

# The Newly Found Letter from John W. Welch to Robert K. Thomas Two Days after the Discovery of Chiasmus in the Book of Mormon

*John W. Welch*

The discovery of chiasmus in the Book of Mormon, made early in the morning on Wednesday, August 16, 1967, continues to draw attention even fifty-eight years later. Many people, old and young, find this event interesting and still highly relevant to contemporary studies of the Book of Mormon. They especially ask me what it felt like when I spotted the first one in Mosiah 5:10–12. People often wonder how that discovery happened. What led up to it? How did it feel? With whom did I first share it? How did they react? And what happened next?

Eager to know, people usually react with amazement as I tell them how exciting and meaningful it was for me—a twenty-year-old missionary in an isolated ancient Roman outpost on the Danube River in southeastern Germany—to have made such a discovery. When I recount the main details of that event, several adjectives often come up in their responses: amazing, remarkable, significant, inspired, important, interesting, useful,



**FIGURE 1.** The medieval cathedral of Regensburg, on the Danube River, in lower Bavaria. On a bulletin board a few yards to the west of this gothic masterpiece was an announcement of a lecture series, on Friday mornings, about the New Testament that I happened to notice and then to attend. Photo by John W. Welch.

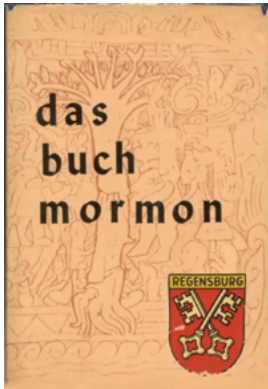


FIGURE 2. This is the copy of the Book of Mormon in which chiasmus in the Book of Mormon was discovered. The graphic on this cover is the tree of life on Stela 5 from Izapa, Mexico; its ancient significance is explained on the inside front flap. On the back cover is a picture of a Persian gold metal plate in a stone box, from about 515 B.C. Twelve questions, with scripture references to their answers, are on the inside back flap. I had put the Regensburg decal on this copy, which I used for personal study. Courtesy John W. Welch.

and even miraculous. People rightly wonder: Why had no one ever noticed this before? Was the timing somehow just right? How did all the necessary pieces come together to make this discovery possible?

Since that day, August 16, 1967, I have been asked numerous times to tell this story, which I am always glad to do.<sup>1</sup> Fortunately, I still have my missionary day-by-day appointment book, my original study notes, and the 1965 booklet about chiasmus in the Gospel of Matthew by a Jesuit priest named Paul Gaechter, which I had purchased a month earlier at the nearby Catholic bookstore. For a few days, I had been dipping into that book and simultaneously marking up a small Catholic German edition of the New Testament to verify and understand what Father Gaechter claimed about the presence of chiasmus in the Gospel of Matthew. Early that morning—it was still dark outside—I was awakened by the words, “If it is evidence of Hebrew style in Matthew, it must be evidence of Hebrew style in the Book of Mormon.” I got out of bed and sat down at the table where my companion and I had been reading in Mosiah 4 before going to bed. I turned the very next page, and the key words in the chiasmic center point of Mosiah 5 in verses 10–12 jumped out at me: first *Übertretung//Übertretung*, . . . and next *ausgelöscht werden//ausgelöscht werde*, . . . and then *wirt zur linken Hand Gottes finden//zur linken Hand Gottes befunden werdet*, and so on. I then went back and rescanned all of King Benjamin’s speech in Mosiah 2–5, discovering and marking up—what I believe to be—three of the best examples of structural chiasmus found anywhere in world literature.

1. For two such accounts, see also Greg Welch, “The Amazing True Story of How Chiasmus Was Discovered in the Book of Mormon,” posted July 20, 2016, by Scripture Central, YouTube, 10 min., 15 sec., <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8GpJ-lLrJcc>; and “The Discovery of Chiasmus in the Book of Mormon,” posted on August 17, 2017, by Book of Mormon Central, YouTube, 8 min., 33 sec., <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=InUSGarArl0>.

17,27 und 19,1 - 20,16) mit der Rede zwischendrin. „Erzählung“ ist hier im weitesten Sinn zu verstehen. Diese Reihen umfassen nicht nur Wundertaten und andere Handlungen Jesu, sondern auch Streitgespräche, Wehrufe und Anklagen; zu diesen letzteren gehört auch Mt 23. All das ergibt fünf große Teile im Inneren des Matthäus-Evangeliums, deren jeder aus einer Rede und einer Erzählungsreihe besteht.

Ihnen geht ein Teil voraus (über die Anfänge Jesu, Mt 1-4), der keine Rede enthält, ebenso folgt auf sie als Schluß des Evangeliums eine Partie ohne Rede (Leidens- und Auferstehungsbericht Mt 26-28). Damit ist die Einteilung oder der Aufbau des Matthäus-Evangeliums, wie er vom Verfasser kommt, dargelegt. Es enthält sieben Teile, nicht mehr und nicht weniger.

Nun wäre ein siebenfältiges Nacheinander ohne innere Gruppierung reichlich langweilig. Matthäus muß das auch empfunden haben. So baute er diese Siebenheit in einem formalen Chiasmus auf, wie an den Reden sichtbar wird. Vom Chiasmus wird später noch die Rede sein. Wie dem ersten Teil der letzte entspricht, sofern in beiden eine Rede fehlt, so entspricht die erste Rede (im II. Teil) der fünften und letzten Rede (im VI. Teil), insofern beide mehr zum Volk als zu den Jüngern gesprochen sind. Hingegen sind die Unterweisungen der zweiten Rede (im III. Teil) und der vierten Rede (im V. Teil) an die Jünger Jesu gerichtet, nicht an das Volk. Die dritte Rede (Mt 13) ist als Parabelrede einzig in ihrer Art, wenn auch in anderen Reden ab und zu Parabeln vorkommen. Somit läßt sich der Aufbau des Matthäus-Evangeliums schematisch so darstellen:

- I. Teil — keine Rede
- II. Teil — Rede an das Volk
- III. Teil — Rede an die Jünger
- IV. Teil — Parabelrede
- V. Teil — Rede an die Jünger
- VI. Teil — Rede an das Volk
- VII. Teil — keine Rede

Dieser kunstvolle Aufbau ist ein bewußt angewandtes literarisches Stilmittel. Wir haben uns hier ausschließlich an das Äußere, Formale gehalten. Auch die äußere Form hat ein Recht, beachtet zu werden; das Ergebnis erbringt dafür die Rechtfertigung. Später

FIGURE 3. This chiasmic centerpiece of the Gospel of Matthew, in Matt. 13:10–18, as presented on page 13 of Father Gaechter's recent book on the literary art in the Gospel of Matthew. Courtesy John W. Welch.

Many of the details about the further unfolding of that discovery are told in the attractively illustrated article entitled “The Discovery of Chiasmus in the Book of Mormon: Forty Years Later,” which was published in the *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* (JBMS) in 2007, freely available on the web.<sup>2</sup> As we prepared that article for publication, I knew that I had written two letters shortly after the chiasmus discovery. I had in my possession one of those two letters, which I wrote the morning of Friday, August 18, and sent to my family. My mom kept that letter, and she gave it to me after I returned home in 1968.

Until recently, however, I was missing the other letter that I wrote to BYU English Professor Robert K. Thomas, telling him about this discovery. I wanted him to be the first to know. He was the director of the honors program during my first three semesters at BYU (fall 1964–winter 1966). He taught me English 115H and Book of Mormon 122H, and he encouraged me to study German and sign up for the semester abroad in Salzburg, Austria, before going on my mission. In addition, I was aware that Dr. Thomas regularly taught an upper-division English class titled “The Bible as Literature” and had published a Relief Society resource titled *Out of the Best Books*.<sup>3</sup> So, for several reasons, I wanted to share my discovery of



FIGURE 4. Robert K. Thomas, PhD, Professor of English, Director of the BYU Honors Program, and Academic Vice-President under Ernest L. Wilkinson and Dallin H. Oaks in the 1960s and 1970s. From a photo taken about 1968 published by the Neal A. Maxwell Institute for Religious Scholarship at BYU in the *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 16, no. 2 (2007): 76.

2. John W. Welch, “The Discovery of Chiasmus in the Book of Mormon: Forty Years Later,” *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 16, no. 2 (2007): 74–87, 99, <https://scholars.archive.byu.edu/jbms/vol16/iss2/10>. See also John W. Welch, “Chiasmus in the Book of Mormon,” *BYU Studies* 10, no. 1 (1969): 69–84, <https://byustudies.byu.edu/article/chiasmus-in-the-book-of-mormon>; John W. Welch, “Chiasmus in the Book of Mormon: Or the Book of Mormon Does It Again,” *New Era*, February 1972, 6–11. See also the book celebrating the fiftieth anniversary of the discovery of chiasmus in the Book of Mormon, John W. Welch and Donald W. Parry, eds., *Chiasmus: The State of the Art* (BYU Studies Quarterly, 2020), <https://byustudies.byu.edu/issue/59-2-Supplement>.

3. Bruce B. Clark and Robert K. Thomas, *Out of the Best Books*, 5 vols. (Deseret Book, 1964–69).

chiasmus in the Book of Mormon with him immediately and ask if he knew of anyone else coming across something like this.

In 2007, while I was providing information for the writing of the *JBMS* article, I did not have the letter I had written to Professor Thomas. He would have been the last person to have had it, but he had died in October 1998. And thus, I did not know for sure the date on which I had written that letter to Professor Thomas. Because he had answered me on October 9, 1967—I still have his response—I knew that I had written to him in August or September, as the 2007 article mentions. But without having the actual copy of my letter to him, I could only approximate (on the safe side) that I had written to him at “about this time.”<sup>4</sup>

Then, after my wife Jeannie and I had returned home from our 2021–2023 mission, I received a call from one of my former law students, Stuart W. Hinckley. He had married Angie, a daughter of Robert K. Thomas, in the 1980s, and they lived in the Salt Lake City area where he practiced law. Angie had been contacted by the people at BYU who were processing all of the administrative papers of Robert Thomas and filing them in the BYU institutional archive. In completing that immense task, the filing team set aside a few items that did not look like they belonged in the BYU official records but thought the family might be interested in looking at. Angie and Stuart then made an appointment to come to Provo to see if any of those personal items might be worth keeping. When they saw the envelope pictured below, Stuart immediately recognized it as having been sent by me, one of his law professors. They opened it and recognized the significance of its contents.

Soon, Angie and Stuart called me, and—wanting to deliver it to me personally—we arranged a time when they could deliver it to me in downtown Salt Lake City, where Stuart kindly and generously handed it to me, still in its original envelope. I was astonished. I had not seen that letter nor even dreamed that it still existed ever since I sealed and mailed it more than half a century earlier. What a thrill—not only for me but for all who can now read it.

As you will see, it is fairly long and very detailed. As you read, it pays to compare the typescripts with their handwritten original pages. As I wrote to Professor Thomas—and wanting to come across as a serious academic—I quoted several lines of Gaechter’s German, without taking (or having) the time to translate them for him into English. Maybe I assumed that he knew enough German to get the gist of what was being

---

4. Welch, “Discovery of Chiasmus,” 83.

AUG 22 1967

Regensburg den 18. VIII. 1967

Dear Brother Thomas!

viele Grüße aus Süddeutschland! We've had quite a summer, quite inspirational I mean. But I need to ask you a couple questions because we are a lonely folk cut off from the mainstream. I wouldn't <sup>have</sup> also liked to have been more formal, but we'll do our best.

I think I've found something new and very convincing in the Book of Mormon, but the entire project is of course still in infancy. I've shown it to Professors, Librarians, bookstore managers and have arrangements to speak with the theologians here and haven't yet been refuted. So it may be good. It all started with a little book I bought (which I do often, I must confess) by a Jesuit Prof in Innsbruck, Paul Gaechter, entitled "Die literarische Kunst im Matthäus-Evangelium". It even reminded me of your "Bible as Lit." class. In his book he develops an idea of <sup>a man,</sup> Hermann Cladder, (1919) [90 years after 1829] to the extent that he claims "Leiden besitzen wir <sup>(Matthäus)</sup> es <sup>nur</sup> in griechischer Form, finden aber auch im griechischen Matthäus-Evangelium so viele Züge hebräischer Empfindens und Denkens, daß am Übersetzungscharakter dieses griechischen Werkes nicht gezweifelt werden kann" (page 5). The ideas were very impressive and exciting! I studied and thought it out constantly. Matthew must have been first rate Hebrew.

FIGURE 5. Page 1 of my letter to Robert K. Thomas, written and mailed two days after discovering chiasmus in the Book of Mormon. Courtesy John W. Welch.

said there or that he had faculty members close by who could do so. For present purposes, in transcribing my handwriting, I have inserted my translations of those German quotations or abbreviations in brackets and italics. Bracketed text in Roman typeface is in the original letter. Text between angle brackets is inserted text in the original letter.

## Letter to Robert K. Thomas

Here, now, is the five-page letter I hurriedly wrote on April 18, just two days after the remarkable discovery of chiasmus in the Book of Mormon.

[page 1] Regensburg den 18. VIII. 1967 [August 18, 1967]

Dear Brother Thomas!

Viele Grüße aus Süddeutschland! [*Many greetings from South Germany!*] We've had quite a summer, quite inspirational I mean. But I need to ask you a couple questions because we are a lonely folk cut off from the mainstream. I would have also liked to have been more formal, but we'll do our best.

I think I've found something new and very convincing in the Book of Mormon, but the entire project is of course still in infancy. I've shown it to Professors, Librarians, bookstore managers and have arrangements to speak with the Theologians here and haven't yet been refuted. So it may be good. It all started with a little book I bought (which I do often, I must confess) by a Jesuit Prof in Innsbruck, Paul Gaechter, entitled "Die Literarische Kunst im Matthäus-Evangelium" [*The Literary Art in the Gospel of Matthew*]. It even reminded me of your "Bible as Lit[erature]" class. In his book he develops an idea of /a man,/ Hermann Cladder (1919) [90 years after 1829], to the extent that he [*Gaechter*] claims "Leider besitzen wir es /(Matthäus)/ nur in griechischer Form, finden aber auch im griechischen Matthäus-Evangelium so viele Züge hebräischen Empfindens und Denkens, dass am Übersetzungscharakter dieses griechischen Werkes nicht gezweifelt werden kann" [*Unfortunately, the earliest version of the Gospel of Matthew that we have is in Greek; but even in the Greek version we find so many features of Hebrew expressions and thinking that one cannot doubt the Semitic origins of this as a work that was translated into Greek*] (page 5). The ideas were very impressive and exciting! I studied and thought it out constantly. Matthew must have been [*a*] first rate Hebrew.<sup>5</sup>

---

5. The back cover blurb on Gaechter's book notes that "In addition, Gaechter has published an extensive commentary on the first Gospel {his book *Das Matthäus Evangelium*} (1964). He often goes down his own paths in his research, but his explanations are definitely interesting and always stimulating." For two recent LDS publications agreeing that the Gospel of Matthew strongly reflects Jewish themes, see Tyler Griffin, "Matthew's Portrayal of Jesus: Son of David, a New Moses, a Son of God," in *Thou*

The discussion of the problem climaxes with the two forms "Symmetrie" and "Chiasmus" and the author comments "der Urheber für geschlossene Formen ist kein Grieche, sondern ein Hebräer, da die Anordnung eines literarischen Stückes in dazartigen Formen NUR vom Semitischen her verstanden werden kann" The closed form which he mentions is the symmetry, a-b-a construction or Chiasmus a-b-c...d...c-b-a. These appear all through Matthew, z.B.:

Matth 16:13 - Matth 17:27

- A. Peter 16, 13-20
- B. Christ prophesies his suffering 16, 21
- C. Peter reprimanded 16, 22-23
- Jesu Nachfolge 16, 24-28 ("The Cross" v. 24)
- climax - D. Transfiguration of Christ 17, 1-9
- C. Wiederkommen des Elias 17, 10-13 ("leiden" v. 12)
- All disciples reprimanded 17, 14-21
- B. Christ prophesies his suffering 17, 22-23
- A. Peter 17, 24-27

That's just a sample, but this pattern is in every part of Matthew. Of course other literary forms are also discussed. Are you familiar with this one? What do you think of it? He thinks it's the proof for Matthew. z.B. again the whole gospel:

- I. NO speech ch 1-4
- II. Speech to the people 5-7
- III. to the disciples 10
- IV. Parables 13
- V. To the disciples 19
- VI. Speech to the people 24-25
- VII. NO speech 26-28

FIGURE 6. Page 2, presenting two strong chiasms in the Gospel of Matthew. Courtesy John W. Welch.

[page] 2

The discussion of the problem climaxes with the two forms “symmetrie” and “chiasmus” and the author comments “der Urheber für geschlossene Formen ist kein Grieche, sondern ein Hebräer, da die Anordnung eines literarischen Stückes in derartigen Formen NUR vom Semitischen her verstanden werden kann.” [*the originator of closed forms was not a Greek, but rather a Hebrew, because the arrangement of a literary composition in this form can only have arisen from a Semite.*] The closed form which he mentions is the symmetry, a–b–a construction or chiasmus a–b–c . . . d . . . c–b–a. These appear all through Matthew, z[um] B[eispiel]<sup>6</sup>:

Matt 16:13–Matt 17:27

- A. Peter 16:13–20
- B. Christ prophecies his suffering 16:21
- C. Peter reprimanded 16:22–23  
Jesu Nachfolge [*followers of Jesus*] 16:24–28  
 (“the cross” v. 24)
- climax—
- D. Transfiguration of Christ 17:1–9
- C. Wiederkommen des Elias [*return of Elijah*] 17:10–13  
 (“leiden” [*to suffer*] v. 12)  
All disciples reprimanded 17:14–21
- B. Christ prophecies his suffering 17:22–23
- A. Peter 17:24–27

That’s just a sample,<sup>7</sup> but this pattern is in every part of Matthew. Of course other literary forms are also discussed. Are you familiar with this one? What do you think of it? He thinks it’s the proof for Matthew. z.B. again the whole gospel [*of Matthew, as displayed and on Gaechter’s p. 13*]:

- I. No Speech ch 1–4
- II. Speech to the people 5–7
- III. To the disciples 10
- IV. Parables 13
- V. To the disciples 18
- VI. Speech to the people 24–25
- VII. No speech 26–28

---

*Art the Christ, the Son of the Living God*, ed. Eric D. Huntsman, Lincoln H. Blumell, and Tyler J. Griffin (Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University; Deseret Book, 2018), 67–91; and Jordan Lavender, “Jesus and the Torah in Matthew,” *BYU Studies* 63, no. 2 (2024): 99–124.

6. *Zum Beispiel*, abbreviated as “z.B.,” means “for example.”

7. Found in Gaechter, 30.

-3-

Every time Gaechter said "Hurray for matthew! The details prove it!" I cringed a bit and thought, "Hey, not too loud there, The Book of mormon ought to be doing the same. Well you can guess the result, I went searching for Symmetry and Chiasmus in The Book of mormon and found a mint in Nibley's favorite chapters Mosiah 2-5. Not one Chiasmus but 5 (perhaps 7)! which are all together a Symmetrical system. no accident but a ceremonial ritual steeped in semitish style. If it's good for matthew, how about Benjamin?

If you think there's something to it, I want to send you Gaechter's book and my notes on Mosiah 2-5  
Here's a sample Chiasmus Mosiah 2:9-27

- A. Purpose of The assembly v. 9
- B. What is man? v. 10-11
  - 1. "I am no more than mortal (than you)"
  - 2. "My entire strength comes from God"
- C. The Laws (civil order) of Benjamin's Kingdom 12-13
- D. Service v. 14-18
  - ↳ In the service of fellow man and God
  - ↳ "Labor to serve one another" v. 18
- climax E. Don't Thank me, Thank your heavenly king
  - 1. "live in peace one with another"
- D. Service v. 21
  - unprofitable servant
- C. The Laws of God's Kingdom v. 22
- B. What is man? v. 23-26
  - 2. "All belongs to The creator"
  - 1. "I am no more than dust (than you)" v. 26
- A. Purpose of assembly v. 27

FIGURE 7. Page 3, showing the chiasitic structure in Mosiah 2:9-27, the first of seven sections in Benjamin's ceremonial, coronation and covenantal speech. Courtesy John W. Welch.

[page] 3

Every time Gaechter said “Hurray for Matthew! The details prove it!” I cringed a bit and thought, “Hey, not too loud there, the Book of Mormon ought to be doing the same.” Well you can guess the result, I went searching for symmetry and chiasmus in the Book of Mormon and found a mint in Nibley’s favorite chapters Mosiah 2–5. Not one chiasmus but 5 (perhaps 7)! which are all together a symmetrical system. no accident but a ceremonial ritual steeped in semitic [*Semitic*] style. If it’s good for Matthew, how about [*for*] Benjamin?

If you think there’s something to it, I want to send you Gaechter’s book and my notes on Mosiah 2–5. Here’s a sample chiasmus Mosiah 2:9–27

- A. Purpose of the assembly v. 9
- B. What is man? v 10–11
  - 1. “I am no more than mortal (than you)”
  - 2. “My entire strength comes from God
- C. The Laws (civil order) of Benjamin’s kingdom 12–13
- D. Service v. 14–19
  - In the service of fellow man and God
  - “Labor to serve one another” v. 18
- climax E. Don’t thank me, Thank your heavenly king
  - “Live in peace one with another”
- D. Service v. 21
  - Unprofitable servant
- C. The Laws of God’s kingdom v. 22
- B. What is man? v. 23–26
  - 2. “All belongs to the Creator”
  - 1. “I am no more than dust (than you)” v. 26
- A. Purpose of the assembly v. 27

It works again and again. It's easy to tell when you've got one because everything fits, if you're on a wrong track, nothing fits.

- Perhaps the entire scheme could be arranged folgendermaßen:
- I. Give your thanks unto God for his service unto you (he created you) 2,9-2,27
  - II. Open rebellion against God brings no joy nor salvation. (children mentioned) 2,31-41
  - III. Angel's Proclamation of Christ (short speech) 3,2-10
  - IV. State of Man (children) 3,11-27
  - V. Benjamin's testimony of Christ (short symmetry) 4,4-10
  - VI. Harmony with God and fellow man brings peace, love, and joy (children mentioned) 4,11-30
  - VII. Take part in Christ's service - The Name (he sealed and begot you) 5,7-15  
(Ye are all children)

climaxes are glaring in several chaismus :

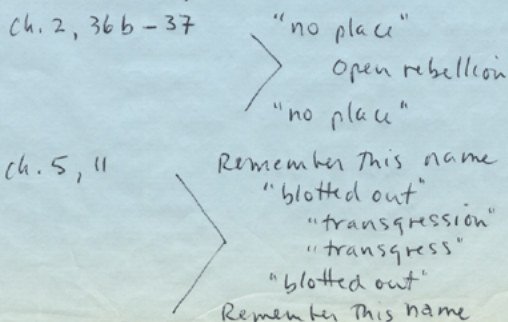


FIGURE 8. Page 4, outlining the seven parts of Benjamin's speech, with their respective centerpieces. Courtesy John W. Welch.

[page] 4

It works again and again. It's easy to tell when you've got one because everything fits, if you're on a wrong track, nothing fits.

Perhaps the entire scheme [*of Benjamin's overall speech*] could be arranged folgendermassen [*in the following way*]:

- I. Give your thanks unto God for his service unto you  
(he created you) 2:9–2:27
- II. Open rebellion against God brings no joy nor salvation  
(children mentioned) 2:31–41
- III. Angel's Proclamation [*sic*] of Christ  
(short speech) 3:2–10
- IV. State of Man (children) 3:11–27
- V. Benjamin's testimony of Christ  
(short symmetry) 4:4–10
- VI. Harmony with God and fellow man brings peace, love, and joy  
(children mentioned) 4:11–30
- VII. Take part in Christ's service—The Name  
(he sealed and begot you) 5:7–15  
(Ye are all children)

Climaxes are glaring [*sic*] in several chiasmus:

- Ch. 2:36b–37 “no place”  
                   Open rebellion  
                   “no place” [*the center of Benjamin's part II*]
- Ch. 5:11           Remember this name  
                           “blotted out”  
                           “transgression”  
                           “transgress”  
                           “blotted out”  
                   Remember this name<sup>8</sup>

---

8. These lines stand at the very center of part VII in Benjamin's Speech.

-5- The use of children is also consistent - an interesting thread. Also interesting is the way the two parallel parts compliment each other, for example  
 Earthly laws (2,12-13) → God's laws (2,22)  
 or Wo! Wo! (4,18) → wo! wo! (4,23)  
 found on the left hand of God (5,10) → left hand of God (5,12)  
 (a very strange expression)

Other give-aways are the parallel beginnings in the 4th chapter. v. 5-6 = v. 11

compare v. 7 = v. 12  
 faith and works.

or D. "And moreover" (3,17) ...

E. "like little children" v. 18b  
 climax { Natural man is an enemy 19a  
 like a child (specific traits) 19b

D. "And moreover" (3,20) ...

And so on and so forth. Has the topic already been elaborately described? I had never heard of it.

Two problems follow:

1) Mos. 1, 4 indicates Egyptian influence. Could we show <sup>with</sup> that Prof. Gaechter's idea is not Hebrew but Egyptian? 2) Was this literary form common in Lehi's day and before?

The Book of Mormon will do great things. Isaiah knew it, I know it. My testimony has made it a pleasure to be serving a mission! please respond.

P.S. Just as with Matthew, we have no original Hebrew Book of Mormon manuscript. The parallels are amazing. sincerely, John W. Welch

FIGURE 9. Page 5, pointing out escalations and significant dublets in Benjamin's compositional style. Courtesy John W. Welch.

[page] 5

The use of children is also consistent—an interesting thread. Also interesting is the way the two parallel parts compliment [*sic*] each other, for example

Earthly laws (2:12–13) → God’s laws (2:22)<sup>9</sup>

or Wo! Wo! (4:18) → [*echoed by*] Wo! Wo! (4:23)

found on the left hand of God (5:10) → left hand of God (5:12b)

(a very strange expression)

Other give-aways [*sic*] are the parallel beginnings in the 4th chapter [*of Mosiah*]:

v. 5–6 = v. 11

compare v. 7 = v. 12

faith and works

or D. “And moreover” (3:17) . . .

E. like little children” v. 18b

Climax Natural man is an enemy 19a

like a child (specific traits) 19b

D. “And moreover (3:20) . . .

An[d] so on and so forth. Has the topic [of chiasmus] already been elaborately described? I had never heard of it.

Two problems follow:

1) Mos. 1:4 indicates egyptian [*sic*] influence. Could we show that Prof. Gaechter’s idea is not Hebrew but Egyptian? 2) Was this literary form common in Lehi’s day and before?

The Book of Mormon will do great things. Isaiah knew it, I know it. My testimony has made it a pleasure to be serving a mission! please respond.

Sincerely,

John W. Welch

P.S. Just as with Matthew, we have no original Hebrew Book of Mormon manuscript. The parallels are amazing.

---

9. Benjamin not only repeats the word *law* but elevates earthly laws to heavenly laws in their counterpart.



Obviously, I was excited about the things I had discovered on Wednesday morning in Mosiah 5, in Mosiah 2 and 3, and also in King Benjamin's speech overall. Later that day, I located more chiasmic structures back in 1 Nephi. On Thursday, my companion and I showed those results to several people, including a couple erudite priests in Regensburg. I was learning a lot, and my mind was racing with further questions and possible implications.

I promptly mailed this letter, dated August 18, 1967, in Regensburg, as the postage cancelation on the envelope indicates. As we usually did, I probably dropped this letter in the mailbox in front of Regensburg's main post office. On that morning, my companion and I would have ridden our bicycles past that post office on our way to the Regensburg railroad station to meet two missionaries in our district, coming from Landshut for a "split" with us, arriving at 9:09 a.m.<sup>10</sup> I would go to Landshut with Elder Wimmer, while my companion, Elder Barry Barrus, would stay in Regensburg with Wimmer's junior companion for three days. In Landshut I would speak with a Catholic graduate student who was studying at the Pontifical Biblical Institute in Rome. He was actually quite intrigued by the idea of chiasmus in the New Testament and was friendly toward my enthusiasm for the idea of it being found in the Book of Mormon.

In addition, the date stamp on the top of the first page (see fig. 5) of this five-page letter shows that it was officially received by Robert Thomas's office at BYU already on Tuesday, August 22.

On the back side of this envelope, I wrote my return address (Gesandtenstrasse 10), which happened to be right next door to the main Catholic bookstore in Regensburg, the Pustet Buchhandlung. It was there, a couple weeks earlier, that I had bought the only copy on their shelves of Paul Gaechter's 1965 monograph entitled *Die literarische Kunst im Matthäus-Evangelium* (*The Literary Art in the Gospel of Matthew*), published as number seven in the *Stuttgarter Bibelstudien*, a series published by the Catholic Bible-Works Press in Stuttgart, Germany. Gaechter was a Jesuit scholar, born in Switzerland, who became the chancellor or academic vice-president of the University of Innsbruck, Austria.

On the back of the envelope, I had remarked, using my red scripture-marking pen: "... it's as exciting as skiing! and you can't break your leg at

---

10. My journal indicates that as the district leader, I then returned one of those two elders back to Landshut on Monday, August 21, where I spoke that evening, concluding our companion swap that weekend.

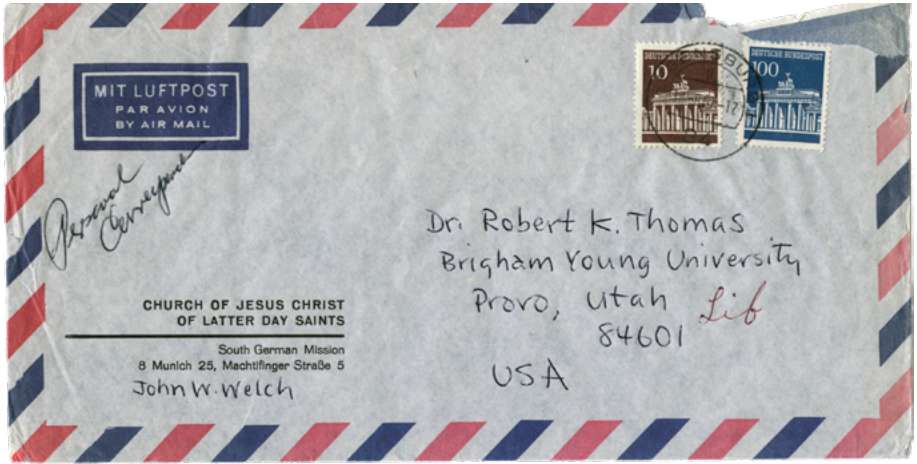


FIGURE 10. This letter was mailed on Friday morning, August 18, 1967, as the post mark shows. On the front side of this envelope the words “Personal Correspondence” were apparently added by President Thomas’s secretary. Without that notation, this letter would likely never have been given back to me. Courtesy John W. Welch.



FIGURE 11. Reverse side of envelope. I couldn’t suppress my excitement and hoped to grab President Thomas’s attention. Courtesy John W. Welch.

it either!” as a friendly inside joke with Professor Thomas. While being a student in his Honors Book of Mormon class in the 1965 winter semester, I broke my left leg in a BYU skiing class and thus was on crutches almost all that semester. Still, I never missed any of Professor Thomas’s enriching lectures on the Book of Mormon, even though that class met on the top floor of the David O. McKay Building.

## Letter Home to My Family

On that same Friday, August 18, 1967, I also wrote to my family, as our mission president strongly encouraged us to do each “D-Day” (diversion day, now known as preparation day), which was every Friday. I include this second letter here, because chiasmus also came up there. I wrote this letter on the same kind of blue airmail stationery and mailed it to my grandmother Eulalia Welch in Logan, Utah, because my parents and younger siblings would be there on Tuesday, having driven up from southern California that weekend.

In this second letter from August 18, 1967, after some chitchat, I mention that I was then on a train from Regensburg to Landshut, where I was scheduled to speak in sacrament meeting on Sunday and would also give a fireside on Monday evening. (I’m guessing that I mentioned chiasmus in those two talks.) I also noted here that “my mission is *well past* ½ gone.” Counting my two months in the LTM (Language Training Mission), that was true, but in fact, August 16—the precise day on which I first found chiasmus in the Book of Mormon in King Benjamin’s speech—was the exact midpoint of my twenty-four months in Germany. In my appointment book, I had marked that day as the one-year anniversary in my two years in the South German Mission. So, the discovery of chiasmus—fittingly—fell on the midpoint of my mission.

But most of all, I was excited to tell my grandmother (who unfortunately and unexpectedly died five months later on January 15, 1968, before I returned home) about my discovery of chiasmus in the Book of Mormon. She was a gifted poet and a reader, having served together with her husband, my grandfather, as teaching missionaries and administrators over the Māori Agricultural College in New Zealand in the early 1920s, so I hoped she would find this discovery interesting. I also wanted my mother and father to hear about it right away. And indeed, my father quickly wrote me back. He appropriately cautioned me about trying to prove the Book of Mormon to people. I responded to him on September 11, saying, “I know what you mean about proving it to other people, but I feel that the Lord has made it clear enough that man can choose and judge for himself.”<sup>11</sup>

On the bottom of the first page of that letter to my grandmother, I wrote about the “discovery I made on Wed[nesday] morning.” I mentioned that “we’ve shown it [on Thursday] to professors and theologians and no one can refute it!”

---

11. Quoted in Welch, “The Discovery of Chiasmus,” 83.

On the second page, I then gave an example from Paul Gaechter's book, showing chiasmus in Matthew 16:13–17:27.<sup>12</sup>

I wrote that I had already found five, and maybe seven, chiasms in the Book of Mormon, but “not without a big push from the Lord,” referring to my having been awakened very early Wednesday morning, being prompted to get out of bed and look for chiasmus in the Book of Mormon. In this letter, I also mentioned chiasmus in Mosiah 2:9–27 and 5:11. I then commented, “I’ve got pages of details and comparisons work[ed] out.”

I added a note to my father, asking him if he knew of anything (or could find anything) written on the subject. Knowing that it was found in Matthew, I wondered if it was also found earlier in the Old Testament, perhaps in Isaiah or Jeremiah, which would be around Lehi's time. I even asked him about whether chiasmus in the Book of Mormon might have been influenced by Egyptian style “as Mosiah 1:4 suggests.” In my letter earlier that Friday morning I had asked Professor Thomas something similar, as by then I was already looking back to Lehi, Nephi, and the plates of brass as the possible source of King Benjamin's use of chiasmus.

The following is a verbatim transcript of this second letter, which was written that morning while on the train to Landshut. Those three handwritten pages are reproduced here, because they contain further unique information, even though they contain no German or other points of documentary manuscript significance.<sup>13</sup> I wrote the letter to my grandmother on the same type of blue air-mail stationery and mailed upon arrival in Landshut, about forty-five minutes later.



FIGURE 12. Myself on the left, with Elder Barry Barrus, my companion, beside a public water fountain near our apartment. Courtesy John W. Welch.

12. See Paul Gaechter, *Die literarische Kunst im Matthäus-Evangelium*, Stuttgarter Bibel-Studien 7 (Katholisches Bibelwerk, 1965), 30; see also Paul Gaechter, *Das Matthäus Evangelium* (Tyrolia, 1963), 548–84, where two years earlier Gaechter had called special attention to chiasmic literary structures in Matt. 1–28 (pp. 16–17); in the framework of Matt. 5:1–2 and 7:24–27 (p. 141); in the Beatitudes (p. 145), in Matt. 8–9 (p. 259); in Matt. 11:2–12:21, and 12:22–12:45 (p. 356); in a reverse ordering of Matt. 13 by Revelation 13 (429); in the extended reverse words in Matt. 13:10–18 (p. 435), the center of Matthew's gospel; also in the key elements in Matt. 14:1–16:20 (p. 469); in the nine element chiasm of Matt. 16:13–17:27 (p. 548); in Matt. 20:17–21:27 (p. 641); and in the overriding six element structure in Matt. 26:1–28:20 (p. 826). These structures are clearly summarized in his seventy-five-page 1965 introductory study that I am so grateful to have read just a couple of weeks earlier.

13. The key lines at the bottom of this page were previously included in Welch, “Discovery of Chiasmus,” 82.

Regensburg den 18. Aug. 1967

Dear Grandmother,

Greetings from Germany! What a wonderful summer we've been having - gorgeous weather, inspirational work, and rich blessings! It sounds like the whole family has gone in different directions seeking the summer leisure - if any of them intrude in on you, say "hi" for me and let them know that we've got big things on the boards!

Please excuse my scrawling handwriting - not only has it gotten worse but moreover I'm bouncing along the German Railway now headed for Landshut, a city in my district. Sunday I'll be the speaker in church, the rest of the time will be spent with my elders there. We really have a good district and love to work together for the Lord.

How have you been? Well and busy, I hope. I realize often how fast time and opportunity pass - can you imagine that my mission is well past 1/2 gone? Including the first trip, I've been in Europe almost 20 months now! I am looking forward to seeing you, sooner than it seems!

Right now about all I can think about is a discovery I made on Wed. morning. It's a great idea and I'm really excited about it - we've shown it to professors and theologians and no one can refute it! I can't explain it all but follow closely:

A few weeks ago I found a book called "The Literary Art in the Gospel of Matthew" and for some reason couldn't put it down - it was simply great - The author argued brilliantly a new theory proving the original hebraic tradition of Matthew, a difficult problem, for we have only Greek manuscripts of the Gospel. That Matt. was translated from Hebrew and that it is genuine can not be denied, so he says

FIGURE 13. Page 1 of my letter that same morning to my family, having shared chiasms in the Book of Mormon the two days before with several informed but unsuspecting people. Courtesy John W. Welch.

[page 1] Regensburg, August 18, 1967

Dear Grandmother,

Greetings from Germany! What a wonderful summer we've been having—gorgeous weather, inspirational work, and rich blessings! It sounds like the whole family has gone in different directions seeking the summer leisure—if any of them intrude in on you, say “hi” for me and let them know that we've got big things on the boards!

Please excuse my scrawling handwriting—not only has it gotten worse, but moreover I'm bouncing along the German Railway now headed for Landshut, a city in my district. Sunday I'll be the speaker in church; the rest of the time will be spent with my elders there. We really have a good district and love to work together for the Lord.

How have you been? Well and busy, I hope. I realize often how fast time and opportunity pass—Can you imagine that my mission is well past ½ gone? Including the first trip, I've been in Europe almost 20 months now! I am looking forward to seeing you, sooner than it seems!

Right now about all I can think about is a discovery I made on Wed[nesday] morning. It's a great idea and I'm really excited about it—we've shown it to professors and theologians and no one can refute it! I can't explain it all but follow closely: A few weeks ago I found a book called “The Literary Art in the Gospel of Matthew” and for some reason couldn't put it down—it was simply great—the author argued brilliantly a new theory proving the original Hebraic tradition of Matthew, a difficult problem, for we have only Greek manuscripts of the Gospel. That Matthew was translated from Hebrew and that it is genuine can not be denied, so he says [page 2] because of an exclusively Aramaic literary form which occurs repeatedly throughout the Gospel. This form is a closed form which he calls “symmetry” or “chiasmus,” constructed as follows:

a–b–a, or a–b–c . . . d . . . c–b–a.

For example:

A.	Peter as foundation	Matt 16:13–20
B.	Prophecy of suffering	16:21
C.	Peter scolded	16:22–23
D.	Follow Christ (“cross” v. 24)	16:24–28
E.	Transfiguration	17:1–9
D.	Return of Elijah (“suffer” v. 12)	17:10–13
C.	All apostles scolded	17:20–21
B.	Prophecy of suffering	17:22–23
A.	Peter as temple director	17:24–27

See the symmetry! It's subtle. It's an acid test for a Hebraic narrative!

Well, you can guess what comes next. Every time that book said, “Hurrah for Matt[hew],” my mind was convinced that I could find the same in The book of Mormon! Well, that’s just what I’ve done, not once, but 5 (perhaps 7!) and not without a big push from the Lord. Benjamin was a scholar and Mosiah 2–5 is loaded with this very form!

For example:

Mosiah 2:9–27 (The first one)

- |    |                                       |                   |
|----|---------------------------------------|-------------------|
| A. | Purpose of assembly                   | v. 9              |
| B. | What is man?<br>“no more than mortal” | v. 10–11          |
| C. | Laws of Benjamin’s kingdom            | v. 12–13          |
| D. | Service<br>“one another”              | v. 14–17          |
| E. | Climax—thank your Heavenly King       |                   |
| D. | Service<br>“one <u>with</u> another”  | v. 21             |
| C. | Laws of God’s Kingdom                 | v. 22             |
| B. | What is man?<br>“no more than dust”   | v. 23–26<br>v. 26 |
| A. | Purpose of the assembly               | v. 27             |

If it’s good for Matthew, it’s good for Benjamin!

Other climaxes are dead giveaways (ch. 5:11)!

[page 3] Oh well, you get the idea. It’s a new idea (or is something like that already in print??) I couldn’t imagine where.

Tell me what you think of the possibilities—it’s a very convincing demonstration. I’ve got pages of details and comparisons work[ed] out.<sup>14</sup>

Enough.

Hope all the travels make it safe and successfully!

All have my love and thanks.

Gram, keep everyone on the right trail!

With love,

Jack

[P.S.] Dad—is there anything written on the subject? Is the form as old as Isaiah (Lehi) or Jeremiah? Could we show that it was highly influenced by Egyptian style as Mosiah 1:4 suggests?

---

14. On Thursday, I had started looking for chiasms in 1 Nephi and had spotted right away a few possibilities.

## Conclusion

These two letters offer several important insights into the discovery and explication of chiasmus in the Book of Mormon. In telling the story about what happened that Wednesday morning, August 16, 1967, I usually point out that it occurred early in the morning. It was still dark enough outside that I needed to turn on a light to read at our table. My companion was still sound asleep, and I woke him up about 5:45 a.m. to tell him with excitement what I had just found in the previous hour and a quarter or so. Thus, I figure the prompting must have come to me about 4:30 a.m. I am normally a sound sleeper and don't usually wake up at that time.

What woke me up? As I mention on page two of my letter to my grandmother and family, this happened partly because I had been mulling over the day or two before some of the implications of many things that Paul Gaechter had written. But more than that, it all came with "a big push from the Lord." As I recall, the words that woke me up said: "If it is evidence of Hebrew style in the Gospel of Matthew, *it must be* evidence of Hebrew style in the Book of Mormon." I had probably wondered something along that line the previous day or two as I was working my way through Gaechter's eighty-two-page paperback in German, but the full force of that idea did not hit me until that early morning wake-up call. And, knowing my usual sleep habits, I like to point out that the real miracle that morning was that I got out of bed.

Why did I begin by looking that morning in Mosiah 4, instead of in 1 Nephi or any other place? Before we turned off the lights on Tuesday night at our regular bedtime of 22:30 (German time), my companion and I had been reading in Mosiah 4. So, I opened the book where we happened to leave off. I read one page at the end of Mosiah 4, and not seeing anything there, I turned over page 139, which ended with Mosiah 5:7, and suddenly spotted in the middle in the lefthand column, in Mosiah 5:11, the midpoint of the first chiasm found in the Book of Mormon (see fig. 14).

The reason that turning point jumped off the page at me was because of the way in which two long German words, *Übertretung*, *Übertretung* [transgression, transgress], had been stacked on the inside margin in the middle of that page.<sup>15</sup> While such a "stack" is not usually thought to be the best typesetting practice, it was probably unavoidable here because of the length of those two German words. For me, it was like a spotlight, drawing my attention exactly to that center point. And this central repetition in that German edition of the Book of Mormon is more precise than it is in the English. In English, the two words at the turning point

---

15. For a picture of that page, see Welch, "The Discovery of Chiasmus," 79.

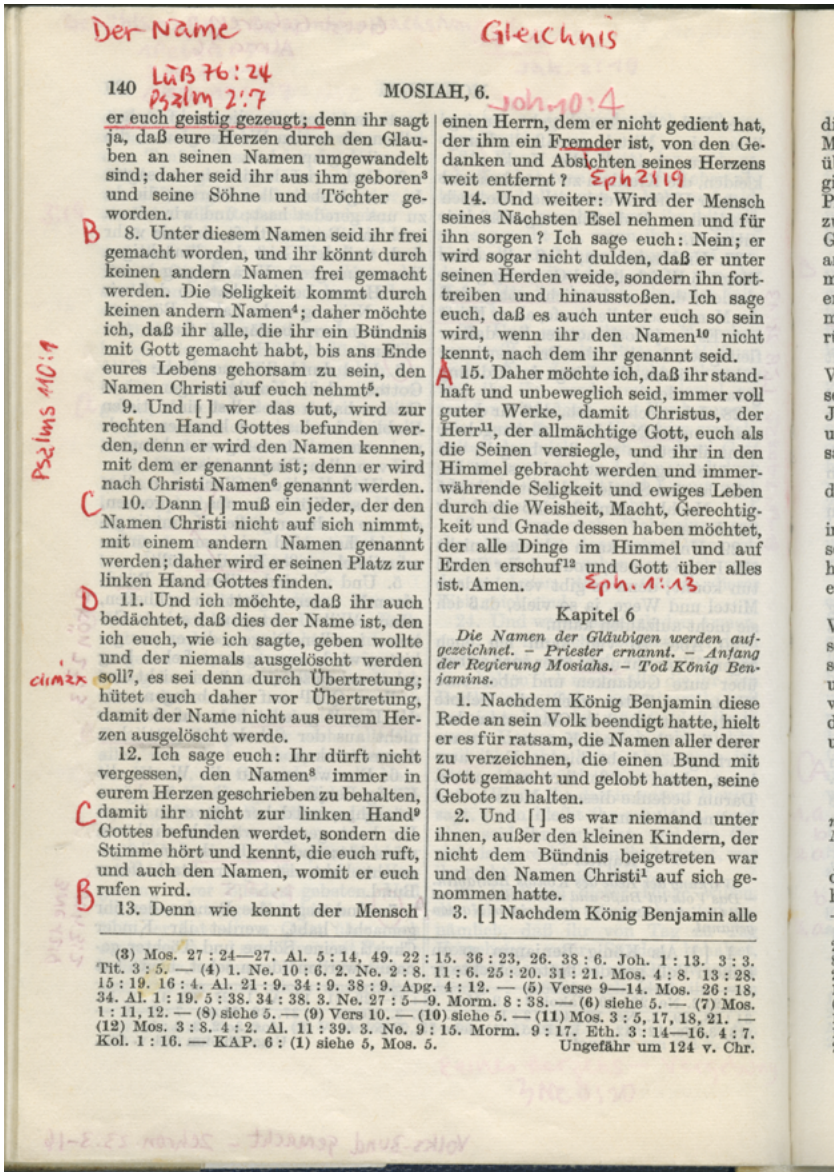


FIGURE 14. Page of Mosiah 5 with the markings and marginal notations I made on or shortly after August 18, 1967. Courtesy John W. Welch.

are *transgression* (a noun) and *transgress* (a verb), but in German they had been rendered as two identical nouns. That exact repetition made that central turning point even more obvious to me.

After that, I noticed the three terms “left hand of God,” “name,” and “blotted out,” which are then repeated in the opposite order, “blotted out,” “name,” “left hand of God,” coming right before and right after the turning point. In the margin of verses 7–15, I wrote the letters A, B, C, D, C, B, A (see fig. 14).

Next, I wondered if King Benjamin had done anything else like this in his written speech that he circulated and delivered at the coronation of his son.<sup>16</sup> And so, I looked back to the beginning of that speech in Mosiah 2, where I quickly noticed the symmetry in Mosiah 2:9–27, which centers on verse 19, where Benjamin asks, if I your “king” deserve any “thanks” for being in your service, then how much more should you “thank” your “heavenly King.” In my German Book of Mormon, I marked that point as the climax of that section.

I then noted another symmetry in Mosiah 2:31–41, centering on 2:37.

And, on the bottom of the next page in my Book of Mormon, I sketched out an A, B, C, B, A pattern in Mosiah 3:11–27, centering on 3:19, repeating twice “the natural man,” “the natural man,” which turns out to be exact midpoint of King Benjamin’s entire speech (see fig. 15).

After noticing these chiasms, I eagerly woke up my companion, Elder Barrus. After all, by then it was time to get up. I remember startling him, saying something like, “Bruder! It’s here!”<sup>17</sup> I showed him quickly what I had found; he was interested, but it was too early to be very excited.

As we went out on the streets that morning, we showed a few random people about this pattern in the Book of Mormon. Of course, they had no idea what I was talking about. But that afternoon and on Thursday, we knocked on the office doors of some priests and even of a professor. I had been hoping to find something in the Book of Mormon that would interest those scholarly devoted Catholics, if only a little bit. Those initial conversations did not turn out very well, but they helped us to see how we could improve our delivery of this idea and humbly show others what had been found.

A year later, on my way home from Germany, I was given permission to visit Paul Gaechter in his cloister in Innsbruck, Austria, not far from our mission office in Munich where I had been serving. I had previously

---

16. See the eventual development of this topic in John W. Welch and Stephen D. Ricks, eds., *King Benjamin’s Speech: “That Ye May Learn Wisdom”* (Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies, 1998), especially chapters 3, 8, and 11.

17. *Bruder* is the German cognate of the English word *brother*.

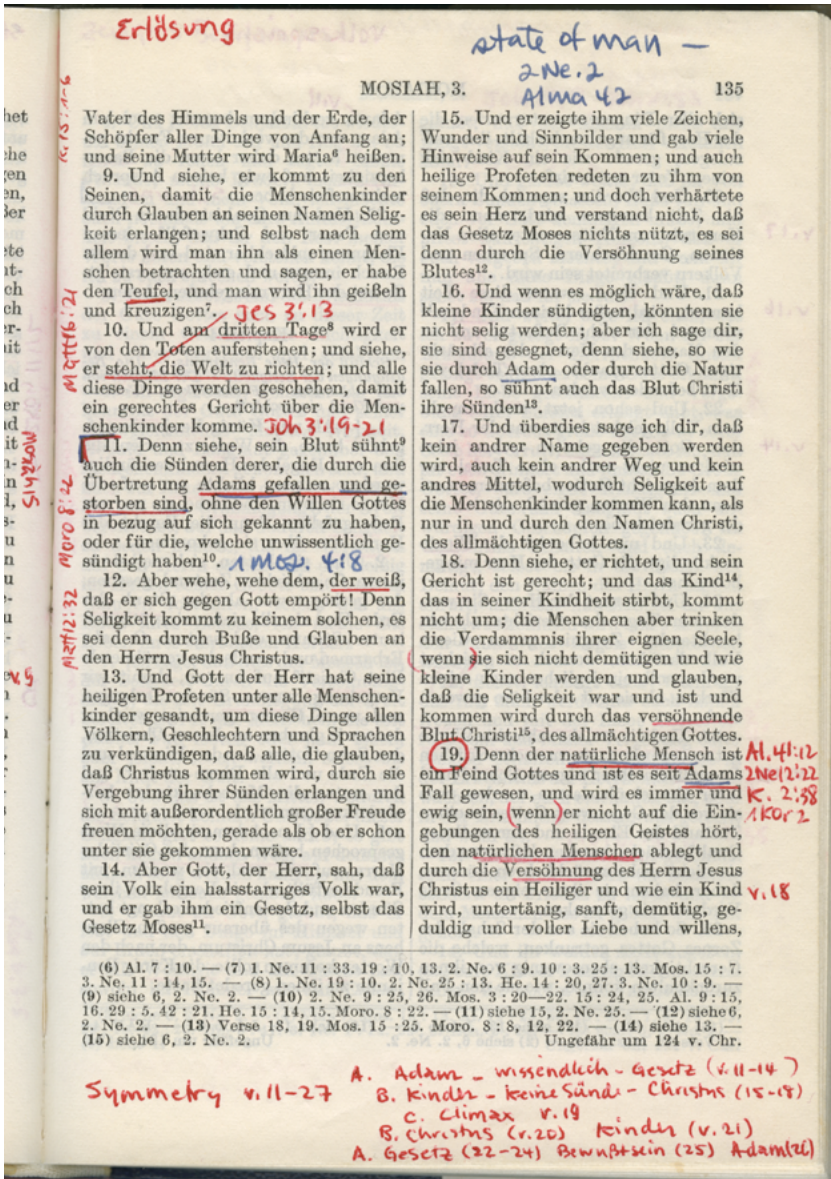


FIGURE 15. Page of Mosiah 3 with the markings and marginal notations I made on or shortly after August 18, 1967. Courtesy John W. Welch.

corresponded with him, and I wanted, most of all, to thank him. He had become the provost (academic vice president) at the University of Innsbruck. Happily, on that occasion, my presentation and our extended conversation was very gratifying for both of us.<sup>18</sup>

Looking back on this unusual experience, fifty-eight years later, I am most struck by the number of “coincidences” that had to be in place for this to have just happened.

My own preparations had begun when I was in high school, when I just happened to have a Sunday school teacher, Douglas L. Callister, who was in law school at the University of Southern California. He had been entranced by Hugh Nibley, one of his teachers at BYU in the 1950s. He told us numerous inspiring Nibley stories. They motivated me at the time, as I was taking four years of AP Latin in high school.

Then, in 1964, I just happened to enroll as a freshman at BYU, instead of pursuing other attractive options. And there, I just happened to take Hugh Nibley’s Book of Mormon class my first semester. Because I had read some of Nibley’s books and articles a few years before and had learned a fair amount about his overall approach to using historical linguistics in studying the scriptures, seeing connections between the Book of Mormon and various civilizations throughout the ancient Near East and Egypt made great sense to me.

Then I would just happen to study at the University of Salzburg the next year, where I learned academic German and saw how German universities worked. I realized how, with my Austrian student credentials (my *Studienausweis*), I could attend any class at any institution of higher learning anywhere in Austria or Germany.

And then, somehow, I received my mission call, while I was there in Salzburg, to serve for two years just next door in South Germany—which had been one of Hugh Nibley’s mission areas in the 1920s.

A year later, I would be assigned to serve in the obscure, two-thousand-year-old Catholic center of German Catholicism: Regensburg. There, I just happened to see a schedule, posted on Domplatz, listing the 1967 summer academic lectures within the University of Regensburg system. One of those about the New Testament happened to catch my eye, and conveniently it would be held on our Friday preparation day, just down the street from our apartment. I happened to know how a lecture notice of that kind worked in the German academic system, and that lecture turned out to be about the recent book authored by Paul Gaechter—about Matthew’s use of chiasmus.

---

18. See the account of our conversation in Welch, “Discovery of Chiasmus,” 84–85.

Also, I had befriended one of the clerks at the main Catholic bookstore there, and after that lecture, there just happened to be an unusual copy of Gaechter's new monograph about Matthew's use of chiasmus on one of their shelves. And that was just the beginning.

When I returned to BYU after my mission in September 1968, Hugh Nibley was the first person I told about chiasmus. After a lengthy conversation with him in his dining room, which lasted into the wee hours of the night, he offered, on the spot, to serve on my committee if I would write this all up and then do a master's thesis on chiasmus in ancient literatures and in the Book of Mormon. I was only a junior at that time, but all of that soon came to pass in remarkable ways in 1969 and 1970.<sup>19</sup> Such coincidences and blessings just kept unfolding.

Regarding the timing of this discovery, it might also seem noteworthy that in August 1967, some Egyptian papyri surfaced at the New York Metropolitan Museum. While that development brought on a wave of problems for the Church in some scholarly circles, one can wonder if the timing of the discovery of chiasmus in the Book of Mormon at that very same time was somehow fortune's way of coincidentally keeping the scales balanced. As an often-stated aphorism says, "Coincidence is God's way of remaining anonymous."

Now, in addition to all these several coincidences, one may now include the fortunate survival of my letter, written and sent on August 18, 1967, to Robert K. Thomas. As a signal of the patient, not-entirely-anonymous working of God's hands behind the scenes in our lives, all this makes even more manifest what a marvelous work and a miraculous wonder the Book of Mormon and the restoration of the gospel of Jesus Christ truly are.<sup>20</sup>

---

John W. Welch is the Robert K. Thomas Professor of Law, Emeritus, at Brigham Young University.

---

19. Welch, "Chiasmus in the Book of Mormon," 69–84; John W. Welch, *A Study Relating Chiasmus in the Book of Mormon to Chiasmus in the Old Testament, Ugaritic Epics, Homer, and Selected Greek and Latin Authors* (master's thesis, Brigham Young University, 1970).

20. For many more documents regarding the overall chiasmus story, see the online archive at Scripture Central, <https://scripturecentral.org/archive/all>; and the John W. Welch Chiasmus Papers, BYU Special Collections, Harold B. Lee Library, [https://archives.lib.byu.edu/repositories/ltpsc/resources/upb\\_mss3776](https://archives.lib.byu.edu/repositories/ltpsc/resources/upb_mss3776); and on the web at Chiasmus Resources, <https://chiasmusresources.org/>.