

Chiasmus in Leviticus 24:13–23

Key Scripture Leviticus 24:13–23

Explanation Chiasmus is a style of writing known in antiquity and used by many ancient and some modern writers. It consists of arranging a series of words or ideas in one order, and then repeating it in reverse order. In the hands of a skillful writer, this literary form can serve several purposes. The repeating of key words in the two halves underlines the importance of the concepts they present. Furthermore, the main idea of the passage is emphasized by its placement at the turning point where the second half begins. Thus chiasms, in general, place their most important elements in the center. Chiasmus can be found in biblical texts, as Leviticus 24:13–23 demonstrates. It is one of the clearest examples of chiasmus in the Bible. In this case “breach for breach, eye for eye, tooth for tooth” is the central formulation. Other words important to the structure of the chiasm are italicized.

Source John W. Welch, “Chiasmus in Biblical Law: An Approach to the Structure of Legal Texts in the Hebrew Bible,” in *Jewish Law Association Studies IV*, ed. Bernard Jackson (Atlanta: Scholars, 1990), 5–22.

Chiasmus in Leviticus 24:13–23

And the Lord spake unto Moses, saying,

Bring forth him that hath *cursed without the camp*; and let all that heard him . . . *stone him*.

And thou shalt speak unto the children of Israel, saying,

Whosoever curseth his God shall bear his sin. . . . the *stranger*,
as [well as] he that is *born in the land*. . . .

And he that *killeth any man* shall surely be put to death.

And he that *killeth a beast* shall make it good; beast for
beast.

And if a man cause a *blemish* in his neighbour; as he
hath done, so shall it be done to him;

Breach for breach,
eye for eye,
tooth for tooth:

as he hath caused a *blemish* in a man, so shall it be
done to him again.

And he that *killeth a beast*, he shall restore it:

and he that *killeth a man*, he shall be put to death.

Ye shall have one manner of law, as well for the *stranger*, as for
one of your own country. . . .

And Moses spake to the children of Israel,

that they should bring forth him that had *cursed out of the camp*, and
stone him with stones.

And the children of Israel did as the Lord commanded Moses.