Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, 1981), 245–62.

20. For an extended discussion of the two-ways motif, see Noel B. Reynolds, "The Ancient Doctrine of the Two Ways in the Book of Mormon," *BYU Studies Quarterly* 56, no. 3 (2017): 49–78.

21. See Margaret Mary McKenna, "The Two Ways in Jewish and Christian Writings of the Greco-Roman Period: A Study of the Form of Repentance Parenesis" (PhD diss., University of Pennsylvania, 1981), 293–309, 349–57.

22. See Noel B. Reynolds, "This Is the Way," *Religious Educator* 14, no. 3 (2013): 71–83.

23. Cf. 2 Nephi 2:13.

24. Lundbom borrows the concept of ballast lines from Muilenburg and George Adam Smith and illustrates the form these took in Isaiah in *Biblical Rhetoric,* 133–35.

25. Reynolds, "Nephi's Outline," 16.

Jesus and the Roman Centurion (Matthew 8:5–13)

A Window to Chiasmus and Apostolic Pedagogy

H. Douglas Buckwalter

At the time I was doing my post-graduate work in New Testament studies at Kings College at the University of Aberdeen in Scotland, my wife gave birth to our second child, a son. Under the National Healthcare System that was provided, we were periodically visited at home by a district nurse. As our son grew a little older, she began to bring colored toy blocks for him to play with. At first, she would randomly pick out any colored block, say a blue block, and see if he could associate color and pick out the same colored block. In time this progressed to short sequences and then longer ones, where she might line up a row of blocks in the order of red to blue to green to yellow and see if he could follow the pattern and create on his own the same arrangement. Such patterning ability was considered an important marker of cognitive development.[1]

In a landmark study on Hebrew literary structure in the Old Testament,[2] David A. Dorsey has plausibly demonstrated that such patterning techniques (parallelism, symmetry/chiasm) comprise a common writing format used in each book of the OT to convey meaning and even to grace simultaneously linear chronological accounts.[3] After years of research and careful analysis of the Hebrew, his work is a compendium of the fruits of his labors in each Old Testament book. His argument is quiet but persistent and compelling that the OT text exhibits *a conscious surface structure designed to convey meaning*.[4] Dorsey has provided extensive, sensible patterning examples (most as chiasms) of this, supplying with commentary the overall pattern for each book, the