

III Nephi 26:4-11 Structure

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I. Parallel Substructure in 3 Nephi 26:4,5

And even unto the great and last day,

- 1**
 - a** when all people,
 - a** and all kindreds,
 - a** and all nations
 - a** and tongues
 - 2**
 - a** shall stand before God,
 - a** to be judged of their works,
 - 3**
 - a** whether they be good
 - a** or whether they be evil--
 - 4**
 - a** If they be good,
 - b** to the resurrection of everlasting life;
 - a** and if they be evil
 - b** to the resurrection of damnation;
- !** BEING ON A PARALLEL,
- 5**
 - a** the one on the one hand
 - a** and the other on the other hand,
 - 6**
 - a** according to the mercy,
 - a** and the justice,
 - a** and the holiness
 - 7**
 - a** which is in Christ,
 - a** who was before the world began.¹

In the center of these seven successive parallels, is one statement--"being on a parallel"--that is not in parallel form. This is an example of *structural omission*. Omission generally serves the purpose of emphasis.

There are three ways in which the number *four* is associated with the first portion of this structure (preceding the statement, "being on a parallel") and the number *three* is associated with the last portion (following the statement, "being on a parallel").

- A. There are four parallels (1,2,3,4) in the first portion and three in the last (5,6,7).
- B. There are smaller sets of four and three in the first and last portions, respectively.
 1. In the first portion (**1, 2, 3, 4**),
 - a. The first parallel (**1**) contains *four* elements (and could be further subdivided into two parallels: *people-kindreds* are related, and *nations-tongues* are related).
 - b. The next two parallels (**2,3**), each containing two elements, come in a set totalling *four* elements.
 - c. The last parallel (**4**) is an **a b a b** parallel, containing *four* elements.This gives, in sum, *three* sets of *four*, which are each made up of two sets of two.
 2. In the last portion (**5, 6, 7**), the middle (**5**) of the three parallel has *three* elements. There is also one arrangement of "two sets of two": both 5 and 7, above, are arranged sets of two: **a a**.
- C. The numbers four and three occur symbolically.
 1. The first portion of this structure (**1, 2, 3, 4**) ties in strongly to the concept of man ("all people, kindreds, nations, tongues"). The number *four* symbolically usually refers to man (four winds of the earth).
 2. The last portion (**5, 6, 7**) ties in strongly to the concept of God ("mercy, justice, holiness in Christ"). The number *three* symbolically usually refers to God (Godhead).

This saddled arrangement of fours and threes around the phrase "being on a parallel" further emphasizes that central phrase.

While parallel 1, above, was made up of four elements (really, two sets of two, as mentioned in I.B.1.a. above), parallel 6 contains only three. "Mercy" and "justice" could be considered a set of two, but that leaves "holiness" with no pairing. Had there not been this omission, then this would have been the *fifth* set of two—like two hands, fingers touching, making five sets of two.

II. Chiastic Substructure in 3 Nephi 26:4,5

Consider the statement, "the one on the one hand and the other on the other hand." This wording can serve as a vivid illustration of several fundamental structural arrangements, including parallelism, chiasmus, grouping, omission, and variation.

Hold your hands out in front of you, palms down. Number the fingers from left to right, so that the left-hand pinky is #1 and the right hand pinky is #10. Let this represent the succession of points as they occur in a given

- 1) **Chiasmus:** Now place your hands together such that the palms and fingertips touch. Note that point #1 and #10 are now juxtaposed. This beginning and ending point will be assigned the letter A. Point #2 and #9 correspond and are assigned the letter B, and so forth, until you get to the thumbs: points #5 and #6, or letter E. Written sequentially, this inverted format would be A,B,C,D,E; E,D,C,B,A. This is a chiasm.
- 2) **Parallel:** Next place one hand on top of the other. Point #1 is now juxtaposed with point #5, and will be assigned letter A. Number two corresponds to #6, and is assigned letter B; and so forth until #5 and #10, which are assigned letter E. Written sequentially, this analogous format would be A,B,C,D,E; A,B,C,D,E. This is a parallel.
- 3) **Grouping:** Next, hold both hands in a fist. With this arrangement, rather than each finger corresponding in analogous (parallel) or inverted (chiastic) order, five points on the one hand correlate with five points on the other—as a group. The regimented ordering of chiasmus and parallel structure would be considered a subset of grouping, for grouping can also allow for a scrambling of the order in which points are made. (e.g. A,B,C,D,E; D,B,E,A,C).
- 4) **Omission:** Suppose that one of your fingers is missing as the result of some unfortunate accident. When you hold your hands together in any of the above arrangements, the absence of the missing finger becomes much more apparent. Omission draws attention to the missing point. (e.g. A,B,C,**D**,E; A,B,C, ,E)
- 5) **Variation:** Looking closely at your hands, you can see that one is not identical to the other. The various aberrations, such as cuts and scars, along with your unique fingerprints, distinguish your hands from those of anyone else. Complex scriptural structures (not speaking of smaller structures) also seem to be such that no two are alike. If the structures were a perfect fit each time, then there would be no requirement to look past the seeming weakness.

We have already seen how the concepts in 3 Nephi 26:4,5 are arranged in parallel form. Within these same verses are also examples of chiasmus.

- A. The three parallels (5, 6, 7) after the "being on a parallel" statement above are arranged in a **2x 3x 2x** format, which is a form of structural chiasmus (**a b a**).
- B. Covering the same territory as parallel elements 1 through 7 above, there is also a chiasm that runs from the beginning of verse four to the end of verse five as follows:

- A** And even unto the great and *last day*,
B when all people, and all kindreds, and all nations and tongues *shall* stand
B before *God*,
D to be *judged* of their works, whether they be good
or whether they be evil--If they be good, to the resurrection
of everlasting life; and if they be evil, to the resurrection
of damnation;
E being on a parallel,
E' the one on the one hand and the
other on the other hand,
D' according to the mercy, and the *justice*, and the holiness
C' which is in *Christ*,
B' who was
A' before the world began.

- This chiasm contains *five* elements in each half: the one on the one hand and the other on the other hand.
- C. The actual wording within this chiasm follows the form: the last shall be first, and the first shall be last (a b b a)--a chiasm.
1. The *first* element, **A**, uses the word "*last*;" and the *last* element, **A'**, insinuates the word "*first*" ("before the world began").
 2. A similar inversion comes in **B** and **B'** in which "*shall stand*" and "*who was*" are contrasted.

III. Chiastic/Parallel Substructure in 3 Nephi 26:4,5

Above, the statement, "the one on the one hand and the other on the other hand" was displayed

5 **a**
 the one on the one hand
 a
 and the other on the other hand,

a the one
b on the one hand
a and the other
b on the other hand

A-1 (1) when all people
 (2) and all kindreds
 (3) and all nations
 (4) and tongues

A-2 shall stand before God
 to be judged of their works
 whether they be good
 or whether they be evil

B **a** If they be good
 b to the resurrection of everlasting life
 a and if they be evil
 b to the resurrection of damnation

C ! BEING ON A PARALLEL

B' **a** the one
 b on the one hand
 a and the other
 b on the other hand

A-1' (1) according to the mercy
 (2) and the justice
 (3) and the holiness

A-2' which is in Christ
 who was before the world began.

The basic form of the above structure is:

- A-1 4-set parallel
- A-2 (two) singlet set parallels
 - B doublet parallel
 - C "being on a parallel"
 - B doublet parallel
- A-1 3-set parallel
- A-2 (one) singlet set parallel

In this arrangement there are *seven* main elements altogether: A-1, A-2, B, C, B', A-1', A-2'. Note the seeming aberration, with **A-2** and **A-2'** not being as precise a correlation as the others, which creates a variation or *fingerprint*.

Note that both **A** (**A-1 A-2 A-1' A-2'**) and **B** are arranged in an **a b a b** parallel structure. Once more, the focal element of this chiasm, **C**, "being on a parallel," is the only element not arranged in a parallel, further setting it off.

IV. Correlating Structure in 3 Nephi 26:9-11

The structure of 3 Nephi 26:9-11, just *three* verses beyond the ones we have been considering above, was published in the April 21, 1992 edition of *Greater Things*.² It too has a *three/four* arrangement. It too is a chiasm made up of parallels. These common features create a possible structural link between these two sets of verses (3 Ne. 26:4,5 and 26:9-11). Another link by another means would strengthen this correlation (in case it is not immediately apparent that the concepts in each are comparable).

V. Linking Chiasms: 3 Nephi 26:5-11

The following chiasm picks up the Third Nephi text immediately after the final phrase of the structure we have been considering above.

- v6 **A-1** And now there *cannot be written* in this book
- A-2** even a hundredth part of the things which Jesus did truly teach unto the people; (compare 3 Ne. 5:8)
- v7 **B** But behold the plates of Nephi
- C** do contain the *more part of the things which he taught the people.*
- v8 **D** And these things *have I written,*
- E** which are a *lesser part*
- F** of *the things which he taught the people,*
- G-1** and I have written them
- G-2** to the intent
- H** that they may be *brought again unto this people,*
- I** from the *Gentiles,*
- J** according to the *words*
- J'** which Jesus hath *spoken.*
- v9 **I'** And when *they*
- H'** shall have *received this,*
- G-1'** which is expedient that *they should have first,*
- G-2'** to try their faith,
- F'** and if it shall so be that they shall believe these things then shall the *greater things* be made manifest unto them.
- v10 **E'** And if it so be that they will not believe these things, then shall the greater things be *withheld* from them, *unto their condemnation.*
- v11 **D'** Behold, *I was about to write* them,
- C'** *all which were engraven*
- B'** upon the plates of Nephi,
- A-1'** but *the Lord forbade it,* saying:
- A-2'** I will **try the faith** of my people.

This chiasm runs *twelve* elements deep. **A-1** through **F**, which contain *seven* elements, form a set with the following arrangement: 2x, 1x, 1x, 1x, 1x, etc. **G-1** through **J** form another such set and contains *five* elements. This arrangement is solidified by the occurrence of the phrase "try the faith" on the furthest extreme of this pattern (in **A-2'** and **G-2'**).

This is not the only way the concepts in these verses can be organized. Below is another chiasm that can be formed by making alternative correlations:

v6 **A** And now there *cannot be written* in this book even a hundredth part
B of the things which Jesus did *truly teach* unto the people;
v7 **C** But behold the plates of Nephi
D do contain the *more part of the things which he taught the people*.
v8 **E** And these things *have I written*,
F which are a *lesser part*
G of the things
H which he taught the people;
I and I have written them to the intent
J that they may be *brought again*
K *unto this people, from the Gentiles,*
L according to the *words*
L' which Jesus hath *spoken*.
v9 **K'** And when *they shall have received this,*
J' which is expedient that *they should have first,*
I' to try their faith,
H' and if it shall so be that they shall believe these things then shall the *greater things* be made manifest unto them.
v10 **G'** And if it so be that they will not believe these things, then shall the greater things
F' be *withheld* from them, *unto their condemnation*.
v11 **E'** Behold, *I was about to write* them,
D' *all which were engraven*
C' upon the plates of Nephi,
B' but the Lord forbade it, *saying*.
A' I will try the faith of my people.

(The author found these structures in 3 Nephi 26:4,5 and 26:6-11 on April 12 and 13.)

VI. Link to 2 Nephi 28:30

Compare the concepts presented just above in 3 Nephi 26:9,10 with the last half of 2 Nephi 28:30, whose substructure can be depicted as follows:

- a** Blessed are those
 - b** who *hearken* unto my precepts,
 - b** and *lend an ear* unto my counsel,
- a** for they shall *learn wisdom*;

- b** for unto him that *receiveth*
 - a** I will give *more*;
 - b** and from them that shall say, *We have enough*,
- a** from them shall be *taken away* even that which they have.

The first four lines are arranged in a chiasm, and the last four are arranged in a parallel

VII. Link to Isaiah 28:10

Seeing that the last half of 2 Nephi 28:30 ties into 3 Nephi 26:9,10, compare now the first half of 2 Nephi 28:30 with Isaiah 28:9,10.

2 Nephi 28:30a

line upon line,

precept upon precept,

here a little
and there a little;

Isaiah 28:13

For precept must be upon precept,
precept upon precept;

**LINE UPON LINE,
LINE UPON LINE;**

here a little,
and there a little:

The word-for-word repetition of the phrase "line upon line", and the nearly identical repetition of the phrases "precept upon precept" and "here a little," are all plain examples of *parallel* structure.

Chiasmus is also illustrated in the above cross-reference. Note that if a line were drawn between the left-hand column occurrence of "line upon line" and the right-hand column occurrence of "line upon line," and if another line were similarly drawn between the occurrences of "precept upon precept," the lines would cross, forming an X. It was this type of an arrangement from which the word *chiasmus* was derived, coming from the twenty-second letter in the Greek alphabet, chi (χ), and the Greek *chiazēn* ("to mark with a χ ").³

This usage mirrors the same kind of deliberate emphasis and illustration of parallelism and chiasmus as was seen in 3 Nephi 26:4,5, surrounding the words,

Being on a parallel
the one on the one hand and
the other on the other hand.

Might these literary arrangements of scripture be a key to unlocking messages within the Book of Mormon and other scriptures that have been hitherto sealed thereby? (See Elements **J** and **N** in the Isaiah 28 & 29 P;

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Endnotes:

1. See Wade Brown, The God-Inspired Language of the Book of Mormon, Rainbow Press, Clackamas, Oregon, 1988, pp. 40, 849.
 2. Sterling D. Allan, Vol. 1, Num. 2, p. 3.
 3. John W. Welch, "Chiasmus in the Book of Mormon," Book of Mormon Authorship, Bookcraft, Salt Lake City, Utah, 1982, p. 35.
 4. Gail L. Porritt and Sterling D. Allan, *Greater Things*, Vol. 1, Num. 4, May 6, 1992, p. 19.
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