

1 And this is the means whereby *salvation* cometh,
And there is none other *salvation* save this which hath been spoken of.

2 Neither are there any *conditions* whereby man can be saved
Except the *conditions* which I have told you.

3 *Believe in God*, believe that he is
And that he created all things both *in heaven and in earth*.

4 *Believe that he has all wisdom*
And all power both *in heaven and in earth*.

KnoWhy #340
July 17, 2017



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HOW DID BIBLICAL AND ANCIENT NEAR EASTERN AUTHORS USE CHIASMUS?

“For it is expedient that an atonement should be made; for according to the great plan of the Eternal God there must be an atonement made, or else all mankind must unavoidably perish; yea, all are hardened; yea, all are fallen and are lost, and must perish except it be through the atonement which it is expedient should be made.”

Alma 34:9

THE KNOW

The word *chiasmus* comes from the Greek, “crossing,” based on *chiazō*, “to make a mark like the letter X.” A simple example of a chiasm in the Bible is Mark 2:27: “The Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath.”

This example from Mark is a very simple chiasm, but there are many occurrences of chiasmus throughout the Bible and in the literature of the broader ancient Near East that vary greatly in their length and complexity. They range from several verses to whole chapters, and even entire books.

BYU Professor John W. Welch has pointed out that scholars “have identified fascinating chiasms in virtually every book of the Bible, whether the poetry of the Psalms or the prose of the Gospels, whether in law, prophecy, or epistolary.”¹ Biblical scholar Mitchell Da-

Editor’s Note: This year marks 50 years since the discovery of chiasmus in the Book of Mormon on August 16, 1967. To celebrate this 50th anniversary, throughout July and August Book of Mormon Central will publish one KnoWhy each week that discusses chiasmus and its significance and value to understanding the Bible, the Book of Mormon, and other ancient literatures. Be sure to check out our other KnoWhys on chiasmus and the Chiasmus Resources website for more information.

hood has noted, “On micro and macro levels chiasmus has been shown to be a basic element in the formal structure of biblical literature.”²

Furthermore, these literary structures are not present simply to add variety to the text or show off the ancient authors’ skills, but “to enhance appreciation for a composition’s logic, impact, and beauty; to link form with substance; to clarify conceptual connections or contrasts; and to aid in studies of comparative literature.”³

For example, the central line or thought in most chiasms is the most important idea, with the other supporting ones building up to and then down from the center point (in an A-B-C-B-A pattern, where C represents the central message). Genesis 17, in which God makes a covenant with Abraham, demonstrates this structure, as follows:⁴

mus we come a giant step closer to the Spirit of and in the Book of Mormon.¹⁷

FURTHER READING

John W. Welch, ed., *Chiasmus in Antiquity: Structure, Analysis, Exegesis* (Hildesheim, Germany, 1981; reprint, Provo, UT: FARMS, 1999).

John W. Welch, “What Does Chiasmus in the Book of Mormon Prove?” in *Book of Mormon Authorship Revisited: The Evidence for Ancient Origins*, ed. Noel B. Reynolds (Provo, UT: FARMS, 1997).

Paul Gaechter, *Literary Art in the Gospel of Matthew*, trans. Lore Schultheiss (Provo, UT: BYU Studies, 2013; originally published in German, Stuttgart, 1965).

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NOTES

1. John W. Welch, “Chiasm, Chiasmus: I. Ancient Near and Hebrew Bible/Old Testament,” in the *Encyclopedia of the Bible and Its Reception*, ed. Hans-Josef Klauck (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2012), 5:78.

2. Mitchell Dahood, “Chiasmus,” in *The Interpreter’s Dictionary of the Bible*, ed. K. Crim, et al., Supplementary Volume (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 1976), 45.

3. Welch, “Chiasm, Chiasmus,” 78.

4. Adapted from Yehuda Radday, “Chiasmus in Hebrew Biblical Narrative,” in *Chiasmus in Antiquity: Structure, Analysis, Exegesis*, ed. John W. Welch (Hildesheim, Germany, 1981; reprint, Provo, UT: Research Press, 1999), 105.

5. See David A. Dorsey, *The Literary Structure of the Old Testament: A Commentary on Genesis–Malachi* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1999), 47–102; Roland Meynet, *Rhetorical Analysis: An Introduction to Biblical Rhetoric*, JSOTSup (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998), 256.

6. See “What Counts as Chiasmus? (1 Nephi 19:7),” *KnoWhy* 337 (July 10, 2017). See also “Criteria Chart,” online at chiasmusresources.org. For examples from the scholarly literature, see Nils Lund, *Chiasmus in the New Testament: A Study in the Form and Function of Chiastic Structures* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1942; reprint, Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1992). See also John W.

Welch, “Criteria for Identifying and Evaluating the Presence of Chiasmus,” *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 4, no. 2 (1995): 1–14.

7. Welch, “Chiasm, Chiasmus,” 79. For further examples of chiasmus in the biblical literature, please see the Hebrew Bible index at <https://chiasmusresources.org/hebrew-bible>.

8. Yehuda T. Radday, “Chiasmus in Hebrew Biblical Narrative,” in *Chiasmus in Antiquity*, 50–117; Wilfred G.E. Watson, “Chiastic Patterns in Biblical Hebrew Poetry,” in *Chiasmus in Antiquity*, 118–68; Bezalel Porten, “Structure and Chiasm in Aramaic Contracts and Letters,” in *Chiasmus in Antiquity*, 169–182; Jonah Frankel, “Chiasmus in Talmudic-Aggadic Narrative,” in *Chiasmus in Antiquity*, 183–197.

9. See, for example, John Breck, *The Shape of Biblical Language: Chiasmus in the Scriptures and Beyond* (Crestwood, NY: St Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1994), 21; Robert F. Smith, “Chiasm in Sumerian-Akkadian,” and John W. Welch, “Chiasmus in Ugaritic,” both in *Chiasmus in Antiquity*, 17–35, 36–49.

10. Gary A. Rendsburg, “The Biblical Flood Story in the Light of the Gilgamesh Flood Account,” in *Gilgamesh and the World of Assyria*, ed. Joseph Azize and Noel Weeks (Leuven, Belgium: Peeters, 2007), 115–27, at 117. For further examples of chiasmus from ancient Near Eastern texts, please see the Ancient Near East Literature index at the Chiasmus Resources website (<https://chiasmusresources.org/ancient-near-east-literature>).

11. See John W. Welch, “Chiasmus in Ancient Greek and Latin Literatures,” in *Chiasmus in Antiquity*, 250–268; also, the Classical Literature index at <https://chiasmusresources.org/classical-literature>.

12. Robert Smith noted the Sumerian influence on Semitic literature in “Chiasm in Sumerian-Akkadian,” in *Chiasmus in Antiquity*, 17–35.

13. Craig Blomberg, “The Structure of 2 Corinthians 1–7,” *Criswell Theological Review* 4, no. 1 (1989): 3–20.

14. John W. Welch, “Chiasmus in the Book of Mormon,” *New Era* (Feb 1972), accessed online at lds.org.

15. Welch, “Chiasmus in the Book of Mormon,” online at lds.org.

16. Welch, “Chiasmus in the Book of Mormon,” online at lds.org.

17. Welch, “Chiasmus in the Book of Mormon,” online at lds.org.