Nephi's Outline

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There are at least two distinct reasons to examine the literary structure of the Book of Mormon. For those who recognize the Book of Mormon as sacred scripture, such a study can enhance their appreciation of its teachings. For others, a literary analysis provides a subtle test of the skeptical hypothesis that this book is a unique product of early nineteenth-century American folk culture. Although the Book of Mormon has been of central importance to both of these groups for a century and a half, it is surprising to discover that very few members of either group have examined it from literary or cultural perspectives. Hugh Nibley's invaluable comparison of the Book of Mormon with ancient Near Eastern culture and John Welch's ground-breaking discovery of ancient literary patterns in the Book of Mormon are among the few such analyses, as is Richard Bushman's insightful and sensitive comparison of Nephite political assumptions to those of early nineteenth-century Americans.[1]

The scriptural text which we refer to as the small plates of Nephi was apparently known to the ancient Nephites first as the plates of Nephi and later as the plates of Jacob, a name which distinguished it from the plates of Nephi or the large plates.[2] Although Nephi refers frequently to the commandment to write the small plates, it becomes apparent only late in his narrative that this commandment was not received until some thirty years after the departure from Jerusalem. Furthermore, it also appears that it took him approximately ten years to write the first twenty-five chapters.[3] This ten-year writing period, based on a perspective of thirty years, gave Nephi both the distance and the time he needed to devise a highly complex account with a carefully fashioned rhetorical structure.

As I undertook an analysis of Nephi's writings, I was first impressed with their episodic character. Nephi's story reports a number of diverse, selected events which, on first impression, seemed loosely structured and plagued with the author's repetitious moralizing. There seemed to be no clear reason for dividing 1 Nephi from the first several chapters of 2 Nephi, as the latter book continues the same story.

Renewed analysis, however, reveals that 1 Nephi is part of an extended argument based on a thesis which the author announces near the beginning of his narrative and repeats in many forms throughout the book: "Behold, I, Nephi, *will show unto you* that the tender mercies of the Lord are over all those whom he hath chosen, because of their faith, to make

them mighty even unto the power of deliverance" (1 Nephi 1:20).[4] Taking this thesis for a guide and rereading 1 Nephi, we discover that the entire book is a compilation of approximately thirty proofs of this idea that the Lord will deliver those who obey him and endure in faith.[5]

Nephi supports his thesis with a wide variety of evidence designed to appeal especially to the "stiff-necked" and "hardhearted," such as his own brothers, as well as to the righteous. He reports six incidents during his family's journey to the promised land in which the Lord interposes himself: by the power of his spirit, by the appearance and speech of an angel, by his voice, by shock, and also by his power in a tempest at sea. Each of these stories demonstrates that victory does finally come to the faithful in even the most difficult assignments.

An additional range of evidence is drawn from similar stories and experiences from the history of Israel as recorded on the brass plates. Prophecies from the brass plates constitute a further series of proofs for Nephi's thesis, as do the visions and prophecies received by him and his father. Most significant of these proofs is the atonement of Jesus Christ, as revealed to the prophets. For, ultimately, it is by the power of the Atonement that men can be delivered from their greatest enemy, if they will be faithful.

Nephi's faith, as manifest in his writings, is consistently poised against the murmurings and doubtings of his faithless brothers. His primary purpose is to persuade those whose faith might be weak, but who may be receptive. Laman and Lemuel must be persuaded many times; Sariah only once. Nephi repeats his thesis frequently in one form or another so that we cannot fail to see how each of his proofs constitutes independent evidence of the mercy shown by the Lord to the faithful. Finally, the seriousness and the importance of the thesis are dramatically emphasized because both Lehi and Nephi consciously stake their lives on the thesis—with wonderful results.

The recognition that 1 Nephi is a carefully developed argument reveals Nephi as a great champion of the teaching that men must rely on the arm of the Lord and that the Lord will always prepare the way for the faithful to fulfill the commandments given to them, regardless of the opposition they face.

Yet further analysis reveals a far more complex structure. At the beginning of the book, Nephi explains that he will first make an abridgment of his father's record, then an account of his own doings. Beginning at chapter 10, he states that he will now commence with an account of his own proceedings, reign, and ministry. At the end of chapter 9, as at the end of chapter 22 (the last chapter in 1 Nephi), Nephi concludes with a restatement of his thesis, punctuated by the formal ending, "And thus it is.

Amen."[6] The suggestion seems to be that there are two records, an abridgment of Lehi's record followed by an account of Nephi's proceedings, but it those few verses were removed, we would never suspect two records. The story is continuous; Nephi is the narrator of the entire book from beginning to end. And the very next verse continues the speech of Lehi that was interrupted to end chapter 9. We known of Lehi's teachings through Nephi's report, not through a condensation of Lehi's own record. So why does Nephi divide the book in his seemingly arbitrary manner? He even mentions parenthetically that "it mattereth not" to him that he be particular to give a full account of all of the doings of his father . . . "for the fulness of mine intent is that I [Nephi] 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 6:3–4).

The answer seems to be not that there are two distinct records in 1 Nephi, but rather that the book is divided into two parallel structures. The verses previously referred to serve primarily to call our attention to that structural division. A comparison of these two structural halves reveals that the major elements of each portion are directly parallel to each other (see Table 1).[7]

This table raises two questions: First, are the similarities as real as they appear to be, and were they intentionally designed by Nephi? Second, why are elements 3, 5, 9, and 11 rearranged in Nephi's account? The answers that emerge to these questions are very helpful in understanding Nephi's overall intent.

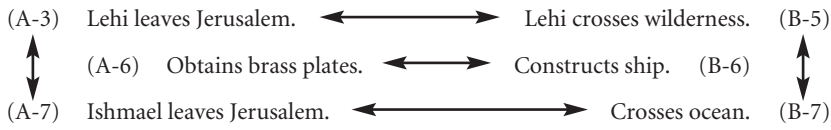
One way to answer the first question is simply to read through the entire book making a detailed comparison. The more obvious parallels appearing in the same order in both accounts are— the statements that Nephi will make a record of his proceedings, the record of the visions and prophecies of Lehi, the discussions of Nephi's desire to know the mysteries of God and his subsequent prophecies and visions, the mention of seeds gathered for use in the promised land, Nephi's discussion of the distinctions between the two sets of plates he is making, the preaching and prophesying to Laman and Lemuel, and the formal endings conjoined with restatements of Nephi's thesis.

The other elements of the comparison are not so obviously parallel. These include the six stories of experiences from the journey of Lehi's family, comprising the three longest elements in both Nephi's and Lehi's accounts (see Table 2 below). As we begin to compare the three stories which appear in Lehi's account with the three appearing in Nephi's, it becomes evident that there are conscious pairings between the two groups. There are too many points of direct resemblance on each side for coincidence.

TABLE 1
Lehi's Account Compared to Nephi's Account

(A) 1 Nephi 1–9 (Lehi's Account)	(B) 1 Nephi 10–22 (Nephi's Account)
1. Nephi makes a record (or account) of his proceedings but first gives an abridgment of Lehi's record (1:1–3, 16–17).	1. Nephi now commences to give an account of his proceedings, reign, and ministry but first "must speak somewhat of the things of [his] father, and . . . brethren" (10:1).
2. Nephi gives a brief account of Lehi's prophecies to the Jews, based on visions he received in Jerusalem (1:5–15, 19).	2. Nephi reports Lehi's prophecies about the Jews, as given to Laman and Lemuel in the wilderness (10:2–15)
3. Lehi is commanded to journey into the wilderness, and he pitches his tent in the valley he names Lemuel (2:1–7).	3. Nephi desires to see, hear, and know these mysteries; he is shown a great vision by the Spirit of the Lord and by an angel (10:17–14:30).
4. Lehi teaches and exhorts his sons, and they are confounded (2:8–15).	4. Nephi instructs and exhorts his brothers, and they are confounded (15:6–16:6)
5. Nephi desires to know the mysteries of God; he is visited by the Holy Spirit and is spoken to by the Lord (2:16–3:1).	5. Lehi is commanded to journey further into the wilderness, and he pitches his tent in the land he names Bountiful (16:9–17:6).
6. Lehi is commanded in a dream to send his sons for the brass plates of Laban; this he does (3:2–5:22).	6. Nephi is commanded by the voice of the Lord to construct a ship; this he does (17:6–18:4).
7. In response to a command from the Lord, Lehi sends for Ishmael's family (7:1–22).	7. In response to a command from the Lord, Lehi enters the ship and then sails (18:5–23).
8. They gather seeds of every (8:1).	8. Lehi's family plants the seeds and reaps in abundance (18:24).
9. Lehi reports to his sons the great vision received in the wilderness (8:2–35).	9. Nephi details the distinctions between the two sets of plates (19:1–7).
10. Lehi exhorts Laman and Lemuel, preaching and prophesying to them (8:36–38).	10. Nephi preaches and prophesies to Laman and Lemuel, his descendants, and all Israel (19:7–21:26)
11. Nephi makes a distinction between the two sets of plates (9:1–5).	11. To explain Isaiah's prophecies to his brothers, Nephi draws on the great vision given to him and Lehi (22:1–28).
12. Nephi ends with a general formulation of his thesis and the formal punctuation: "And thus it is. Amen" (9:6).	12. Nephi ends with the highest formulation of his thesis, focusing on the salvation of man, and with the formal punctuation: "And thus it is. Amen" (22:29–31).

TABLE 2
(Arrows Connect Stories Containing Parallels)



Compare, for example, the story of the trip to bring back Ishmael and his family (A-7) with the story of the journey in the ship (B-7):

1. Both accounts are prefaced in the usual way by a command given to Lehi.

2. In each case Nephi's brothers first become rebellious because of their afflictions and lack of faith.

3. After Nephi's exhortations, they rebel against him and bind him with cords.

4. In the first story Nephi is given power from God to burst his bonds, but in the second he specifies that the Lord permitted him to be bound for a purpose.

5. In both instances one of Ishmael's daughters and others plead with Laman and Lemuel to reconcile themselves with Nephi.

6. In the first story they are successful, but in the second these pleas fail and the order brothers are persuaded to relent only when the power of God threatens them with destruction by a storm.

7. In each case relief comes as Nephi prays.

8. Both times Laman and Lemuel repent of their actions.

This analysis shows eight analogous items in the same order in two completely different stories which occupy parallel positions in the structural halves of 1 Nephi. The strength of the claim of parallelism between these two stories does not rest primarily on the uniqueness of the matched items, as only two elements in the series of eight are unique to these two stories. Rather, as in examples which will follow, the strength of the claim rests on the precise order of the parallel elements within each episode.

Analysis reveals this same parallel of details in each of the sets of stories listed in Table 1. Combined with the obvious parallels mentioned earlier, this provides very strong support for dividing 1 Nephi into two parallel accounts, the first labeled "Lehi's account" and the second "Nephi's account." Nephi did not rigorously divide the two accounts[8] but rather created the appearance of a division primarily to provide us with a guide to the formal structure of the book.

The answer to the second questions, concerning the switched ordering of some of the parallel elements, is more complex. Nephi's desire to know the mysteries of God and his experience with the Spirit is reported in Lehi's account (A-5) as part of the story of Lehi's departure into the wilderness. But in Nephi's account (B-3), the discussion of his desire to know the mysteries of God and the recounting of his vision occur as an appendage to Lehi's report of the tree of life, not as part of the parallel story of the journey to the land of Bountiful (B-5). The question remains: if a parallel were intended, why did Nephi allow the reversal of parallel elements to occur twice? One observation which may provide an answer is that these reversals suggest the pattern of chiasmus.

Briefly stated, chiasmus is a peculiar and long-forgotten literary form present in the very earliest Hebrew writing as well as in other ancient Near Eastern works.[9] In the Hebrew tradition it developed into a rhetorical device in which two sets of parallel elements are presented. The first set is presented 1, 2, 3, etc., but order of presentation is inverted in the second set, 3, 2, 1. An element is often centered between the two sets, usually placed there for emphasis. When the apparently disordered elements of 1 Nephi (Table 1, p. 134) are abstracted and placed together, two chiasms result, as shown in Tables 3 and 4.

As this suggestion of chiastic structure is explored, a further parallel emerges between the halves of 1 Nephi. Each forms a separate chiasm centering on its most important story, the expedition to obtain the brass plates in the first half (A) and the construction of the ship in the second (B).[10] Table 5 outlines this chiastic structure in the first nine chapters of 1 Nephi.

Again the question arises: are such general parallels as Lehi's taking his family into the wilderness and Ishmael's taking his family into the wilderness really sufficiently similar to give them a coordinate location in the formal structure of a chiasm? As in the preceding analysis, a detailed comparison makes the parallels even more evident. There are eight elements in these two stories which occur in the same order.

1. Both open with a family going into the wilderness because of the Lord's command to Lehi.

2. This departure is followed in both instances by the murmuring and rebellion of Laman and Lemuel, who desire to return to Jerusalem.

3. In each case, Laman and Lemuel are then admonished—in the first episode by Lehi, in the second by Nephi.

4. Lehi testifies in the first story that Jerusalem will be destroyed, and in the second story Nephi testifies of the same.

5. In the first episode Laman and Lemuel seek to kill their father, and at the same point in the second they seek to kill Nephi.

TABLE 3

LEHI'S ACCOUNT

(A-3) Lehi is commanded to journey into the wilderness, and he pitches his tent in the valley he names Lemuel.

(A-4) Lehi teaches and exhorts his sons, and they are confounded.

(A-5) Nephi desires to know the mysteries of God; he is visited by the Holy Spirit and is spoken to by the Lord.

NEPHI'S ACCOUNT

(B-3) Nephi desires to see, hear, and know these mysteries; he is shown a great vision by the Spirit of the Lord and by an angel.

(B-4) Nephi instructs and exhorts his brothers, and they are confounded.

(B-5) Lehi is commanded to journey further into the wilderness, and he pitches his tent in the land he names Bountiful.

TABLE 4

LEHI'S ACCOUNT

(A-9) Lehi reports to his sons details of the great vision received in the wilderness.

(A-10) Lehi exhorts Laman and Lemuel, preaching and prophesying to them.

(A-11) Nephi makes a distinction between the two sets of plates.

NEPHI'S ACCOUNT

(B-9) Nephi details the distinctions between the two sets of plates.

(B-10) Nephi preaches and prophesies to Laman and Lemuel, his descendants, and all Israel.

(B-11) To explain Isaiah's prophecies to his brothers, Nephi draws on the great vision given to him and Lehi.

6. In the first story Lehi is spared as he confounds Laman and Lemuel by the power of the Spirit, and in the second story Nephi is spared as he bursts his bonds through the power of God.

7. Both stories then report the submission of the rebellious brothers: in the first case as they obey their father and in the second as they seek their brother's forgiveness.

8. Each story ends at Lehi's tent.

TABLE 5
Chiasmus in 1 Nephi 1–9(Lehi's Account)

1. Nephi discusses his record, and he testifies it is true (1:1–3).
   2. Lehi's early visions are reported, followed by his preaching and prophesying to the Jews (1:6–15, 18–20).
      3. Lehi takes his family into the wilderness (2:2–15).
         4. The Lord speaks prophecies to Nephi about Lehi's seed (2:19–24).
            5. Lehi's sons obtain the brass plates, and Nephi records the most striking example of the murmuring of his faithless brothers (3:2–5:16).
         4'. Lehi, filled with the Spirit, prophesies about his seed (5:17–19; 7:1).
      3'. Ishmael takes his family into the wilderness (7:2–22).
   2'. Lehi's tree of live vision is reported, followed by his prophecies and preaching to Laman and Lemuel (8:2–38).
1'. Nephi again discusses his record, and he records his testimony (9:1–6).

Again we have such a wealth of exactly ordered detail that the intended parallelism is hard to deny. Yet here we have compared the Ishmael story to a different story than the one to which it was compared earlier. It is striking that Nephi was able to write each of these stories so that he could use them in parallel construction with two other stories which themselves do not occur as parallels.

This parallel construction is largely facilitated by the single overall pattern in which all six stories are cast. Each begins with a divine command to the prophet Lehi which leads to a conflict between his rebellious, faithless sons and the obedient, faithful Nephi. In each case the resolution of the conflict is facilitated by some demonstration of divine power, and the

command of God is fulfilled by the faithful. In most cases the rebellion of Laman and Lemuel ends in a measure of submission or repentance as Lehi or Nephi forgives them. The lesser details of each story and the variations in the order of the elements are the marks which identify parallel accounts.

The reader will find a similar system of parallels in all four lesser stories of 1 Nephi (see Table 2, p.135). To show this we must first examine the chiastic structure of 1 Nephi 10–22, as it is outlined in Table 6. Many of the parallels of this chiasm are self-explanatory. The structural requirements of this chiasm explain why Lehi's exposition of his own vision of the tree of life and the prophecies of the Jews and gentiles must be left out in the first report and inserted at this later point. Furthermore, we can now see why Nephi's discussion of how one can come to know the mysteries of God is in a slightly different order in the second half of 1 Nephi as compared to its occurrence in the first half. Its position in the chiasm of the second half apparently has priority.

Again the cautious reader may doubt that all of these chiasms are intentional. But detailed analysis of two stories—the story of Lehi and his family traveling in the wilderness between the valley of Lemuel and the land of Bountiful (B-5) and the story of their journey by ship to the promised land (B-7)—will provide initial grounds for taking these parallels seriously.

1. Each story begins as the voice of the Lord commands Lehi to depart on a journey.

2. In both instances the group gathers all their provisions and their seeds. (It is noteworthy that the only three references to these seeds occur exactly in the parallels that have been mentioned.)

3. In the first they depart across the river; in the second they put forth into the sea.

4. The journey has barely begun before Nephi's brothers begin murmuring-in the first case because of the difficulties resulting from the loss of Nephi's bow, and in the second because they have forgotten the divine power that has brought them there.

5. In the first story Nephi successfully rebukes the murmurers, but in the second he has no such success.

6. Because of his success in the first story, the families receive instructions from the Liahona or "director," which, Nephi explains, works only by faith. At the corresponding point in the second story, the director ceases functioning. the parallel statement in the first story gives the explanation for the failure of the compass in the second story.

7. The death of Ishmael, the afflictions of his daughters, and the attempts of Laman and Lemuel to kill Lehi and Nephi are paralleled in the second story by the report of Lehi and Sariah's grief (almost unto death) and suffering due to the sins of Laman and Lemuel.

TABLE 6
Chiasmus in 1 Nephi 10–22 (Nephi's Account)

1. Lehi expands on his great vision, detailing prophecies about the Jews and gentiles (10:1–16).
   2. Nephi explains that all men can know the mysteries of God by the power of the Holy Ghost (10:17–22).
      3. Nephi reports the great visions and prophecies given to him (11–14).
         4. Overcome by the hardness of his brethren, Nephi interprets the great vision to his family, rehearsing one of Isaiah's prophecies as support (15:2–16:5).
            5. Lehi takes his family further into the wilderness (16:9–17:6).
               6. Nephi builds a ship and records his most complete reply to the murmuring of his brothers (17:7–18:4).
            5'. Lehi takes his family across the ocean in the ship (18:5–25).
         4'. Concerned for those at Jerusalem, Nephi writes for his descendants and all the house of Israel and explains the ancient prophecies of a Redeemer (19:3–23).
      3'. Nephi quotes chapters of a prophecy from Isaiah which parallels portions of his own great vision (20–21).
   2'. Nephi explains to his brethren that prophecies are only to be understood by the same Spirit that also manifested these things to the prophets (22:1–3).
1'. Nephi offers a final summary of the prophecies about the Jews and the gentiles, drawing primarily from the language of the great vision but also from the brass plates(22:3–28).

8. In the first story the voice of the Lord chastens Laman and Lemuel, thus sparing the lives of Lehi and Nephi. In the second only the Lord's power in the storm can soften Laman and Lemuel's hearts.

9. In each case, the chastening is followed by a period of travel. In the first story, the Lord nourishes the group for eight years in the wilderness. In the second, Nephi guides the ship for many days by following the compass (which now functions perfectly).

10. The first story concludes as the families arrive in the land Bountiful, pitch their tents, and find much fruit and honey. The second story ends as they arrive in the promised land, pitch their tents, find beasts in the forest and a variety of ores.

A first reading of these two stories reveals a certain dissimilarity. During the march through the wilderness (B-5) two separate crises occur: the incident with Nephi's bow and the death of Ishmael; each is followed by rebellion and resolution. However, the list of parallel elements between the stories holds true because Nephi, in effect, makes two crises out of the episode on the ship by excluding part of it on first telling and then going on to a detailed account of the omitted section, treating it structurally as a second episode. This skillful construction orders the events of the second story so that they correspond neatly to those of the first story, confirming that Nephi intended the parallelism.

The combination of ordinary and inverted parallels presented in Tables 1, 5, and 6 suggests a complex set of relationships among the six stories of 1 Nephi (see Table 2, p. 135). Stories A-6 and B-6 parallel each other as center points on Tables 1, 5, and 6. The parallel functions of A-6 and B-6 are emphasized by the facts that (1) these are the only two stories that are answer the central issue of 1 Nephi, as will be explained. But the chiastic structures in each half of 1 Nephi (Tables 5 and 6) combined with the direct parallels between the halves (Table 1) indicate that each of the other four stories (A-3, A-7, B-5, and B-7) should have important parallels with *two* other stories to form a second set of parallel narrations. We have shown that A-7 is designed as a parallel for both A-3 and B-7 and that B-7 also parallels B-5. It remains to be seen whether A-3 and B-5 also fit the suggested pattern. Again we note that two stories may be parallel to a third story without being parallel to each other (A-3 is not parallel to B-7; B-5 is not parallel to A-7).

The strongest parallel is the most obvious one: both stories (A-3 and B-5) recount Lehi's journeys in the wilderness. The balanced and ingenious symmetry of the other pairs of stories does not exist here, because A-3 relates the events preceding and following one three-day march, while B-5 relates the events of two short marches plus a summary of the following eight years in the wilderness. Some further evidences of intended parallelism, although not as strong, include the following:

1. Both stories are preceded by verses which state that Lehi had kept all of the commandments he had received from God and that he (A-3) and Nephi (B-5) had been greatly blessed by God.

2. Each story begins with the same elements: the Lord commands Lehi to take his family into the wilderness, they gather provisions, and they depart.

3. In both accounts they pitch their tents after a three-or four-day journey and Lehi names the campsite.

4. When Laman and Lemuel rebel, they are confounded: in the first story by Lehi "filled with the Spirit" and in the second by Nephi speaking "with all the energies" of his soul.

5. Finally, Nephi breaks B-5 into two parts; in both accounts he details the rebellion and chastening of his brothers as a postscript to the stories of the journey. (Although this device adequately establishes the parallel elements in stories B-5 and B-7, it does not have the same effect with A-3.)

Stories A-3 and B-5 have almost as many matched elements as do the other pairs of stories. Even though the elements are not identically ordered, the combination of several parallel elements with some ordered elements, plus the fact that these two stories contain all the wilderness travels, confirms the overall parallelism suggested in the charts.

I have shown that 1 Nephi has a complex structure based on both standard and inverted parallelism, but I have not yet explored the reasons for parallels. Significant ideas can be emphasized by their placement in a chiasm. Alma does this in Alma 36 (see p. 203 of this issue) to call attention to the brief yet crucial central message of his account, "the coming of one Jesus Christ . . . to atone for the sins of the world" (Alma 36:17). This statement is both the turning point in his dramatic story and an explanation for the important changes in his life which he details in the remainder of the chiasm.[11]

Analysis of 1 Nephi shows that, not only are A-6 and B-6 related by their central locations in parts A and B respectively, but these are also the only two stories written in chiastic form,[12] as is shown in Tables 7 and 8.

Several important insights are revealed by the chiastic structure of the story of obtaining the brass plates of Laban. The most frequently quoted version of Nephi's thesis—

> I will go and do the things which the Lord hath commanded, for I know that the Lord giveth no commandments unto the children of men, save he shall prepare a way for them that they may accomplish the thing which he commandeth them (1 Nephi 3:7)—

is emphasized by the chiastically parallel testimony of Sariah, stated in almost identical phrases. It is important that each of these testimonies is underscored by the rejoicing of Lehi, who first announced the thesis and who now finds it firmly rooted in the hearts of his wife and son. This may be one reason why Nephi saw the first half of the book as his father's record.

TABLE 7
Obtaining the Brass Plates

1. Lehi summarizes the contents of the brass plates, mentioning his genealogy (3:3).
   2. Nephi testifies to his thesis—Lehi is glad (3:7–8).
      3. Nephi attempts to slay Laman (3:9–14).
         4. Lehi's sons are sorrowful, but Nephi exhorts them (3:14–21).
            5. Nephi fails to obtain the brass plates by using gold and silver (3:22–27).
               6. Laman and Lemuel murmur, and they beat Nephi and Sam (3:28).
                  7. An angel intervenes, saying that the Lord will help them obtain the plates (3:29–30).
                     8. Laman and Lemuel murmur again! (3:31).
                  7'. Nephi elaborates the angel's message and refers to Moses and the Israelites (4:1–3).
               6'. Laman and Lemuel continue to murmur, but they follow Nephi reluctantly (4:4–5).
            5'. The Spirit leads Nephi to obtain the plates (4:6–38).
         4'. Sariah is sorrowful, and Lehi exhorts her (5:1–6).
      3'. Nephi spares Zoram's life (4:30–37).*
   2'. Sariah testifies to Nephi's thesis—Lehi is glad (5:7–9).
1'. Lehi reviews the contents of the brass plates, with special reference to his genealogy (5:10–19).

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* In Table 7, elements 3' and 4' are reversed from the order in which Nephi reports them. He could have avoided this reversal only by having Laman and Lemuel sorrowing before Laban tried to slay Laman or by alternating between the events at Jerusalem and Sariah's sorrowing in the camp. Neither of these options would have been acceptable from a narrative viewpoint; and certainly the reversal does not flaw the literary structure, as chiasmus requires careful, distinct order, but not mathematical precision.

TABLE 8
Constructing the Ship

1. Nephi is commanded to construct a ship (17:8).
   2. The Lord tells Nephi where to find ore for tools (17:9–10).
      3. The Lord blesses them miraculously in the wilderness, that they might know they are led by him (17:11–15).
         4. Laman and Lemuel murmur and complain, not believing that Nephi can build a ship (17:17–19).
            5. Laman and Lemuel repeat the elements of their standing complaint against Nephi and Lehi, denying both that they have been led or supported by God and that the Jews are wicked or can be destroyed (17:17–22).
               6. Nephi responds to the murmuring of Laman and Lemuel in unprecedented detail of his thesis, invoking the ancient history of Israel as the evidence that they would be most likely to accept (17:23–43).
            5'. Nephi summarizes the great errors and sins of Laman and Lemuel, comparing them to the wicked Jews, and testifies to the power and goodness of God (17:44–47).
         4'. Nephi, in the power of the Spirit, testifies that if God commanded he could not only build a ship but could even make water earth (17:48:–52).
      3'. Laman and Lemuel are shaken by the power of the Lord in Nephi, and they testify thereof (17:53–55).
   2'. The Lord shows Nephi how to build the ship (18:1–3).
1'. The ship is finished, the workmanship "exceeding fine" (18:4).

Other interesting details include the parallel between Laban's attempt to slay Laman and Nephi's desire to spare the life of Zoram, Laban's servant. The character comparison between the wicked Laban and the faithful Nephi is very important in helping us to understand the justification for Nephi's midnight execution of Laban. Also, the failure of Lehi's sons to obtain the brass plates through the worldy power of riches is paralleled dramatically by Nephi's miraculous success in obtaining the plates as he is led by the Spirit "not knowing beforehand the things which [he] should do" (1 Nephi 4:6). These comparisons strongly support Nephi's thesis that the Lord protects and aids the faithful.

The central point of this chiasm is but another of the oftrepeated reports that Laman and Lemuel murmured. But in this case, they are murmuring not only because of their real or imagined afflictions but also in direct response to an angelic visitation and to reassurance that the Lord will bless them. This is indeed murmuring par excellence! But why does Nephi choose their murmuring as the central point of both this story and Lehi's entire account (the first nine chapters of the book)? This story alone does not answer the question fully; we must compare it with its counterpart in Nephi's record (the second half of the book). The second of these two great stories in 1 Nephi—the building of the ship—is also a chiasm, but it has a sharply contrasting central point (see Table 8).[13]

The story of obtaining the brass plates (Table 7) focuses on the most remarkable instance of Laman and Lemuel's murmuring and is followed immediately by a highly abbreviated account of Nephi's response to them, which includes references to the Exodus from Egypt under Moses' inspired leadership. It is significant that the central point of this last chiasm (Table 8) is the longest verbatim account of Nephi's response to the murmuring of his brothers, and that it is the only other response in which he specifically cites as primary evidence for his thesis the interventions of God on behalf of his faithful servants during the Exodus.

Lehi's account focuses on the murmuring; Nephi's account centers on his own response to that murmuring. Together these focal points give in microcosm the story of 1 Nephi and, simultaneously, explain the distinction between 1 and 2 Nephi. The book of 1 Nephi is addressed to Laman and Lemuel—to an audience which seems to accept the powerful interventions of God in ancient times, as recorded in the history of Israel, but which cannot accept and live the teachings of God's prophet, Spirit, or angel, though the message is the same. It contains Nephi's tireless, ingenious, and inspired effort to appeal to that audience, which included many of his own descendants, and to convince them that Jesus would be the Christ and that through the power of the Atonement he could overcome the effects of all the evil in the world. The transition between the two books is effected by

Nephi's growing emphasis on the importance of the coming Redeemer, seen in his exhortations to Laman and Lemuel in chapter 19 and in the final reiteration of his thesis, in which he testifies that those who obey God and endure to the end shall be saved at the last day.

In his second book Nephi addresses a much narrower audience: those who embrace the thesis of the first book. Here he emphasizes a selection of prophecies and speeches on redemption and supports these teachings with the fact that he, his father, his brother Jacob, and many ancient prophets such as Isaiah had been redeemed of God. He documents what it means to be redeemed and spells out in a powerful conclusion how we might take advantage of the great blessing of redemption, which is made available to all men through the Atonement.

Because of Nephi's persistent concern in the first book to advance his thesis that God preserves the faithful, and because of his focus on a marginal audience, Nephi chose not to include several important items: Lehi's last instructions and blessings for his sons; the Song of Nephi; the teachings of Jacob, Lehi, and Nephi on the Redemption; the teachings and prophecies of Isaiah on the Atonement; and Nephi's detailed discussion of the doctrine of Christ. He incorporates these passages in 2nd Nephi, which appears to be a collection of odds and ends, its only unifying features being the thematic emphasis on redemption and the general aim at a higher or more spiritually receptive audience than Laman and Lemuel.[14] It is interesting that the cursing of Laman and Lemuel, who were "cut off from the presence of God" (the antithesis of redemption), is mentioned frequently in 2 Nephi.

We do not have access to Nephi's ideas about the rules governing the use of literary structures. Modern studies of the Bible and other ancient literature have produced a variety of inductive reconstructions of stylistic rules the ancients may have used. The rules for chiasmus were obviously very broad, and they varied considerably from one culture and period to another; a combination of short precise chiasms and long general chiastic structures characterizes the ancient Hebrew authors[15] and some of the writers in the Book of Mormon. Without direct access to their rules it is difficult to analyze fully the structure of their writings. In constructing hypothetical outlines we are not certain how to handle sections of text that do not fall neatly into a pattern or that fit a pattern in an obviously unbalanced way.

This analysis leaves some unanswered questions. Several suggested parallel sections of the text are not the same length. Usually the second member of each pair is longer than the first, and in a few cases it is many times as long. There are a few scattered verses, usually repetitive or parenthetical, that are simply left over; I have not attempted to force them into

the pattern. The pattern outlined above provide no extraordinary emphasis for the great dreams of Lehi and Nephi, though they do seem to explain why some of the accounts are so brief and others are interrupted. Also, the specific thesis of 1 Nephi may explain why the message of those dreams is not emphasized until 2 Nephi.

There are undoubtedly other aspects of my hypothesis which may raise doubts in the minds of readers. Whether or not the patterns outlined above are exactly right, however, there is ample evidence that Nephi was consciously working with rhetorical patterns and devices. In this article I have attempted to identify only a few such elements. As others are identified, the patterns suggested here will undoubtedly be revised or even replaced. The more such creative response there is to the hypothesis of this article, the more my objectives in writing it will be fulfilled.

This essay is not an attempt to detail the insights we can glean from the observation of an elaborate rhetorical structure in 1 Nephi. There are several reasons why I feel such an attempt would not have been appropriate. Rather, I have chosen simply to gesture in the direction of the central teachings I see emphasized.

My primary objective is twofold. On the one hand, I am hopeful that this initial effort will prove helpful to others who share my own convictions that this book was written and translated by prophets of God. I hope that it may not only help someone to understand better the prophets but also that it will encourage others to improve on these structural analyses. On the other hand, I hope to draw the attention of those who do not yet share my convictions to certain features of the Book of Mormon which simply cannot be explained away as products of nineteenth-century culture. As chiastic literary structures were not recognized in Hebrew literature until the middle of the century, it seems impossible that any modern man could have written the Book of Mormon. The only plausible explanation is the one Joseph Smith gave—the book is an accurate translation of an ancient work.

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1. Hugh Nibley, *An Approach to the Book of Mormon,* 2nd ed. (Salt Lake City, Utah: Deseret Book Co., 1976); John W. Welch, "Chiasmus in the Book of Mormon," *Brigham Young University Studies* 10 (Autumn 1969): 69–84; and Richard L. Bushman, "The Book of Mormon and the American Revolution," *BYU Studies* 17 (Autumn 1976): 3–20.

2. Jacob 3:13–14 (cf. 1 Nephi 9:2).

3. 2 Nephi 5:30 (cf. 1 Nephi 19:1–5); 2 Nephi 5:34. Certainly part of the reason it took Nephi so long to write these chapters was the difficulty of making and engraving gold plates; see Jacob 4:1.

4. Italics added.

5. Nephi's father, Lehi, is the first in the Book of Mormon to affirm this; see 1 Nephi 1:14.

6. 1 Nephi 1:11–17 (cf. 1:1–3); 10:1; 9:6; 22:31.

7. The numbering system used in this table is used throughout the article to identify and discuss the various stories in 1 Nephi.

8. The first nine chapters obviously contain several autobiographical sections which appear to be Nephi's substitutes for Lehi's secondhand accounts of Nephi's experiences.

9. For a more thorough explanation of chiasmus, see 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" (M.A. thesis, Brigham Young University, 1970).

10. These chiasms emerge when major adjacent items in Table 1 are combined. Welch proposes a different chiastic analysis of 1 Nephi which also recognizes the parallel between these key stories; ibid., p. 152.

11. Welch discusses Alma 36 in detail (Welch, "Chiasmus in the Book of Mormon," pp. 82–84).

12. Welch finds numerous chiastic details in this long passage (1 Nephi 3–5), but there seems to be no inconsistency between his findings and the full chiastic structure proposed here (see "A Study Relating Chiasmus," pp. 124–25, 159–60)

13. Cf. Welch's analysis of the chiastic arrangement of the words and phrases in the first half of the passage which I have outlined as a single chiasm (see "A Study Relating Chiasmus," pp. 162–64). This chiasm finally emerges with clarity, although it is more problematic. The major reason for this obscurity is the very long central section which must be treated as one item in the chiastic structure.

14. Welch does find one very general chiasm which provides at least a semblance of overall unity in 2 Nephi (see "Chiasmus in the Book of Mormon," a chapter in his forthcoming book, *Chiasmus in Antiquity,* ed. J. W. Welch).

15. Nils W. Lund, *Chiasmus in the New Testament* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1942), pp. 30–47.