

# INTRODUCTION

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## *Discoveries in Chiasmus: A Pattern in All Things*

The date chiasmus was discovered in the Book of Mormon can be exactly fixed. It was on Wednesday, August 16, 1967. We know this because the young missionary serving in Germany who made the discovery is still with us.

John Welch not only made the discovery of chiasmus in the Book of Mormon, but has also excelled in locating and elaborating on this finding. His effort to document the initial finding has been preserved in an article he wrote for the Journal of Book of Mormon Studies, titled *The Discovery of Chiasmus in the Book of Mormon: Forty Years Later*, Vol. 16, Issue 2, pages 74-78.

Of particular delight to me is the role which Brother Welch assigns to revelation in his discovery. As is so often the case with the voice of the Lord, it was early in the morning when a voice awoke Elder Welch with the words: "If it is evidence of Hebrew style in the Bible, it must be evidence of Hebrew style in the Book of Mormon." These words of revelation not only led to the discovery, but they affirm the relationship between the Bible and Book of Mormon as Nephi had promised. (See 2 Ne. 29: 7-14.)

The article is worth reading, and can found on-line through the Maxwell Institute at BYU. It discusses Brother Welch's enthusiastic teaching, using this new discovery as a means to attract converts on his mission. His enthusiasm was met with varying degrees of success by the audiences. However, he persisted in his effort to locate additional chiasms in the Book of Mormon and the discovery of perhaps the best example is worth including here. He wrote: "I particularly remember being on the train when I noticed the chiasmic structure of Alma 36-the entire chapter! It was an overwhelmingly exciting moment to watch the length and the detail of that text unfold, which turns out to be one of the very best instances of chiasmus anywhere in world literature. Gazing out of the train window and watching the Bavarian countryside roll by, I was transported by the skill and care of Alma as a writer. Amazed at the power of the chiasmic form to focus the reader's attention on the central turning point of Alma's life, I thought how fortunate we are to have the Book of Mormon. I wondered where this train would take me." That chapter is now well known as the premiere example of chiasm in all scripture. Found by a young Elder while serving in Germany, riding a train.

Brother Welch's efforts have also expanded to provide guidance in detecting the presence of chiasmus. He wrote an article for the Journal of Book of Mormon Studies, titled: *Criteria For Identifying and Evaluating the Presence of Chiasmus*, found at Vol.4, Issue 2, Pages 1-14. In the article he suggests there are fifteen criteria which ought to be considered when determining the presence of chiasmus. We had hoped Bro. Welch would join us to discuss these in this conference, but his schedule prevented him from doing so. This article is also important enough that I recommend you visit the full article on-line through BYU.

The purpose of this conference is to explore the idea of chiasm or other patterning as a phenomenon which occurs both in sacred literature and naturally throughout creation. The most often given reason for the presence of chiasmus in Hebrew tradition is that it developed as an aid to the oral tradition. This theory asserts that it is simpler to memorize passages when the material is organized in a chiasm.

Latter-day Saints are aware, however, that writing began at the time of Adam. "And a book of remembrance was kept, in the which was recorded, in the language of Adam," from the foundation of the world. (Moses 6:5.) Without a copy of that book we are unable to determine if the original form of chiasmus, or other patterns, were imbedded in sacred writing from the very beginning of time. What we can be certain of, however, is that chiasmus was not an aid to an oral tradition, because the use of written preservation of language was coincident with the time of Adam.

I have written about the potential underlying reason for chiasmus as a lesson for mankind to learn. Christ's admonition to "become as a little child" (Matt. 18: 3) may underlay the reason. In order to go forward we must go back. That is, returning to a child-like time of faith, innocence and openness to new knowledge is an essential requirement for us to be willing to accept new ideas. We cannot develop without returning to a time when we were willing to develop. For the child, every day is filled with discovery and delight. For the elderly, oftentimes new ideas are threatening. Minds close down, attitudes harden and learning is resisted as we age. To overcome this we must become, as King Benjamin taught: "as a child, **submissive, meek, humble, patient, full of love, willing to submit to all things which the Lord seeth fit to inflict** upon him, even as a child doth submit to his father." (Emphasis added.) This list and its implications are as follows:<sup>1</sup>

"Submissive" denotes acceptance of the Father's will in preference to your own. It does not say you should submit to men. There is nothing about following a man in the concept of "submission." As used here submission is not just an unanchored term, abstractly applied to anyone or anything. It is submission to God. Christ best exemplified this trait as He defined who He was in His introduction to the Nephites. There He proclaimed that He had "suffered the will of the Father in all things from the beginning." (3 Ne. 11:11.) He did not submit to the Rabbis, or the scribes and Pharisees. Though He taught their position warranted respect,<sup>2</sup> He did not submit to them in the sense used here. Rather He challenged them and provoked their ire. Ultimately, He so offended them, they had Him killed. And so following "the will in all things from the beginning" does not ever require anyone to submit to the rule or command of a man.

"Meek" is a word Christ used in the Sermon on the Mount, telling us that the meek will inherit the earth. Meekness denotes, among other things, a conscious effort to avoid harming or offending others. It requires an absence of pride or self will. It is not insistent upon being recognized or applauded. It denotes a willingness to suffer without complaint. Others may never recognize the meek, because meekness does not vaunt itself, nor demand notice. They are "satisfied with things they are able to do." There is a great freedom in meekness, it relieves the meek from the burden of seeking their acclaim. It gives them the security of feeling God's approval for their course of living. It is private.

"Humble" is the word we use for a most remarkable trait. If you have children, you see immediately they are by nature more humble than adults. They not only do not have a good working knowledge of practical skills, they are keenly aware of their own ignorance. As a result, children are inquisitive. They search relentlessly for greater understanding, and pester their parents for the "whys" and "hows" and "whens" of life. As a result, children are willing students and eager to be taught. They not only don't know, **they know they don't know**, and want to be given the chance to learn. They "seek" and "ask" and "knock." Children do by nature just as Christ bids us to do.

In contrast, adulthood is where we find the arrogant and the unwilling. Pride and the refusal to search for knowledge is the typical adult reaction to any new knowledge. Particularly, this hostility is to knowledge that is obtained in a foreign way, which we will discuss further. Nephi wrote a lament typifying the adult mind, stating: "I am left to mourn because of the unbelief, and the wickedness, and the ignorance, and the stiffneckedness of men; for they will not search knowledge, nor understand great knowledge, when it is given unto them in plainness, even as plain as word can be." (2 Ne. 32: 7.) The most eager students are the young. The older the person, the less likely it is they will accept instruction from others with humility. Older people, like the proverbial old dogs, do not willingly accept new "tricks" in their lives. Hence the need for all of us to become as little children again.

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<sup>1</sup> What follows is an excerpt from my book *The Second Comforter: Conversing With The Lord Through the Veil*, © Denver C. Snuffer, Jr., 2006, 2008, Mill Creek Press.

<sup>2</sup> Matt. 23: 1-3: "Then spake Jesus to the multitude, and to his disciples, Saying, The scribes and the Pharisees sit in Moses' seat: All therefore whatsoever they bid you observe, that observe and do; but do not ye after their works: for they say, and do not."

The child's patient waiting is not readily apparent. Most children have little impulse control and do not want to wait for anything. "Patience" as used here does not mean what you typically think. Rather it refers to the child's "patience" to grow into adulthood. They are many years ahead to reach adulthood. There is nothing the child can do to change that. Nor do they attempt to do so. Most adults have many years ahead of them before they become fit for the Second Comforter. Just like you cannot rush from childhood into adulthood, but must progress by degrees through the many long months, into many years; so, too, we must progress from a smaller degree to a much larger one. Going back, like going forward, involves effort. Perhaps it takes decades to develop as necessary to receive an audience with Christ. Children persist in waiting, growing and maturing. Their progression into adulthood is gradual. But that process is relentless and marches on through two decades of development and maturity. That is the patience spoken of here. You will have to grow, mature and progress gradually by degrees to receive the Second Comforter.

Being "full of love" is what the 13th chapter of 1 Corinthians is all about. Charity is the "pure love of Christ." This childlike attribute comes from a natural disposition to share love which children enjoy by their native status. As we progress into adulthood and experience the disappointments of other's failings, we become less willing to love others. We suspect their motives. We distrust their worthiness to be loved. We guard against their potential for causing us mischief. These are learned fears. Little children are "too trusting" because they find it easier to love than to fear. We all found it easier to love when we were children.

The final quality of being "willing to submit" again reminds us of Christ. His knee bent to the Father in all things. And although every knee will ultimately submit to Him, many of those kneeling at the last day will do so from fear or regret, although most will do so from gratitude. Submitting to Him now, when there is no great persuasion to do so and all of the world may be aligned against His ways, stands as proof you really are willing to submit.

Christ asked: "And why call ye me, Lord, Lord, and do not the things which I say?" (Luke 6: 46.) Calling Him Lord is not enough. Willingness to submit requires a willingness to be inconvenienced.

How does the disciple become "childlike?" How does the adult return to the status of their former, childlike mind?

In the Pulitzer Prize winning book *Godel, Escher, Bach: An Eternal Golden Braid*, there are some interesting glimpses of how some of these things can be fit together.<sup>3</sup> The Crab is a recurring character in the book. The Crab is speaking about its movement on page 200: "It's in our genes, you know, turning round and round. That reminds me - I've always wondered, 'Which came first - the Crab or the Gene?' That is to say, 'Which came last, the Gene or the Crab?' I'm always turning things round and round you know. It's in our genes, after all. When we walk backwards, we move forwards." (Hofstadter, Douglas R. *Godel, Escher, Bach: An Eternal Golden Braid*. New York: Basic Books, Inc, 1979.) You see, for a crab to walk on dry ground, the weight of its forward arms is so great that they must be dragged along the ground. They cannot push them by going forward. Instead, that requires the crab to walk backwards. To go forward, it must walk backwards.

Since all things testify of God and His ways, the crab is also a testimony of some truth. It tells us by its movement that to go forward we must go backward.

An illustration on page 201, Figure 43, has this commentary: "Here is a short section of one of the Crab's Genes, turning round and round. When the two DNA strands are unraveled and laid out side by side, they read this way:

.... TTTT'TTT'TCGAAAAAAAAA...AAAAAAAAAGCT'TTTT'TTT'....

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<sup>3</sup> The whole of the book is a chiasm, although its author refers to his discussion in terms of "loops."

Notice that they are the same, only one goes forwards while the other goes backwards. This is the defining property of the form called 'crab cannon' in music. It is reminiscent of, though a little different from, a palindrome, which is a sentence that reads the same backwards and forwards. In molecular biology, such segments of DNA are called 'palindromes' – a slight misnomer, since 'crab cannon' would be more accurate. Not only is this DNA segment crab-canonical - but moreover its base segment sequence codes for the Dialogue's structure." (*Id.*) Interesting how this forward/backward movement goes right to the level of the crab's DNA. The sequence reminds us of chiasmus.<sup>4</sup> The crab's DNA is a chiasm.

Later, on page 661 of *Godel Escher, Bach* there is a discussion regarding Bongard<sup>5</sup> problems, also relevant to the child's mind: "I still have a certain faith that Bongard problems depend on a sense of simplicity... our notion of simplicity is universal, for what matters is not any of these individual objects, but the fact that taken together they span a wide space." (*Id.*) When I read this the first time, I performed a test using the Bongard problems. I saw no pattern. They seemed too random to my mind. I showed them to my wife, and they eluded her, too. However, when I showed them to my children, they recognized patterns in the sequences which eluded me. Yet the children reduced the problems to such a basic and simple level, they could see the matching patterns which the adult complex mind could not see. The author was right. Bongard problems do depend upon a sense of simplicity. They are greatly aided by seeing them in a simple way with a simple mind. The child's view is infinitely superior to the adult's in seeing the patterns because children can see things simply.

This leads us back to the ancient word form of chiasmus. As John Welch<sup>6</sup> has written about chiasmus, he has not related it to the question of *why* this form of writing was developed in the first place. Writers, including Welch, have suggested it points to the central theme of the writing and emphasizes the thought found there. While this may be true, viewing it in light of the observations made in *Godel, Escher, Bach* make it useful to look at it more simply. In chiasmus the first of the pattern repeats at the last. What came first is repeated in the end. It is a literary way of depicting "the last shall be first, and the first shall be last."

That same pattern appears in the Menorah. The seven lamps have arms which connect the first to the last.<sup>7</sup> If you were to set the lamp stand out in the same form using "ABC" the pattern would look like:  
A-B-C-D-C-B-A.

The arms of the Menorah are also a chiasm. The first is also the last. The pattern is the same from beginning to middle and from middle to end, the one being a mirror image of the other. So we have a Temple article containing, by its form, a symbol which mirrors the ancient word form of chiasmus. The pattern seems to have a meaning.

We have a description of the Urim and Thummim from Lucy Mack Smith. She described it as follows:  
"[On the morning of September 22, after Joseph had returned from the hill, he placed] the article [the Urim

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<sup>4</sup> Chiasmus is an ancient sentence structure in which the pattern reaches a central point, then reverses. The pattern can be summarized by the example: ABCDCBA; where the concept in "A" appears in the first and again in the last sentence. Similarly, concept "B" repeats in the second to the first and second to the last sentence, and so on.

<sup>5</sup> Bongard developed a series of tests involving patterns and shapes. The discussion uses Bongard's tests to demonstrate analytical and reasoning issues relevant to the text. They depend upon abstract reasoning, but also require an ability to find the simple patterns within a complex set of problems.

<sup>6</sup> It was John Welch who discovered chiasmus in the Book of Mormon while a missionary in Germany. He has written about the subject, including *Chiasmus in Antiquity*. Edited by John W. Welch. Provo: The Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies, 1981. One of the longest examples of a chiasm in the Book of Mormon is found in Chapter 36 of Alma. The entire chapter is a lengthy form of this pattern of writing.

<sup>7</sup> See Exo. 25: 32: "And six branches shall come out of the sides of it; three branches of the candlestick out of the of the one side, and three branches of the candlestick out of the other side."

and Thummim] of which he spoke into my hands, and, upon examination, [I] found that it consisted of two smooth three-cornered diamonds set in glass, and the glasses were set in silver bows, which were connected with each other in much the same way as old fashioned spectacles." (Taken from *Eyewitness Accounts of the Restoration* by Milton V. Backman, Jr., p.73. Backman, Milton V., Jr. *Eyewitness Accounts of the Restoration*. Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Company, 1986.)

One of these "two smooth three-cornered" stones pointed upward. The other pointed downward. This pattern of two triangles pointing in opposite directions is what the Star of David is made from. One pointing up, and the other pointing down. It, too, is a kind of chiasm. Progression and regression set in a side-by-side pattern. The Urim and Thummim is a chiasm. The Star of David was modeled on the Urim and Thummim, and is also a chiasm.

In ceremony, we move what was on the left side to the right side. The orientation of clothing changes from the one side to the other, forming a mirror image of progression and regression. As husband and wife kneel between the mirrors of the sealing room, facing each other, the right side of the one matches the left side of the other. As the dialogue at the veil concludes, the one acting as proxy speaks words of blessing vicariously for an ancestor, who in turn blesses descendants including the one acting as proxy. The images and symbols fold over upon each other in a repeating pattern of chiasms. Symbol and meaning merge into patterns intended to suggest to the mind a deeper level of meaning.

What do we make of these symbols? These imbedded messages seem to return to a theme. Whatever other meanings as may be contained in these forms, patterns and types, it necessarily includes the notion that to go forward you must go backward. Perhaps this meaning reigns supreme over all the other symbolic meanings of the pattern.

This pattern also reminds us anew of the Lord's injunction: "Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven." (Matt. 18: 3.) Returning to the mind of a child is necessary as a precondition, according to Christ's words, for us to be able to enter His kingdom.

What is it about the mind of a child that makes him or her more suited to following Christ? Is it innocence? Certainly a child's mind is more innocent than the adult's. But innocence also accompanies the willingness or even the necessity to imagine things. Children are able to hold out the possibilities for Santa and tooth-fairies and Peter Pan. To a child these things are possible. It requires failures and disappointments to form an adult mind. Those failings and disappointments make the adult mind skeptical, and unbelieving. Things once held in honor by the childish mind become impossible to believe into adulthood.

After a parable about camels and the eye of a needle making salvation seem unlikely, the disciples exclaimed it wasn't possible for such men to be saved. "But Jesus beheld them, and said unto them, With men this is impossible; but with God all things are possible." (Matt. 19: 26.) Men do not believe enough. Children do.

This feature of the child's mind needs to be reclaimed. Hard though it may be, the opening up for yourself of the possibility you, too, may receive these things must come first. You will not receive until after you have been first proven. And you will not be up to the test if you are unwilling to believe it is possible for you to receive these things.

Simplicity marks the child's mind. Things are much clearer to a child than they are to an adult. Craftiness and cunning develop in the maturing adult mind and are alien to the child's mind. Part of the process of developing involves learning people can be mean, cunning and manipulative. Adults can generally recall specific events in their childhood when they felt betrayed for the first time. All of that is a part of the mortal curriculum because we have come here to receive knowledge of good and evil.

Adult cynicism and skepticism, however, ill-serves us as we seek higher things. The Lord was teaching a profound principle in telling us we must become as little children if we wish to enter His kingdom. It is a requirement. We will need to explore this further.

For any of us to go forward we must go back. We must return to what we were in a more innocent time. Because of our individual "Fall" in the "Garden of Eden" of our youth, we need to regain God's presence for our lives. That childlike innocence we all came with, including believing, trusting, wanting, hoping, and accepting, must be found again.

*Our minds are more of an impediment than an asset in this struggle. Margaret Barker's comments about the early Christian worldview of evil are relevant here, and a good point to end with. Speaking of the Christians at the time of Christ she writes: "They had a picture of a vast conspiracy of evil actively engaged in a struggle against humankind, working to corrupt and destroy the creation. People needed protection against this onslaught, and help to overcome its effects. They were not hampered by our sophisticated attitudes, which have come to terms with evil forces by saying that they do not exist, or by turning them into a form of late-night entertainment. Our Christian ancestors in the time of Jesus would have recognized this ploy. The devil, they knew, acted through the human mind, where man was most proud and therefore most vulnerable. To convince a thinking man that evil forces did not exist was indeed a triumph." (Barker, Margaret THE LOST PROPHET: The Book of Enoch and its Influence on Christianity. Sheffield: England, 2005, p. 36.)*

Perhaps, therefore, chiasmus is another testimony in pattern designed to remind us to remain open, remain humble, teachable, meek and submissive. It may be a reminder that in order to go forward, we must go back and become first as a little child.

Now, this book has been organized to examine different forms of patternism and how they reflect a higher intelligence and God's communication to us. All things testify of Him. We need to develop the eyes to see Him. It may very well be that we all once had that ability and now need to return to what we once were to reclaim that sight. The great chiasm of life itself may be a gift from above. Enjoy what follows, which is offered as the various writers' views and not an official pronouncement by anyone other than those who contribute. It is offered to you as a gift to you.