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# CHIASTIC STRUCTURING OF LARGE TEXTS: SECOND NEPHI AS A CASE STUDY<sup>1</sup>

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Noel B. Reynolds

**Abstract:** *In this important paper, Noel Reynolds extends his 1980 argument for the chiasmic structure of 1 Nephi to demonstrate that 2 Nephi can be seen as a matching structure with a similar nature. Taken together, these findings demonstrate that chiasmus is not a phenomenon that confines itself to the details of words and phrases at the level of scriptural verses but can extend to much larger units of meaning, allowing the rhetorical beauty and emphasis of their overall messages to shine more brilliantly when they are considered as purposefully crafted wholes.*

[**Editor’s Note:** Part of our book chapter reprint series, this article is reprinted here as a service to the LDS community. Original pagination and page numbers have necessarily changed, otherwise the reprint has the same content as the original.]

See Noel B. Reynolds, “Chiasmic Structuring of Large Texts: Second Nephi as a Case Study,” in “*To Seek the Law of the Lord*”: *Essays in Honor of John W. Welch*, ed. Paul Y. Hoskisson and Daniel C. Peterson (Orem, UT: The Interpreter Foundation, 2017), 333–50. Further information at <https://interpreterfoundation.org/books/to-see-the-law-of-the-lord-essays-in-honor-of-john-w-welch-2/>.]

**I**n 1967, John W. Welch was serving as a missionary in Germany and noticed a scholar’s explanation of chiasmus as a rhetorical

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<sup>1</sup> This paper began as a slide presentation to the Society for Mormon Philosophy and Theology at Brigham Young University, Provo, Utah, 8 October 2015, entitled “All the Learning of My Father.”

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

### **Rhetorical criticism in biblical studies**

About three centuries ago, a few European scholars — sometimes without any awareness of the parallel efforts of others — began to notice rhetorical structures featuring repetition and parallelism in the books of the Hebrew Bible. By the 19th century, a few had also begun to notice reverse parallelisms (chiasms) as well. Initially, it was short chiasms where the key terms were close together, as in poetry. But gradually chiasmus, like parallelism generally, was recognized as an organizational principle that could be used for larger texts — and even for entire books of prose. As a result of this growing body of rhetorical studies and reinterpretations of the books of the Old Testament, it is now widely recognized by biblical scholars that in the 8th and 7th centuries BCE Hebrew writers shared a highly developed set of rhetorical principles and techniques which distinguish their work dramatically from the ancient rhetorical traditions of Greece and Rome. These discoveries constitute a powerful step forward in our ability to understand Hebrew writing strategies and the messages their works promote.

My review of two recent books in this field presents a more comprehensive report on these developments.<sup>2</sup> In this paper, I will

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2. For a brief introduction to the current state of understanding as represented in Hebrew rhetorical studies, see Noel B. Reynolds, "The Return of Rhetorical Analysis to Bible Studies," *Interpreter: A Journal of Mormon Scripture* 17 (2016): 91–98, <http://www.mormoninterpreter.com/the-return-of-rhetorical-analysis-to-bible-studies/#more-7735>. The two works selected for this review were Jack R. Lundbom,

rely principally on the discovery that when longer texts are organized chiastically, the ordered elements of that chiasm will consist of subordinate units of text that will themselves be delimited and organized according to some rhetorical principle—and will not necessarily be best understood through a listing of all the repeated words, phrases, or topics that may occur in a chiastic order. In fact, these subordinate units may contain their own subordinate units—thus illustrating the principle of subordinating levels of rhetorical structure in Hebrew writing that some analysts have found extending to as many as eight levels when they include grammatical and philological parallels.<sup>3</sup>

Strong confirmation for this insight about rhetorical levels comes from J. P. Fokkelman's study of narrative patterns in the Hebrew bible. While he sees the single story as "the first level at which a text may largely be understood as an entity in itself," he also sees it fitting into higher levels of narrative organization all the way up to the book or even macro-plots that include multiple books and being composed in turn of lower levels of text down to the sentence and even to words and sounds. Reflecting on the universality of this type of organization in the Bible, he concludes that "the Hebrew storytellers must have received excellent literary training, as time and again they demonstrate a strong preconception of form, and consummate mastery of it at all these levels."<sup>4</sup>

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

In order to step up in the organization of the book, one can say that the most specific contribution of rhetorical analysis is the bringing to light of textual units composed of several pericopes, which I call sequences. Let me add that rhetorical analysis...does not seek to solely identify or extract a sequence or another from the book, but to see how the whole of the book is organized in sequences which cover the entirety of the text. The sequences are then organized in sections and the whole of the sections form the book.<sup>5</sup>

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*Biblical Rhetoric and Rhetorical Criticism* (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2013), and Roland Meynet, *Rhetorical Analysis: An Introduction to Biblical Rhetoric* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998).

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

4 J. P. Fokkelman, *Reading Biblical Narrative: An Introductory Guide* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1999), 161–62.

5 Meynet, *Rhetorical Analysis*, 171.

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

Nils Lund almost single-handedly launched the renewed interest in scholarly study of biblical chiasmus that grew so rapidly in the second half of the twentieth century. His 1942 publication of *Chiasmus in the New Testament* established beyond question the extensive role that this rhetorical form had played in the writing of both testaments of the Bible.<sup>6</sup> But it was left to the rhetorical criticism that emerged later to show how chiasmus fit in as one significant part of a much larger tool chest of Semitic rhetorical patterns that were developed in the 8<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> centuries and that were used extensively in most biblical writings from that period. The prominent leader of the form-criticism movement, James Muilenburg, took the occasion of his presidential address at the 1968 meeting of the Society for Biblical Literature to announce that the form-critical approach had reached its limits and to urge scholars to engage the new and broader approach of rhetorical criticism:

What I am interested in, above all, is in understanding the nature of Hebrew literary composition, in exhibiting the structural patterns that are employed for the fashioning of a literary unit, whether in poetry or in prose, and in discerning the many and various devices by which the predications are formulated and ordered into a unified whole. Such an enterprise I should describe as rhetoric and the methodology as rhetorical criticism.<sup>7</sup>

Jack Lundbom led and chronicled the subsequent rise of rhetorical criticism among American biblical scholars, while Roland Meynet has performed a similar role for the parallel, though largely independent continental movement.<sup>8</sup>

The growing understanding of and appreciation for Hebrew rhetoric of the 7<sup>th</sup> century suggests strongly that we look at the writings of Nephi—born and educated in 7<sup>th</sup> century Jerusalem, and who opens his

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<sup>6</sup> Nils Wilhelm Lund, *Chiasmus in the New Testament: A Study in the Form and Function of Chiastic Structures* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1942).

<sup>7</sup> James Muilenburg, "Form Criticism and Beyond," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 88, no. 1 (March 1969): 1–18, in particular, 8.

<sup>8</sup> See note 2 above.

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

There are a few general warnings that scholars of Hebrew rhetoric raise for those who want to develop these new skills. Commentators have noted that the rhetoric we have learned in the western tradition is *hypotactic* in that it is direct, open, and logical. Hebrew rhetoric, in contrast, is *paratactic* in that it tends to be indirect, making important points both through its structure and through words that may have their full meaning provided and adjusted gradually throughout the text.<sup>9</sup>

They also point out that different kinds of parallelism and repetition ground most rhetorical constructions. For example, the repetition of the same word or phrase at the beginning and end of a rhetorical unit forms an *inclusio*, which marks the boundaries for that unit.<sup>10</sup> Parallelism can take many forms and is often reversed, making the rhetorical unit chiasmic. Further, parallelism can occur in the repetition of words, synonyms, concepts, grammar, or even opposites (antithetical parallels). One of the most important guidelines offered is the necessity of locating the boundaries of rhetorical units, boundaries which can be signaled in verbal or structural terms, such as the *inclusio*—which is the device most frequently used in many texts.<sup>11</sup> Finally, Hebrew rhetoric is notable for its extensive resort to multiple rhetorical levels in longer texts. All rhetorical units may be subdivided into second-level rhetorical units with their own structures. And these can be subdivided again and again—going down several levels—all of which can employ any of the usual rhetorical structures.

### Rhetorical analysis of Second Nephi

All rhetorical writing is designed to persuade, and Nephi’s writings are no exception. While most Old Testament writings have provided modern

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

10 For a helpful explanation of *inclusio*, the history of this usage in studies of biblical rhetoric, and biblical examples of its use, see Lundbom, *Biblical Rhetoric*, 325–327.

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

scholars with bottomless opportunities for speculation about their true purposes, Nephi seems anxious to make his motives perfectly clear. In First Nephi he assures his readers that “the fullness of mine intent is that I may persuade men to come unto the God of Abraham and the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob and be saved” (1 Ne. 6:4). And in Second Nephi he says the same thing in a different way: “For we labor diligently to write, to persuade our children and also our brethren to believe in Christ and to be reconciled to God” (2 Ne. 25:23).<sup>12</sup>

In 1980 I published a proposed rhetorical outline of First Nephi.<sup>13</sup> While that effort will now require significant revision in light of these new developments in Hebrew rhetoric, I will focus this paper on a proposed rhetorical outline of Second Nephi. Should this exploratory outline prove persuasive, suggesting that Second Nephi does seem to be informed by the principles of Hebrew rhetoric, it would then be appropriate to proceed with a comprehensive rhetorical analysis of the entire book at all levels. In this experimental paper, only the central chapter will be analyzed at all four levels.

I will be following the procedure outlined by Muilenburg in his 1968 launch of rhetorical criticism as a sub-field of biblical studies regarding the delimitation of literary units in the text: “The first concern of the rhetorical critic...is to define the limits or scope of the literary unit, to recognize precisely where and how it begins and where and how it ends.” Further, “the literary unit is...an indissoluble whole, an artistic and creative unity, a unique formulation. The delimitation of the passage is essential if we are to learn how its major motif...is resolved.”<sup>14</sup> He then goes on to explain the second major concern of the rhetorical critic—recognizing the structure of a composition and discerning “the configuration of its component parts.” This will require a delineation of “the warp and woof out of which the literary fabric is woven” and identification of “the various rhetorical devices that are employed for marking,” 1) “the sequence and movement of the pericope,” and 2) “the shifts or breaks in the development of the writer’s thought.”<sup>15</sup>

Following Muilenburg’s guidelines, then the first task is to establish the boundaries of the principle rhetorical units in Second Nephi. It may be surprising to some that there has actually been some controversy

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

13 Noel B. Reynolds, “Nephi’s Outline,” *BYU Studies* 20 no. 2 (1980): 1–18.

14 Muilenburg, “Form Criticism,” 8–9.

15 *Ibid.*, 10.

about the appropriate rhetorical dividing line between First and Second Nephi. I will not give here all my reasons for rejecting the 1994 proposal of Fred Axelgard that the real dividing line is between 2 Nephi chapters 5 and 6, even though his theory has been revived recently by Joseph Spencer.<sup>16</sup> Rather, I will assume herein that the obvious division made by Nephi was intended to guide his readers in a straightforward way to see that one major rhetorical structure had ended and that a new rhetorical structure was beginning, in spite of the fact that there is no break in the story between the last verses of First Nephi and the opening verses of Second Nephi. An important principle of rhetorical interpretation is that one must let the author organize the material as he sees fit, without attempting to force it into interpreters' preconceived rhetorical forms or making it convey messages preferred by the interpreters. There is no question that the division into two books as we have it in today's Book of Mormon was present in the original translation, and presumably was taken directly from the very plates engraved by Nephi himself. In my judgment, it would take an extraordinarily powerful argument to undermine that presumption—far more powerful than what has been offered. I take, therefore, the entire Book of Second Nephi as the top level of rhetorical organization to be considered, and proceed to divide it into sub-units according to cues provided in the text. The hypothesis guiding these divisions is that Nephi, having been educated in 7<sup>th</sup>-century Jerusalem, may have incorporated the principles of Hebrew rhetoric in vogue in that time and place into his own writing.

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

### **Commentary on this structure**

Even in this exploratory analysis a few observations are suggested. First, it may be noticed that the first four elements identified (A–D),

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<sup>16</sup> See Frederick W. Axelgard, "1 And 2 Nephi: An Inspiring Whole," *BYU Studies* 26, no. 4 (1986): 53–65, and Joseph M. Spencer, *An Other Testament: On Typology*, (Provo, UT: The Neal A. Maxwell Institute for Religious Scholarship, 2016), 34–35.

Table 1

Label	Text	Rhetorical boundary markers
A	2 Nephi 1:1–1:30	“out of the land of Jerusalem”
B	2 Nephi 1:31–2:4	Zoram and Jacob “blessed”
C	2 Nephi 2:5–30	“know good” / “have chosen the good part”
D	2 Nephi 3:1–4:12	Lehi “speaks”—to Joseph / all his household
E	2 Nephi 4:13–5:34	Laman & Lemuel angry / wars and contentions
F	2 Nephi 6–11:1	words/things “Jacob spake”
G	2 Nephi 11:2–8	“the words of Isaiah”
F*	2 Nephi 12–24	Lord’s house established/Zion founded
E*	2 Nephi 25:1–6	“Isaiah spake/hath spoken”
D*	2 Nephi 25:7–31:1	“mine own prophecy/my prophesying”
C*	2 Nephi 31:2–21	“the doctrine of Christ”
B*	2 Nephi 32:1–8a	“ponder in your hearts”
A*	2 Nephi 32:8b–33:15	Nephi “must speak/commanded to seal” words

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

when compared to the final four (D\*–A\*), remind us of the division of First Nephi between Lehi’s account (chapters 1–9), so labeled by Nephi, and Nephi’s own account (chapters 10–22). The first four feature Lehi’s testimony, preaching, teachings, and prophecies. The last four focus on

Table 2

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A	Lehi's final testimony and call <i>to his family</i> to repentance
B	<u>The Spirit</u> —Jacob redeemed—in the service of God.
C	Lehi's detailed explanation of <i>the way</i> of salvation based on "the things which [he] had read."
D	Lehi's last blessings (prophecies) <i>to his people</i> .
E	Historical interlude—the founding of "the people of Nephi"—"my soul delighteth/grieveth."
F	Jacob's teachings witness of Christ.
G	Nephi's witness of Christ
F*	Isaiah's prophecies witness of Christ
E*	Historical interlude—the education of "my people"—"my soul delighteth/delighteth."
D*	Final restatement of Nephi's prophecies— <i>to all people</i> .
C*	Nephi's detailed explanation of <i>the way or doctrine</i> of Christ based on what he learned from the Father and the Son directly.
B*	<u>The Spirit</u> —the Holy Ghost will show you what to do.
A*	Nephi's final testimony and call <i>to all people</i> to repentance.

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the testimony, preaching, teachings, and prophecies of Nephi. Second, while the First Book of Nephi focused on ways in which the Lord delivered Lehi, Nephi, and their people from their enemies and the trials of their journeys, leading them to a promised land in this world, the Second Book of Nephi focuses on the Lord's ability—through the atonement of Christ—to deliver the faithful from the devil and lead them to eternal life in the next world. Third, the chiastic organization of Second Nephi reveals how the first half of the book focuses on specific accounts of

specific people—usually Lehi and his family—and on the teachings, blessings, and prophecies directed to them. But the second half takes those same teachings and prophecies in turn and universalizes them by applying them to “all people.” The story of Lehi and his people becomes a surrogate for the Lord’s plan of deliverance for all peoples, in the same way that chosen Israel is an exemplar for all nations of how they can be blessed by Israel’s god, or punished—according to their willingness to repent and take up his covenants and endure to the end.

Finally, the language and organization of Nephi’s writing explicitly invokes the biblical motif of the Two Ways. While it was thought for some time by scholars that this motif was mostly a development of early Christians derived from the Savior’s reference to himself as “the way,” it is now widely understood that its significant usage in the Dead Sea Scrolls and its appearance in Old Testament writings such as Deuteronomy and Jeremiah and even more obviously in the wisdom literature demonstrates its firm origins in the Jewish traditions. Both Lehi in his exposition of the plan of salvation, and Nephi in his detailed presentation of the gospel or doctrine of Christ, as taught to him by the Father and the Son, deliberately speak of these as God’s ways for man. Further, Lehi develops the contrast between this and the devil’s way, as he develops his teaching on the necessity of opposition in all things and his account of human beginnings. As suggested above, First Nephi details how God fulfilled his covenant with Lehi and Nephi (like Abraham) by protecting their growing posterity and leading them to a promised land. And Second Nephi turns the journey motif into an account of the gospel as a path or way leading to eternal life.<sup>17</sup> Just as the miraculous director was given to Lehi to point the way for his party to travel toward the promised land, so Nephi will explain that as one progresses on the path that leads to eternal life, “the Holy Ghost...will shew unto you all things what ye should do” (2 Ne. 32:5).

### **Analyzing lower rhetorical levels**

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

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<sup>17</sup> See, Noel B. Reynolds, “This is the Way,” *Religious Educator* 14, no. 3 (2013): 71–83. <https://rsc.byu.edu/archived/re-14-no-3-2013/way>.

other twelve level-two text units. Table 3 outlines the central unit G of the level-2 chiasm as an eight-element chiasm at level 3. Tables 4a–4d will provide a rhetorical analysis of each of those eight elements at level 4. The entire text of G is included in the analysis and in these tables.

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

The eight-element chiasm of G is framed by two parallel triplets—A and A\*. But as with Hebrew poetry generally, the second element provides added or intensified meaning by adding phrases or changing some of the words. The first lines (a/a) of each triplet are virtually identical, providing this central text unit G with an easily recognizable inclusio, which frequently signals that the material within the inclusio may be

Table 3. 2 Nephi 11:2–8

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1	A	And now I Nephi write more of the words of Isaiah,
2	B	Wherefore I will send their words forth unto my children to prove unto them that my words are true. (a proof by citing three witnesses)
3	C	Behold, my soul delighteth in proving unto my people the truth of the coming of Christ
4	D	And also my soul delighteth in the covenants of the Lord which he hath made to our fathers
5	D*	yea, my soul delighteth in...the great and eternal plan of deliverance from death.
6	C*	And my soul delighteth in proving unto my people that save Christ should come all men must perish.
7	B*	For if there be no Christ there be no God. And if there be no God we are not, for there could have been no creation. But there is a God and he is Christ, and he cometh in the fullness of his own time. (a proof by logical reasoning)
8	A*	And now I write some of the words of Isaiah,

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Table 4a

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1	A	a	And now I Nephi write more of the words of Isaiah,
		b	for my soul delighteth in his words.
		c	For I will liken his words unto my people.

---

8	A*	a	And now I write some of the words of Isaiah,
		b	that whoso of my people which shall see these words may lift up their hearts and rejoice for all men.
		c	Now these are the words, and ye may liken them unto you and unto all men.

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structured as another chiasm—as G indeed turns out to be. But line b in the second triplet (A\*) adds meaning as Nephi’s personal delight in Isaiah’s words becomes the rejoicing of his people *for all men*. And in lines c/c just as Nephi could “liken” Isaiah’s words unto his people in A, so his readers are invited in A\* to liken these words unto themselves “and *unto all men*.” In this way, the first pair of parallel elements in G introduces us to the universalizing theme of the second half of Second Nephi.

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

The second rhetorical structure contained in B turns out to be a short chiasm that steps aside from the historical facts Nephi has just reported

Table 4b

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- 2 B a And I will send them [his words] forth unto all my children,
- b for he (Isaiah) verily saw my Redeemer,
- c even as I have seen him.
- 3 b\* And my brother Jacob also hath seen him
- c\* as I have seen him.
- a\* Wherefore I will send their words forth unto my children
- aa to prove unto them that my words are true.
- bb Wherefore by the words of three, God hath said,
- cc\* I will establish my word.
- bb\* Nevertheless God sendeth more witnesses,
- aa\* and he proveth all his words.
- 
- 7 B\* a For if there be no Christ
- b there be no God;
- c and if there be no God we are not,
- c\* or there could have been no creation.
- b\* But there is a God,
- a\* and he is Christ,

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

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to explain why those facts amount to a proof to Nephi's children that his witness of the Redeemer is true. God has given the standard that the word of three witnesses is proof of his word—possibly alluding to Deuteronomy (4:26 and 17:6)—and Nephi has provided three eye witnesses. And God has sent and will send more witnesses. The theme of proving the prophecies of Christ before he comes is what binds B and B\* together as parallel elements in this level-4 chiasm.

B\* picks up the “proof” theme—but in a new way—offering a logical proof from theological reasoning. While this brief passage composed of seven very short clauses may not satisfy a modern reader's learned preference for syllogisms, it is clearly framed rhetorically as a chiasm composed principally of antithetically parallel elements. Line a\* positively contradicts the negative hypothesis raised in a, and b\* positively negates the negative conclusion proffered in b. The central lines c/c\* state and restate the counterfactual conclusion to be drawn from a and b that neither we nor creation itself could exist without God—a fundamental premise that was likely accepted universally in 7<sup>th</sup> century Israelite and quite possibly in all middle-eastern cultures.

The final independent clause in B\* is not part of its chiastic structure. It does extend the teaching about Christ with Nephi's affirmation that he will come “in the fullness of his own time”—the important additional

Table 4c

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

---

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

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information drawn from the visions received by Nephi, Lehi, Jacob, and Isaiah, that has not yet been articulated in the series of proofs. By completing or rounding out what has been said in the rhetorical form, this line fills the role that biblical rhetorician Jack Lundbom recognizes as a “ballast line”—as he and others find these frequently bringing balance at the conclusion of small rhetorical structures in biblical writing.<sup>18</sup>

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

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

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18 Lundbom borrows the concept of ballast lines from Muilenburg and George Adam Smith and illustrates the form these took in Isaiah in *Biblical Rhetoric*, 133–135.

Table 4d

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

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

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covenants as demonstrated in the forward-looking significance of the Law of Moses as just discussed.

### Conclusions

The experiment conducted in this paper has been the application of the principles of Hebrew rhetoric—as that has come to be understood by biblical scholars over the last half century—to the Book of Second Nephi, self-described as personally written by Nephi, who was educated in Jerusalem at the end of the 7<sup>th</sup> century BCE, a time and place where these principles are now thought by scholars to have been *de rigueur*. The experiment did not refute the hypothesis, but instead did produce a plausible division of the book into 13 sub-units that readily organize themselves chiastically as a whole. The experiment also took the central rhetorical sub-unit G and explored its internal rhetorical structure down two more levels. That analysis has produced a plausible chiastic structure in which every word of the passage fits comfortably into yet another lower level of rhetorical structures. In addition, 2 Nephi 11:2–8 turns out to feature the principal theses of Nephi’s writings at the same time that it explains the inclusion and placement of the long excerpts from Lehi, Jacob, and Isaiah, even though it is a passage that has rarely been featured in Book of Mormon analyses. These results are sufficiently positive and justify moving the project forward to the much larger task of providing rhetorical analyses for the twelve remaining major textual subdivisions of the book.

Also, contrary to my 1980 assessment, Second Nephi is not a random collection of teachings and prophecies that did not fit into First Nephi's structure.<sup>19</sup> Rather, the book promises to be best seen as a matching structure which required its own book. Both structurally and thematically, the two books appear to be designed as a pair—each with its own message and emphases. While First Nephi provides Nephi's proofs based on Lehi's travels to the promised land that “the tender mercies of the Lord is over all them whom he hath chosen because of their faith to make them mighty, even unto the power of deliverance” (1 Ne. 1:20), Second Nephi elevates the traditional meaning of the Abrahamic/Lehite promises for this life into a focus on the atonement and gospel of Christ which provide the way of deliverance to eternal life. And so God's prophecies and covenants with Israel turn out to be surrogates for the eternal promises he offers to all his children—in all times and in all places (2 Ne. 30:2).

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<sup>19</sup> Reynolds, “Nephi's Outline,” 16.

