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Chiasmus in Alma 36

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John W. Welch

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Summary:

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CHIASMUS IN ALMA 36

John W. Welch

It is evident that all chiasms are not created equal; they differ in length, purpose, precision, artistic achievement, and in many other respects. Some alleged chiasms are very weak, contrived by the mind of readers, and of negligible significance to understanding the text itself. In strong cases, however, the chiastic features of the text are so clear and meaningful that it seems beyond dispute that these passages are rightly called chiasms and that their authors likely intentionally cast the material in this form.¹ Alma 36 is such an unquestionable text--one of the best examples of chiastic composition known anywhere in sacred literature. We have a long way to go before we will fully appreciate all its aspects.

The purpose of this Working Paper is to advance our study of this text in several ways. Here I will (a) display the overall structure of Alma 36 as it has been published by several commentators, (b) suggest a new detailed analysis of the full text of this chapter, (c) analyze each of the paired sections in the composition, (d) trace the strands of repetition that weave these sections tightly together, (e) assess the chapter's degree of chiasticity by applying fifteen criteria for evaluating the presence of chiasmus together with an examination of word

¹ For a discussion of factors to be considered in assessing the strengths and weaknesses of a proposed chiastic analysis of a text, see my "Criteria for Identifying and Evaluating the Presence of Chiasmus," F.A.R.M.S. Working Paper 1989.

distributions in this chapter, and finally, I will (f) and (g) compare the words and phrases in Alma 36 with the two other firsthand accounts of Alma's conversion in Mosiah 27 and Alma 38 in order to demonstrate that the proposed structure of Alma 36 was intentionally and masterfully created. I intend that these materials will provide a basis for further discussion and commentary.

A. Overall Structure of Alma 36. The structure of Alma 36 has been analyzed by several commentators, all basically agreeing that the chapter is strongly chiasmic. With minor variations, the analyses of Angela Crowell,² Lowell Tensmeyer,³ Wade Brown,⁴ and others,⁵ agree with the basic outline I have previously advanced in several publications.⁶ It is evident that the twice repeated name of "Jesus Christ, Son of God" in Alma 36:17-18 is the central turning point not only of Alma's conversion but also of this composition. A large number of paired and ordered elements flank this midpoint.

2 Zarahemla Record (1986), displayed below.

3 Unpublished analysis below; with paper filed at F.A.R.M.S.

4 The God-Inspired Language of the Book of Mormon (Clackamas, OR: Rainbow, 1988), 554-60.

5 Unpublished papers by Edwin B. Firmage, Gregory G. Wright, and others.

6 Welch, "Chiasmus in the Book of Mormon," BYU Studies 10 (1969): 83; "Chiasmus in the Book of Mormon," New Era (February 1972): 9; Chiasmus in Antiquity (Hildesheim: Gerstenberg, 1981), 206; "Chiasmus in the Book of Mormon," in (Footnote 6 Continued on Next Page

The basic structure of Alma 36 has been published in the following forms, which together give an overview of these words to his son Helaman:

Welch, BYU Studies (1969)

Alma 36

My son give ear to my words (v 1)
 Keep the commandments and ye shall prosper in the land (v 1)
 Captivity of our fathers—bondage (v 2)
 He surely did deliver them (v 2)
 Trust in God (v 3)
 Support in trials, troubles and afflictions (v 3)
 I know this not of myself but of God (v 4)
 Born of God (v 5)
 Limbs paralysed (v 10)

The Agony of Conversion
 destroyed (v 11)
 racked with eternal torment (v 12)
 harrowed up to the greatest degree (v 12)
 racked with all my sins (v 12)
 tormented with the pains of hell (v 13)
 inexpressible horror (v 14)
 banished and extinct (v 15)
 pains of a damned soul (v 16)

Called upon Jesus Christ (v 18)

The Joy of Conversion
 no more pain (v 19)
 oh what joy (v 20)
 what marvelous light (v 20)
 soul filled with joy as exceeding as was my pain (v 20)
 exquisite (v 21)
 nothing as sweet as was my joy (v 22)
 singing and praising God (v 22)
 long to be with God (v 22)

Use of limbs returns (v 23)
 Born of God (v 26)
 Therefore my knowledge is of God (v 26)
 Supported under trials and troubles and afflictions (v 27)
 Trust in him (v 27)
 He will deliver me (v 27)
 Egypt—captivity (v 28-29)
 Keep the commandments and ye shall prosper in the land (v 30)
 This according to his word (v 30)

(Footnote 6 Continued from Previous Page)

Book of Mormon Authorship, N. Reynolds ed. (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, 1981), 50.

Welch, New Era (1972)

- a *My son, give ear to my words (verse 1)*
- b *Keep the commandments [and] ye shall prosper in the land (1)*
- c *Captivity of our fathers—bondage (2)*
- d *Surely God did deliver them (2)*
- e *Trust in God (3)*
- f *Support in trials, trouble, and afflictions (3)*
- g *I know this not of myself but of God (4)*
- h *Born of God (5)*
- i *Seek no more to destroy the church of God (9)*
- j *Fell to the earth (10)*
- k *Limbs paralyzed (10)*
- l *The agony of conversion (11-16)
destroyed, torment, harrowed up, racked, the pains of hell, inexpressible horror, banished and extinct, the pains of a damned soul*
- m *I remember . . .
the coming of one Jesus Christ, a Son of God, to atone for the sins of the world*
- n *I cried within my heart: O Jesus, thou Son of God, have mercy on me (17-18)*
- l *The joy of conversion (19-22)
no more pain, what joy, marvelous light, exquisite, nothing as sweet, singing and praising God, longing to be with God*
- k *Limbs received their strength again (23)*
- j *Stood upon my feet (23)*
- i *Labored without ceasing to bring souls unto repentance (24)*
- h *Many have been born of God (26)*
- g *Knowledge is of God (26)*
- f *Supported under trials and troubles, yea afflictions (27)*
- e *Trust in him (27)*
- d *He will still deliver me (27)*
- c *Egypt—captivity (28-29)*
- b *Keep the commandments and ye shall prosper in the land (30)*
- a *This according to his word (30)*

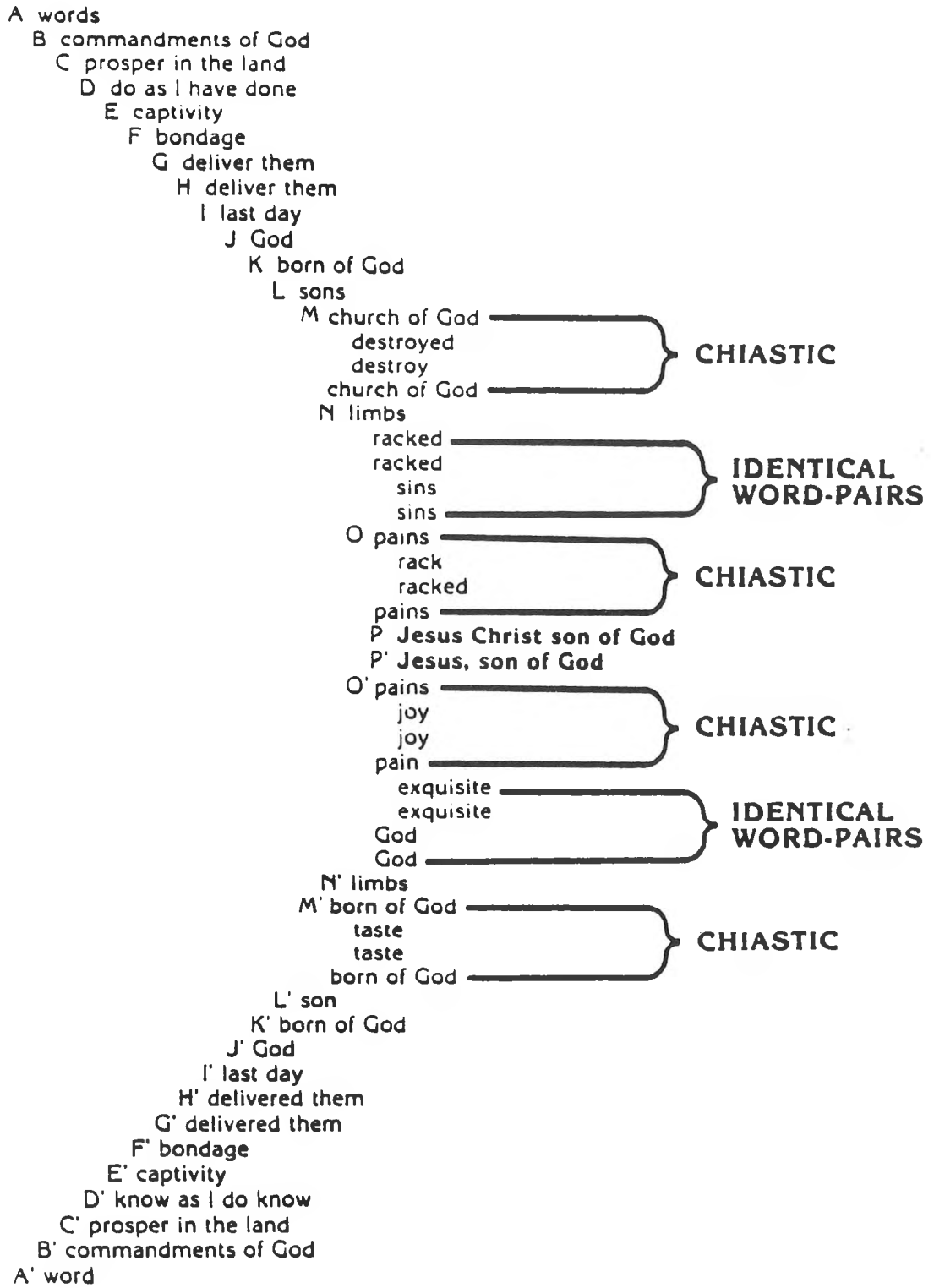
Welch, Chiasmus in Antiquity (1981)

My son give ear to my words (1)
 Keep the commandments and ye shall prosper in the land (1)
 Do as I have done (2)
 Captivity of our fathers — bondage (2)
 He surely did deliver them (2)
 Trust in God (3)
 Support in trials, troubles and afflictions (3)
 I know this not of myself but of God (4)
 Born of God (5)
 Alma seeks to harm the Church (6)
 Limbs paralyzed (10)
 Fear of the presence of God (14)
 Pains of a damned soul (16)
 Alma remembers one Jesus Christ (17)
 Alma calls upon Jesus Christ (18)
 Soul filled with joy as exceeding as was my
 pain (20)
 Long to be in presence of God (22)
 Use of limbs returns (23)
 Alma labors to strengthen the souls of men (24)
 Born of God (26)
 Therefore my knowledge is of God (26)
 Supported under trials and troubles and afflictions (27)
 Trust in him (27)
 He will deliver me (27)
 Egypt — captivity (28–29)
 Know as I do know (30)
 Keep the commandments and ye shall prosper in the land (30)
 This according to his word (30)

Welch, Book of Mormon Authorship (1981)

- My son, give ear to my words (1)
 Keep the commandments and ye shall prosper in the
 land (1)
 Do as I have done (2)
 Captivity of our fathers—their bondage (2)
 He surely did deliver them (2)
 Trust in God (3)
 Support in trials, troubles and afflictions (3)
 I know this not of myself but of God (4)
 Born of God (5)
 Alma seeks to harm the church (6)
 Limbs paralyzed (10)
 Fear of the presence of God (14)
 Pains of a damned soul (16)
 Alma remembers one Jesus Christ (17)
 Christ will atone for the sins of the
 world (17)
 Alma calls upon Jesus Christ (18)
 Joy as exceeding as the pain (20)
 Longing to be with God (22)
 Use of limbs returns (23)
 Alma seeks to bring souls unto God (24)
 Born of God (26)
 My knowledge is of God (26)
 Supported under trials, troubles, and
 afflictions (27)
 Trust in him (27)
 He will deliver me (27)
 Egypt—captivity (28-29)
 Know as I do know (30)
 Keep the commandments and ye shall prosper in the
 land (30)
 This is according to his word (30)
 (Alma 36)

Crowell, Zarahemla Record (1986)



a My son, give ear unto my words; for I swear unto you,
b that inasmuch as ye shall keep the commandments of God ye shall prosper in the land.
c I would that ye should do as I have done,
d in remembering the captivity of our fathers;
e for they were in bondage, and
f none could deliver them except it was the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob;
g and he surely did deliver them in their afflictions.
h And now, O my son Helaman, behold, thou art in thy youth, and therefore I beseech of thee
i that thou wilt hear my words and learn of me; for I do know that
j whosoever shall put their trust in God
k shall be supported in their trials, and their troubles, and their afflictions,
l and shall be lifted up at the last day.
m And I would not that ye think that I know of myself --
n not of the temporal but of the spiritual,
o not of the carnal mind but of God.
p Now behold, I say unto you,
q if I had not been born of God
r I should not have known these things,
s but God has, by the mouth of his holy angel, made these things known unto me,
t seeking to destroy the church of God;
u but behold, God sent his holy angel to stop us by the way,
v and we all fell to the earth, for the fear of the Lord came upon us.
w But behold, the voice said unto me: Arise. And I arose and stood up, and beheld the angel. And he said unto me
x that I could not open my mouth, neither had I the use of my limbs.
y And the angel spake more things unto me, which were heard by my brethren,
z but I did not hear them, for when I heard the words --
1 If thou wilt be destroyed of thyself, seek no more to destroy the church of God --
2 I was struck with such great fear and amazement lest perhaps I should be destroyed,
3 that I fell to the earth and I did hear no more.
4 and racked with all my sins, yea, I did remember all my sins and iniquities,
5 for which I was tormented with the pains of hell.
6 Yea, I saw that I had rebelled against my God and that I had not kept his holy commandments,
7 Yea, and in fine so great had been my iniquities
8 that the very thought of coming into the presence of my God
9 did rack my soul with inexpressible horror.
10 Oh, thought I, that I could be banished and become extinct both soul and body,
11 that I might not be brought to stand in the presence of my God
12 to be judged of my deeds.
13 And now, for three days and three nights was I racked
14 even with the pains of a damned soul.
15 And it came to pass that as I was thus racked with torment,
16 while I was harrowed up by the memory of my many sins,
17 behold, I remembered also to have heard my father prophesy unto the people concerning the coming of one
18 Jesus Christ, a Son of God, to atone for the sins of the world.

Now, as my mind caught hold upon this thought, I cried within my heart:
O Jesus, thou Son of God, have mercy on me, who am in the Fall of bitterness, and am encircled about by the everlasting chains of death.
And now, behold, when I thought this, I could remember my pains no more;
Yea, I was harrowed up by the memory of my sins no more.

And oh, what joy, and what marvelous light I did behold;

Yea, my soul was filled with joy as exceeding as was my pain!

Yea, I say unto you, my son, that there could be nothing so exquisite and bitter as were my pains.

Yea, and again I say unto you, my son, that on the other hand, there can be nothing so exquisite and sweet as was my joy.

Yea, methought I saw, even as our father Levi saw,

God sitting upon his throne, surrounded with numberless concourses of angels

in the attitude of singing and praising their God;

Yea, and my soul did long to be there.

But behold, my limbs did receive their strength again,

and I stood upon my feet, and did manifest unto the people that I had been born of God.

Yea, and from that time even until now, I have labored without ceasing,

that I might bring souls unto repentance;

that I might bring them to taste of the exceeding joy of which I did taste;

that they might also be born of God, and be filled with the Holy Ghost.

For because of the word which he has imparted unto me,

behold, many have been born of God,

and have tasted as I have tasted,

and have seen eye to eye as I have seen;

therefore they do know of these things

of which I have spoken, as I do know;

and the knowledge which I have is of God.

And I have been supported under trials and troubles of every kind, yea, and in all manner of afflictions;

Yea, God has delivered me from prison, and from bonds, and from death;

Yea, and I do put my trust in him, and he will deliver me. And I know that

he will raise me up at the last day, to dwell with him in glory; yea, and I will praise him forever.

For he has brought our fathers out of Egypt, and he has swallowed up the Egyptians in the Red Sea.

and he led them by his power into the promised land;

Yea, and he has delivered them out of bondage and captivity from time to time.

Yea, and he has also brought our fathers out of the land of Jerusalem;

and he has also, by his everlasting power,

delivered them out of bondage and captivity from time to time even down to the present day;

and I have always retained in remembrance their captivity;

Yea, and ye also ought to retain in remembrance, as I have done, their captivity.

But, behold, my son, this is not all; for ye ought to know as I do know,

that inasmuch as ye shall keep the commandments of God ye shall prosper in the land;

and ye ought to know also, that

inasmuch as ye will not keep the commandments of God ye shall be cut off from his presence.

Now this is according to his word.

Brown, God-Inspired Language (1988)

- 1 give ear to my WORDS
 2 INASMUCH AS YE SHALL KEEP THE COMMANDMENTS OF GOD YE SHALL PROSPER
 3 YE SHOULD do AS I have done
 4 REMEMBERING
 5 the CAPTIVITY of our fathers
 6 BONDAGE
 7 DELIVER THEM
 8 the GOD OF Abraham
 9 HE surely did DELIVER THEM
 10 my SON
 11 I do KNOW
 12 PUT their TRUST IN GOD
 13 SUPPORTED in...TRIALS AND...TROUBLES AND...AFFLICTIONS
 14 I KNOW...OF GOD
 15 BEEN BORN OF GOD
 16 GOD HAS... made these things known UNTO ME
 17 I went about...seeking to destroy the church of God
 18 I arose and STOOD UP
 19 neither had I the use of MY LIMBS
 20 ANGEL
 21 I was tormented with the PAINS of hell
 22 PAINS
 23 I was racked with torment
 24 I WAS HARROWED UP BY THE MEMORY OF MY many SINS
 25 I REMEMBERED
 Alma's restoration 26 JESUS Christ a SON OF GOD
 26 JESUS thou SON OF GOD
 JESUS 25 I could REMEMBER
 THOU SON OF GOD 24 I WAS HARROWED UP BY THE MEMORY OF MY SINS
 23 what joy, what marvelous light I did behold
 22 PAIN
 21 so bitter as were my PAINS
 20 ANGELS
 19 MY LIMBS did receive their strength
 18 I STOOD upon my feet
 17 I have labored... that I might bring souls unto repentance
 16 the word which HE HAS imparted UNTO ME
 15 BEEN BORN OF GOD
 14 I do KNOW...OF GOD
 13 SUPPORTED under TRIALS AND TROUBLES...AND...AFFLICTIONS
 12 PUT my TRUST IN HIM
 11 I KNOW
 10 our FATHERS
 9 HE has DELIVERED THEM
 8 HE (God)
 7 DELIVERED THEM
 6 BONDAGE
 5 their CAPTIVITY
 4 retain in REMEMBRANCE
 3 YE OUGHT to know AS I do know
 2 INASMUCH AS YE SHALL KEEP THE COMMANDMENTS OF GOD YE SHALL PROSPER
 1 this is according to his WORD

The previous pages reproduce several approaches to the text of Alma 36. They all fundamentally agree that this text centers on Alma 36:17-18, which is flanked by a substantial number of words and phrases symmetrically arranged before and after this midpoint in a balanced, inverted order. Minor variations exist between the foregoing analyses; readers may readily examine and compare them. My own comparisons have led me to reexamine the complete text of Alma 36 more closely in order to determine comprehensively how the elements of this chapter figure into the overall structure of the text.

B. Text of Alma 36. My analysis of the full text of Alma 36, organized by chiastic sections, is as follows. The key repetitions have been underlined. As discussed below, note that these words may serve multiple roles, in the organization of the chapter, in the substructure of single sections, and as bridges from one section to the next.

Alma 36

	<u>verses</u>
A <u>My son</u> , give ear to <u>my words</u> :	1
B for I swear unto you <u>that</u> <u>inasmuch as ye shall keep the commandments of God</u> <u>ye shall prosper in the land</u> .	
C I would <u>that ye should do as I have done</u> , <u>in remembering the captivity of our fathers</u> :	2
D for they were <u>in bondage</u> , and none could <u>deliver them</u> except it was the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob; and he surely did <u>deliver them</u> <u>in their afflictions</u> .	

- E And now, O my son Helaman, behold, thou art in thy youth, 3
 and therefore, I beseech of thee that
 thou wilt hear my words and learn of me;
 for I do know that whosoever shall put their trust in God
 shall be supported in their trials
 and their troubles
 and their afflictions
 and shall be lifted up at the last day.
- F And I would not that ye think that I know of myself 4
 not of the temporal
 but of the spiritual,
 not of the carnal mind
 but of God.
- G Now, behold, I say unto you, 5
 if I had not been born of God
 I should not have known these things;
 but God has, by the mouth of his holy angel,
 made these things known unto me.
 not of any worthiness of myself.
- H For I went about with the sons of Mosiah, 6
seeking to destroy the church of God:
 but behold, God sent his holy angel to stop us by the way.
 And behold, he spake unto us, as it were the voice of thunder, 7
 and the whole earth did tremble beneath our feet:
 and we all fell to the earth, for the fear of the Lord came upon us.
- But behold, the voice said unto me: Arise. 8
 And I arose and stood up, and beheld the angel.
 And he said unto me: 9
 If thou wilt of thyself be destroyed,
seek no more to destroy the church of God..
 And it came to pass that I fell to the earth: 10
 and it was for the space of three days and three nights
 that I could not open my mouth,
 neither had I the use of my limbs.
- And the angel spake more things unto me. 11
 which were heard by my brethren, but I did not hear them;
 for when I heard the words--
 If thou wilt be destroyed of thyself,
seek no more to destroy the church of God--
 I was struck with such great fear and amazement
 lest perhaps I should be destroyed,
 that I fell to the earth and I did hear no more.

- I But I was racked with eternal torment, for my soul was harrowed up 12
to the greatest degree and racked with all my sins.
- Yea, I did remember all my sins and iniquities. 13
for which I was tormented with the pains of hell;
- Yea, I saw that I had rebelled against my God,
and that I had not kept his holy commandments.
- Yea, and I had murdered many of his children, 14
or rather led them away unto destruction;
- Yea, and in fine so great had been my iniquities,
that the very thought of coming into the presence of my God
did rack my soul with inexpressible horror.
- Oh, thought I, that I could be banished and become extinct 15
both soul and body,
- That I might not be brought to stand in the presence of my God,
to be judged of my deeds.
- And now, for three days and for three nights was I racked. 16
even with the pains of a damned soul.
- J And it came to pass that as I was thus racked with torment. 17
while I was harrowed up by the memory of my many sins,
- K behold, I remembered also to have heard my father prophesy unto the people
concerning the coming of one Jesus Christ, a Son of God,
to atone for the sins of the world.
- K' Now, as my mind caught hold upon this thought, I cried within my heart: 18
O Jesus, thou Son of God,
have mercy on me, who am in the gall of bitterness,
and am encircled about by the everlasting chains of death.
- J' And now, behold, when I thought this, I could remember my pains no more: 19
yea, I was harrowed up by the memory of my sins no more.
- I' And oh, what joy, and what marvelous light I did behold; 20
yea, my soul was filled with joy as exceeding as was my pain!
- Yea, I say unto you, my son, 21
that there could be nothing so exquisite and so bitter
as were my pains.
- Yea, and again I say unto you, my son,
that on the other hand, there can be nothing so exquisite and sweet
as was my joy.
- Yea, methought I saw, even as our father Lehi saw, 22
"God sitting upon his throne
surrounded with numberless concourses of angels,
in the attitude of singing and praising their God;"
yea, and my soul did long to be there.

H' But behold, my limbs did receive their strength again, 23
 and I stood upon my feet,
 and did manifest unto the people
 that I had been born of God.

Yea, and from that time even until now, 24
 I have labored without ceasing,
 that I might bring souls unto repentance

G' that I might bring them to taste of the exceeding joy
 of which I did taste;
 that they might also be born of God,
 and be filled with the Holy Ghost.

Yea, and now behold, O my son, 25

the Lord doth give me exceedingly great joy
 in the fruit of my labors;
 For because of the word which he has imparted unto me, 26
 behold, many have been born of God,

F' and have tasted
 as I have tasted,
 and have seen eye to eye
 as I have seen;
 therefore they do know of these things of which I have spoken,
 as I do know;
 and the knowledge which I have is of God.

E' And I have been supported 27
 under trials
 and troubles of every kind,
 yea, and in all manner of afflictions:

Yea, God has delivered me
 from prison,
 and from bonds,
 and from death;

Yea, and I do put my trust in him,
 and he will still deliver me.

And I know that he will raise me up at the last day, 28
 to dwell with him in glory.

D' Yea, and I will praise him forever,
 for he has brought our fathers out of Egypt,
 and he has swallowed up the Egyptians in the Red Sea;
 and he led them by his power into the promised land;
 yea, and he has delivered them out of bondage and captivity
from time to time:

yea, and he has also brought our fathers out of the land of Jerusalem; 29
 and also by his everlasting power,
 he has delivered them out of bondage and captivity from time to time
 even down to the present day;

C' And I have always retained in remembrance their captivity:
 yea, and ye also ought to retain in remembrance, as I have done, their
captivity.

B' But behold, my son, this is not all; 30
 for ye ought to know as I do know,
that inasmuch as ye shall keep the commandments of God
ye shall prosper in the land;
 and ye ought to know also,
 that inasmuch as ye will not keep the commandments of God
 ye shall be cut off from his presence.

A' Now this is according to his word.

The foregoing arrangement of Alma 36 speaks largely for itself. This text divides evenly into two mirrored halves, presenting its initial sequence of ideas in one order and then revisiting that sequence in precisely the opposite order. The effect is pleasing, powerful, effective, and eloquent. Indeed, the impressive overall structure of this passage becomes even more evident as its twenty-two paired sections are compared, pair by pair.

C. Paired Sections Analyzed. Sections A and A' introduce and conclude the chapter by reference to Alma's "words" and to the "word" of God:

A My son, give ear to my words; 1

A' Now this is according to his word. 30

Sections B and B' both state the principle that prosperity in the land is conditioned upon keeping the commandments of God. B states the principle once; B' repeats it twice, verbatim, once positively and once negatively:

B for I swear unto you that
inasmuch as ye shall keep the commandments of God
ye shall prosper in the land. 1

B' But behold, my son, this is not all; 30
 for ye ought to know as I do know,
that inasmuch as ye shall keep the commandments of God
ye shall prosper in the land;
 and ye ought to know also,
 that inasmuch as ye will not keep the commandments of God
 ye shall be cut off from his presence.

Sections C and C' both exhort Helaman to remember, as Alma had done, the captivity of the fathers. C says that Helaman should do as Alma has done, whereas C' begins by stating what Alma has done and then moves, in the opposite order, to the obligation this imposes upon Helaman:

C I would that ye should do as I have done. 2
in remembering the captivity of our fathers

C' And I have always retained in remembrance their captivity:
 yea, and ye also ought to retain in remembrance, as I have done. their
captivity.

Sections D and D' both speak of bondage and deliverance. Section D itself is a small chiasm, composed of the following elements:

D for they were in bondage.
 and none could deliver them
 except it was the God of Abraham,
 and the God of Isaac,
 and the God of Jacob;
 and he surely did deliver them
in their afflictions.

The expression "did deliver them in their afflictions" (instead of from their afflictions) seems odd, except when it is understood as a direct parallel and chiastic counterpart to the

phrase "in bondage." At the center of D is the triplet, "the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob."

D' does not repeat this threefold name of God, but it speaks of multiple deliverances of the fathers: first, of the Israelites from Egypt; second, of the Israelites in the Holy Land who were delivered from time to time, third, of Lehi out of the land of Jerusalem, and of his descendants from time to time. The principle of deliverance is universal, and thus D' begins with Alma praising God forever, for God will deliver his children "even down to the present day," as D' concludes. Also embedded in D' are several interesting pairings: two references to "Egypt," two uses of the phrase "brought our fathers out," a reversal in the two phrases "by his power into the promised land" and "the land of Jerusalem by his everlasting power," two occurrences of the phrase "delivered them out of bondage and captivity from time to time," and finally an inclusio between "forever" and "the present day." In other words, D' is a set of paired elements:

D' Yea, and I will praise him forever,

for he has brought our fathers out of Egypt,
and he has swallowed up the Egyptians in the Red Sea;

and he led them by his power into the promised land;
yea, and he has delivered them out of bondage and captivity
from time to time;

yea, and he has also brought our fathers out of the land of Jerusalem; 29
and also by his everlasting power.
he has delivered them out of bondage and captivity from time to time

even down to the present day.

E and E' are both distinguished by the repetition of the triad, "supported under trials, troubles, and afflictions." In E', as if to draw this precise repetition emphatically to the reader's attention, the third member of this triplet is stressed, "yea, and in all manner of afflictions." In addition, both E and E' speak of putting one's "trust in God" and of being "lifted up at the last day." In E, Alma states this as a universal proposition, applicable to all people; in E' he personalizes the matter by speaking of the way in which he had been individually supported under trials, troubles, and afflictions, and hence that he will personally put his trust in God to be raised up at the last day. The triplet of "trials, troubles, and afflictions" appears at the center of E, flanked by the ideas of "trust" and being "lifted up." In E', Alma puts the ideas of "trust" and "being lifted up at the last day" together at the end of the section, and begins E' with two other triplets: first the "trials, troubles and afflictions" group, followed by "prison, bonds, and death." Thus, the new triplet, speaking of Alma's deliverance from nearly certain death at the hands of the people of Ammonihah (Alma 14), stands at the center of E', flanked by materials drawn from E:

E And now, O my son Helaman, behold, thou art in thy youth,
and therefore, I beseech of thee that
thou wilt hear my words and learn of me;
for I do know that whosoever shall put their trust in God

3

shall be supported in their trials,
 and their troubles,
 and their afflictions,

and shall be lifted up at the last day.

E' And I have been supported 27
 under trials
 and troubles of every kind,
 yea, and in all manner of afflictions:

Yea, God has delivered me
 from prison,
 and from bonds,
 and from death;

Yea, and I do put my trust in him.
 and he will still deliver me.

And I know that he will raise me up at the last day, 28
 to dwell with him in glory.

F and F' both affirm that Alma speaks of his own knowledge.

In F, Alma asserts that he does not know of himself, but of God,
 and the section begins and ends with the juxtapositions "not of
 the temporal, but of the spiritual, not of the carnal, but of
 God." F' extends this theme to Alma's converts, that they also
 know as he knows. F' presupposes that the listener will recall
 from F that the nature of Alma's knowledge is "not of the
 temporal, but of the spiritual":

F And I would not that ye think that I know of myself 4
 not of the temporal
 but of the spiritual,
 not of the carnal mind
 but of God.

F' and have tasted
 as I have tasted,
 and have seen eye to eye
 as I have seen;
 therefore they do know of these things of which I have spoken,
 as I do know;
 and the knowledge which I have is of God.

The theme of sections G and G' is being "born of God." The
 two sections are not particularly drawn together, except somewhat
 by the word "holy" which appears in both sections.

G Now, behold, I say unto you, 5
 if I had not been born of God
 I should not have known these things;
 but God has, by the mouth of his holy angel,
 made these things known unto me,
 not of any worthiness of myself.

G' that I might bring them to taste of the exceeding joy
 of which I did taste;
 that they might also be born of God,
 and be filled with the Holy Ghost.

Yea, and now behold, O my son, 25
 the Lord doth give me exceedingly great joy
 in the fruit of my labors;
 For because of the word which he has imparted unto me, 26
 behold, many have been born of God

H and H' speak of the contrast between Alma's persecution of the church and being stricken by the angel of the Lord on the one hand, and his recovery and work to bring souls to repentance on the other hand. Both sections speak with unique repetition of limbs, feet, earth, and of falling down or standing up. H is an interesting composition. Three times it intones the phrase "seek no more to destroy the Church of God," the language of the angel, repeated in virtually the same words. This three-fold repetition has a powerful dramatic and compositional effect:

H For I went about with the sons of Mosiah, 6
seeking to destroy the church of God;
 but behold, God sent his holy angel to stop us by the way.
 And behold, he spake unto us, as it were the voice of thunder, 7
 and the whole earth did tremble beneath our feet;
 and we all fell to the earth, for the fear of the Lord came upon us.

But behold, the voice said unto me: Arise. 8
 And I arose and stood up, and beheld the angel.
 And he said unto me: 9
 If thou wilt of thyself be destroyed,
seek no more to destroy the church of God.
 And it came to pass that I fell to the earth;
 and it was for the space of three days and three nights 10
 that I could not open my mouth,
 neither had I the use of my limbs.

And the angel spake more things unto me, 11
 which were heard by my brethren, but I did not hear them:
 for when I heard the words--
 If thou wilt be destroyed of thyself,
seek no more to destroy the church of God--
 I was struck with such great fear and amazement
 lest perhaps I should be destroyed,
 that I fell to the earth and I did hear no more.

H' But behold, my limbs did receive their strength again, 23
 and I stood upon my feet.
 and did manifest unto the people
 that I had been born of God.

Yea, and from that time even until now, 24
 I have labored without ceasing,
 that I might bring souls unto repentance.

I and I' contrast the agony of Alma's suffering with the joy of his conversion. Indeed, the contrast is made explicit in I': "Yea, my soul was filled with joy as exceeding as was my pain" (Alma 36:20), giving considerable internal evidence that Alma was aware of the literary structure of this chapter. Something of an original eight part poem seems to be found in section I, but it is impossible to reconstruct the original form of that composition, if it existed. In section I, the word "racked" appears four times (twice in strophe 1, and once each in strophes 5 and 8, giving balance to the first and second halves of this section); also used twice each are the words "torment" (strophes 1 and 2), "pains" (strophes 2 and 8), "iniquities" (strophes 2 and 5), and "presence of my God" (strophes 5 and 7), binding together the two halves of this composition. Several of these key thematic words seem to be introduced chiastically at the beginning of this section, i.e., torment--all my sins--all my sins--tormented, and possibly also racked--torment--harrowed--racked (Alma 36:12-13). These reversals vividly convey a sharp

feeling of being tossed back and forth in being racked and tormented. Finally, the first and fifth strophes are slightly longer than the others, each introducing their respective quatrains. In I', the torment has been transformed into joy. Whereas Alma had previously trembled at the thought of coming into the presence of God, now he (like Lehi) is ushered into the vision of the heavenly council and his soul longs to be there:

- I But I was racked with eternal torment, 12
 for my soul was harrowed up to the greatest degree
 and racked with all my sins.
- Yea, I did remember all my sins and iniquities, 13
 for which I was tormented with the pains of hell;
- Yea, I saw that I had rebelled against my God,
 and that I had not kept his holy commandments.
- Yea, and I had murdered many of his children, 14
 or rather led them away unto destruction;
- Yea, and in fine so great had been my iniquities,
 that the very thought of coming into the presence of my God
 did rack my soul with inexpressible horror.
- Oh, thought I, that I could be banished and become extinct 15
 both soul and body,
- That I might not be brought to stand in the presence of my God,
 to be judged of my deeds.
- And now, for three days and for three nights was I racked, 16
 even with the pains of a damned soul.
- I' And oh, what joy, and what marvelous light I did behold; 20
 yea, my soul was filled with joy as exceeding as was my pain!
- Yea, I say unto you, my son, 21
 that there could be nothing so exquisite and so bitter as were my pains.
 Yea, and again I say unto you, my son,
 that on the other hand, there can be nothing so exquisite and sweet
 as was my joy.
- Yea, methought I saw, even as our father Lehi saw, 22
 "God sitting upon his throne
 surrounded with numberless concourses of angels,
 in the attitude of singing and praising their God;" (see 1 Nephi 1:8)
 yea, and my soul did long to be there.

The paired sections J and J' are markedly distinguished by their unique use of the nearly identical phrases "harrowed up by the memory of my many sins," and "harrowed up by the memory of my sins no more":

J And it came to pass that as I was thus racked with torment, 17
while I was harrowed up by the memory of my many sins

J' And now, behold, when I thought this, I could remember my pains no more: 19
yea, I was harrowed up by the memory of my sins no more.

Sections K and K' stand at the center of the composition, naming "Jesus Christ, a son of God," and "Jesus, thou son of God," respectively. The structure of Alma's account makes it clear that it was neither the angel, nor the suffering, nor the prayers of the righteous elders, nor Alma's fear of the consequences of his evil deed, nor any other such thing that ultimately caused Alma's conversion. Only when he remembered that his father had spoken of the atonement of Christ and then called upon Jesus Christ did his condition turn around. It is significant that the word "atone" and "heart" occur at the absolute center of this composition, bordered by the name of Jesus Christ, for his atonement and man's responding sacrifice of a broken heart are essential to all divine forgiveness:

K behold, I remembered also to have heard my father prophesy unto the people concerning the coming of one Jesus Christ, a Son of God,
to atone for the sins of the world.

K' Now, as my mind caught hold upon this thought, I cried within my heart: 18
O Jesus, thou Son of God,
have mercy on me, who am in the gall of bitterness,
and am encircled about by the everlasting chains of death.

D. Weaving Factors. In addition to the close relationship that exists between each of the ordered sections discussed above, Alma's words are remarkably fluid, as these sections flow one into the other and then back out again. No awkwardness of form, no abrupt disjunctures, are evident here, but bridges connect each section to the next in smooth transitions. This is accomplished largely by the introduction of minor items in one section which anticipate subsequent ideas and weave the thought from one section to the next. Thus, for example, the phrase "my words" at the end of A blends into the beginning of B, "for I swear." "Captivity" at the end of C blends directly into "bondage" at the beginning of D. "Afflictions" at the end of D introduces a word that will appear again more significantly in E. The phrase "for I do know" in E anticipates all of F, and F ends with the words "of God," which is where G begins. G ends with Alma acknowledging his unworthiness, which leads naturally into H, the section on Alma's wickedness in "seeking to destroy the Church of God." H first introduces the ideas of fear and destruction, which are intensified in I as torment and inexpressible horror. J resumes with a single usage of the key-word mentioned four times in I, "racked." The memory of "sins" in J and J' surround the centrally stated purpose of Christ's coming, namely "to atone for the sins of the world."

Moving from the center now back out to the end, similarly subtle steps of transition and weaving again occur. J' introduces the twice-repeated phrase "no more," which leads directly to the contrast between the joy and pain in I'. Alma's

longing to be in the presence of God at the end of I' evokes the idea of physical movement, which flows into H' and the recovery of strength in Alma's limbs. H' ends with the phrase "that I might bring," and G' begins with the same phrase "that I might bring." The idea of Alma's joy in I' looks forward to the joy of Alma's converts in G'; the joy in I' is called "exquisite," whereas in G' it is both times called "exceeding." As G' blends into F', the phrases "as I have tasted," and "as I have seen," grow into the phrase "as I do know," so that F' returns to the theme of F, namely the source of Alma's knowledge. E' ends with a unique phrase "to dwell with him in glory," which seems to have been introduced as a transition to D', which begins with the idea of praising or glorifying God forever. Alma will praise God forever because of his deliverance from bondage and captivity, which again is mentioned in C' in remembering the captivity of the fathers. C' ends with the exhortation "ye also ought to," a phrase which is twice connected in B'.

These weaving links are subtle, but effective. They make the transitions from section to section in this chapter smooth and flowing. This reflects a very highly polished literary product. If followed by an author mechanically, the idea of chiasmus can produce rigid and stilted writing, as happens when any artistic device is misused or poorly implemented. Alma does not, however, simply stick a list of ideas together in one order and then awkwardly retrace his steps through that list in the opposite order. His work has the markings of a very skillful writer, one completely comfortable with this mode of expression.

E. Degree of Chiasticity. One impressive thing about the Book of Mormon is not merely the fact that it contains chiasmus, for to a limited extent parallelisms generally like chiasmus can be found in nursery rhymes, English poetry, and other bodies of literature, as I have noted several times in other publications.⁷ More significant in the Book of Mormon is the high degree of chiasticity of several complex instances of chiasmus found in this volume.⁸ As I suggest elsewhere,⁹ some fifteen standards can be employed to assess a passage's degree of chiasticity. Judged by these criteria which can be applied to any suggested chiasm, the degree of chiasmus in Alma 36 is extremely high.

1. Objectivity. The chiastic pattern of Alma 36 is strongly verifiable in the text itself. The proposed arrangement arises out of elements that are objectively observable in the text. It is not based on loose connections, imaginative synonyms, or conceptual relationships. The foregoing analysis identifies 22 sections in the chapter (11 in the first half, and 11 in the second half). In these sections, there are at least 26 key words or phrases (or their direct opposite) that are identical or nearly identical in both the first and second halves.

⁷ E.g., Welch, "Chiasmus in the Book of Mormon," BYU Studies 10 (1969): 70-71.

⁸ For a further discussion, see my master's thesis, A Study Relating Chiasmus in the Book of Mormon to Chiasmus in the Old Testament, Ugaritic Epics, Homer, and Selected Greek and Latin Authors (Brigham Young University, 1970).

⁹ "Criteria for Identifying the Presence of Chiasmus," F.A.R.M.S. 1989.

Particularly indicative is the contrast between the pain in I and the joy in I', a comparison that is drawn explicitly in Alma 36:20: "My soul was filled with joy as exceeding as was my pain." Few texts contain evidence as overt as this, showing that the author was conscious of the relationship between the elements of the first and second halves of an extended chiasm. This significantly enhances the objective character of the chiasm in this text. It cues the reader or listener to relate this reference in section I' to its counterpart in section I, and by implication it instructs the reader to do likewise with each of the ensuing sections.

2. Purpose. A passage's degree of chiasticity is greatly enhanced when a strong conceptual or stylistic reason can be identified why the author might have employed chiasmus in the text at hand. In Alma 36, no better literary device can be imagined to convey the sense of conversion, the complete reversal of one's spiritual attitudes and religious behavior, than chiasmus. The turning point of Alma's chapter communicates both in form and substance the turning point of Alma's life. Moreover, it has been observed in biblical texts that the holy names of God tend to gravitate either toward the middle or the ends of chiasms.¹⁰ For this reason as well, the placement of the sacred name of "Jesus Christ, a Son of God" twice at the center of Alma 36 seems to be highly purposeful and intentional. The use of chiasmus in this text serves concertedly to focus the

¹⁰ Nils Lund, Chiasmus in the New Testament (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 1942), 40-41.

attention of the reader on the most important factor in the conversion of Alma the Younger, namely his calling upon the holy name of Jesus Christ, the son of God, the only "name given whereby salvation cometh" (Mosiah 5:8).

3. Boundaries. Chiasm is strongest if it operates upon a literary unit as a whole. Alma 36:1-30 is an unequivocal literary unit. The blessing of Alma to his eldest son Helaman divides into two units, printed as Alma 36 and Alma 37. In the former, Alma gives his "words" (see Alma 36:1, 3; see also Alma 36:30). In Alma 37, he gives his "commandments;" for example, Alma "commands" Helaman regarding his stewardship over the Plates of Nephi, the Plates of Brass, the 24 Plates of Ether, and the Liahona, together with exhortations with respect to his teaching, preaching, and learning to keep the commandments of God. The phrase "I command you" is dominant in Alma 37 (Alma 37:1, 2, 16, 20, 27), but this phrase does not appear in Alma 36. Thus, the break between Alma 36:30 and 37:1 is not artificial (a major paragraph break also occurred at this point in the 1830 edition of the Book of Mormon). The chiasm in Alma 36 operates on an entire well-defined unit, the account of the conversion of Alma to his son Helaman.

4. Competition. There seems to be no other competing structural devices employed in this chapter as a whole. Thus, it may be viewed as a pure example of the chiastic form.

5. Length. The longer and clearer the chiasm, the higher its degree of chiasticity. As set forth above, Alma 36 is composed of 22 sections and includes at least 26 identical key

words or phrases, occurring initially in one order and then repeated in precisely the opposite order. Alma 36 is one of the longest and tightly-linked chiasms I am aware of.

6. Density. In its 22 sections, several words play a role in the overall structure. Alma 36 contains 1230 total words altogether. Of these, around 175 may be counted among the total words that figure directly into the chiastic structure by virtue of the paired repetitions within the chapter. This is a respectable density factor, considering the overall length of the passage.

7. Dominance. The words important to the chiastic structure of this chapter are significant or substantial words. Since the composition does not hinge on minor parts of speech or inconsequential elements, its degree of chiasticity is strengthened. Words that I identify as substantial ones figuring directly into the chiastic arrangement of Alma's conversion account are listed in the next paragraph. They are the dominant words in this account; they convey the essence of Alma 36.

8. Mavericks. A proposed chiasm is less convincing if words that are important within the structure also appear elsewhere within the text but outside the suggested arrangement. The following are dominant words in the structure of Alma 36. In only a few cases do these words appear anywhere in the chapter except within their respective sections, or when they are used as transitional phrases to immediately adjacent sections, as the following table demonstrates.

<u>Key words</u>	<u>Related Sections Where They Appear</u>	<u>Maverick Appearances</u>
Word(s)	A, A'	E, H, G'
Keep	B, B'	
Commandments	B, B'	I
Prosper	B, B'	
Land	B, B'	
As I have done	C, C'	
Remember	C, I, K, J' C', C'	
Captivity	C, D', C'	
Our fathers	C, D', D'	
Bondage	D, D'	
Deliver	D, E', D'	
Trust	E, E'	
Supported	E, E'	
Trials	E, E'	
Troubles	E, E'	
Afflictions	E, E'	
Last day	E, E'	
Born	G, H', G', G'	
Know	E, F, F', F', E'	B'
Limbs	H, H'	
Feel-Stand	H, H'	
Feet	H, H'	
Soul(s)	I(4 times), I'(2 times), H'	
Sins	I(2 times), J, K, J'	
Joy (5 times)	I'(3 times), G'(2 times)	
Pain (5 times)	I(2 times), J', I'(2 times)	
Harrowed up	I, J, J'	
Memory	J, J'	
Jesus	K, K'	
Son of God.	K, K'	

The foregoing information demonstrates that Alma 36 contains very few extraneous occurrences of the key words upon which its chiastic structure is composed. These key words quite consistently occur in and only in their correlative sections. Thus, the proposed analysis cannot be charged with selectively picking and choosing among the occurrences of these elements in this chapter while arbitrarily ignoring others.

9. Reduplication. If the same word or element appears over and over within the system, it becomes more likely that some other kind of repetition (including random repetition) is

predominant in the passage. In Alma 36, there is a low degree of random repetition or reduplication of words. With the exception of "remember," "soul(s)," "know," "son(s)" and "God," no word appears more than five times in the entire chapter, other than prepositions, conjunctions and helping verbs. This corroborates the claim that the structure of the chapter is not the result of random repetitions. The distribution of these words through out the chapter is reported on Appendices 1 and 2, showing the following results.

<u>Description</u>	<u>Number</u>
Words appearing once in the chapter	144
" " twice	57
" " three times	24
" " four times	18
" " five times	16
" " more than five times	42

As the Appendices demonstrate in detail, few significant words are repeated more than five times in this chapter, and as is seen further below, these repetitions are generally balanced or in close proximity to each other. Alma 36 manifests a low incidence of reduplication or frequently repeated reoccurrences of a small number of words.

10. Centrality. The crux of chiasmus is generally its central turning point. It is beyond doubt that Alma 36 contains a well-defined centerpiece that communicates a distinct crossing effect. A clear chiasm occurs at the center of this chapter in sections J, K, K', and J'. The key terms are:

Harrowed up
 I remembered
 Jesus Christ, a son of God
 Jesus Christ, thou son of God
 I could remember no more
 Harrowed up no more.

These central lines are relatively short and tightly related, manifesting a clear reversal of the torment and pain experienced by Alma, resulting in the joy and light of total conversion. This is a powerful centerpiece.

11. Balance. Alma 36 also exhibits a strong degree of overall balance. Ideally, the elements on both sides of the proposed focal point should be nearly equal, and in the case of Alma 36, this is achieved in many ways. For example, the first and second halves compare as follows:

<u>Description</u>	<u>36:1-17</u>	<u>36:18-30</u>
Total words:	645	585
Percentage of total words:	52.4%	47.6%
Words appearing once in Alma 36	80	64
Words appearing twice in Alma 36 but only in their respective halves of the chapter	14	19
Words appearing three times in Alma 36 but only in their respective halves	13	6
	<u>Number</u>	
Words appearing twice in Alma 36 balanced once each in first and second halves (1/1)	25	

Additionally, the word "behold" appears six times in the first half, and six times in the second; even inconsequential words like "my," and "and" occur equally in the two halves of this chapter. The foregoing data, of course, is presented simply to indicate the overall balance that exists in Alma 36. The chapter is balanced accurately around its centerpiece. It is unknown to what extent Alma or any of his listeners were conscious of the extent to which, or the specific ways in which, this chapter is

equally balanced. The foregoing data does, however, corroborate the conclusion that the chapter was composed with balance and equilibrium generally in mind. It manifests a high degree of symmetry and proportion.

12. Climax. The central elements of this passage are its focal climax. The concept at the center of Alma 36 is not only the structural turning point of the chapter, but also its conceptual climax. It is very weighty, indisputably supporting concentrated attention and bearing the author's paramount intention.

13. Return. Alma 36 conveys a powerful sense of completeness and return. It ends where it began, namely with the exhortation that if one is going to be blessed, prospered, and delivered by the Lord, one must keep his commandments. The journey into Alma's conversion explains how it is that he knows this to be true and is of God, and therefore why his words (A) are in fact equatable with God's words (A').

14. Stylistic Compatibility. It becomes even more likely that the chiasmus in Alma 36 was intentionally created by Alma when one finds chiasmus being used creatively and meaningfully in other contemporaneous writings of this man. For example, Alma 41:13-15, a passage in the blessing of Alma to his third son, Corianton, is strongly chiastic and was given by Alma at the same time as his blessing to his son Helaman. Moreover, the occurrence of small chiasms within Alma 36, as well as numerous parallelisms within this chapter and elsewhere in his writings, support the conclusion that parallelism was a major tool in

Alma's literary repertoire. Particularly interesting is the striking compatibility of the chiasm in Alma 36 with the abrupt antithetical parallelisms in Mosiah 27, discussed further below.

15. Aesthetics. Alma 36 attains high marks in terms of fluency with the form, consistency in sustaining the structure, harmony, and pliability at the turning point. Alma has presented a rigorous composition in which the form does not draw undue attention to itself. As shown above, Alma easily weaves the thought of one section into the next, evidencing great creativity and ease of style. The composition is effective, memorable, and inspiring.

16. Other. Another possible reason why Alma might have used chiasmus in speaking to Helaman is that Helaman was Alma's first-born son. Over time, the ancient rights of firstborn sons had dwindled in significance in Nephite law and society.¹¹ Rights of primogeniture appear to have been further deemphasized among the Nephites upon their instituting the reign of judges, instead of continuing with hereditary kings, shortly after Helaman was born. It is possible that Alma gave Helaman a double structured spiritual blessing in order to represent poetically the double portion of the father's legacy that typically belonged to the firstborn son (Deuteronomy 21:17). This possibility is distinctly enhanced by the fact that the blessing to Alma's second son Shiblon (Alma 38), discussed further below, consists

¹¹ See my, "Lehi's Last Will and Testament," in 2 Nephi: The Doctrinal Development (Provo: Religious Studies Center, 1989), forthcoming.

of only the first half of Helaman's blessing. It stops precisely at the central turning point of the former words before concluding with a separate section of moral exhortation.

17. Intentionality. Since the degree of chiasticity in Alma 36 is very high, we may suppose that Alma purposefully created it. It is scarcely possible to imagine that this complex pattern occurred by accident. Short of an actual statement by Alma certifying that he used this pattern on purpose, it is difficult to imagine a clearer communication of that fact than the text itself gives us.

Moreover, this conclusion is corroborated by a very unusual but fortunate set of circumstances. While the presence of a chiastic pattern in most texts does not establish that the structure was intentionally created, in the case of Alma 36 we have corroboration elsewhere. Two related texts exist in Mosiah 27 and Alma 38. The relationships between these three texts give further evidence that the words of Alma 36 were precisely selected and that their structure was intentionally composed.

F. Comparison of Mosiah 27 and Alma 36. The story of Alma's conversion is told three times in the Book of Mormon: Contemporaneously in the spontaneous words of Alma in Mosiah 27, and twice later in Alma's life, in Alma 36 and 38. Despite the intervening years and pages between the events of Mosiah 27 and the document that is Alma 36, it is evident that both accounts were written by the same person. Distinctive phrases found in Mosiah 27 reappear in Alma 36 as he retells his conversion story. Alma's abrupt antithetical parallelisms (see below) in Mosiah 27,

however, have now been separated, and their elements have been repositioned into the respective halves of the chiastic structure of Alma 36.

The words of Alma in Mosiah 27 appear below. We do not know who wrote the surviving account of Alma's conversion in Mosiah 27. It could have been Mosiah II or Alma the Elder, and it appears to have been abridged somewhat by Mormon; nevertheless, these words report the spontaneous and characteristic expressions of Alma the Younger. The text given here demonstrates how the words of the Angel and of Alma have been quoted and embedded in this report. A large number of these precisely quoted words and phrases reappear in Alma 36, as underlined in the text below. This material is advanced as further evidence that these words belonged to Alma and that they were purposefully and consciously built into the structure of the longer and more reflective account of Alma's conversion in Alma 36.

Alma 36

Mosiah 27:8-37

Now the sons of Mosiah were numbered among the unbelievers; and also one of the sons of Alma was numbered among them, he being called Alma, after his father; nevertheless, he became a very wicked and an idolatrous man. And he was a man of many words, and did speak much flattery to the people; therefore he led many of the people to do after the manner of his iniquities.

And he became a great hinderment to the prosperity of the church of God; stealing away the hearts of the people; causing much dissension among the people; giving a chance for the enemy of God to exercise his power over them. And now it came to pass that while he was going about to destroy the church of God, for he did go about secretly with the sons of Mosiah seeking to destroy the church, and to lead astray the people of the Lord, contrary to the commandments of God, or even the king--And as I said unto you, as they were going about rebellious against God, behold, the angel of the Lord appeared unto them; and he descended as it were in a cloud; and he spake as it were with a voice of thunder, which caused the earth to shake upon which they stood; and so great was their

36:6

36:14

36:13

36:7

36:7 astonishment, that they fell to the earth, and understood
 36:11 not the words which he spake unto them:

"For why persecutest thou the church of God? For the Lord hath said: This is my church, and I will establish it; and nothing shall overthrow it, save it is the transgression of my people."

And again, the angel said: "Behold, the Lord hath heard the prayers of his people, and also the prayers of his servant, Alma, who is thy father; for he has prayed with much faith concerning thee that thou mightest be brought to the knowledge of the truth; therefore, for this purpose have I come to convince thee of the power and authority of God, that the prayers of his servants might be answered according to their faith. And now behold, can ye dispute the power of God? For behold, doth not my voice shake the earth? And can ye not also behold me before you? And I am sent from God. Now I say unto thee: Go, and remember the captivity of thy fathers in the land of Helam, and in the land of Nephi; and remember how great things he has done for them; for they were in bondage, and he has delivered them. And now I say unto thee, Alma, go thy way, and seek to destroy the church no more, that their prayers may be answered, and this even if thou wilt of thyself be cast off."

36:6
 36:2, 29
 36:2
 36:2
 36:9, 11
 36:9, 11

And now it came to pass that these were the last words which the angel spake unto Alma, and he departed. And now Alma and those that were with him fell again to the earth, for great was their astonishment; for with their own eyes they had beheld an angel of the Lord; and his voice was as thunder, which shook the earth; and they knew that there was nothing save the power of God that could shake the earth and cause it to tremble as though it would part asunder. And now the astonishment of Alma was so great that he became dumb, that he could not open his mouth; yea, and he became weak, even that he could not move his hands; therefore he was taken by those that were with him, and carried helpless, even until he was laid before his father. And they rehearsed unto his father all that had happened unto them; and his father rejoiced, for he knew that it was the power of God.

36:10
 36:7
 36:10

And he caused that a multitude should be gathered together that they might witness what the Lord had done for his son, and also for those that were with him. And he caused that the priests should assemble themselves together; and they began to fast, and to pray to the Lord their God that he would open the mouth of Alma, that he might speak, and also that his limbs might receive their strength--that the eyes of the people might be opened to see and know of the goodness and glory of God. And it came to pass after they had fasted and prayed for the space of two days and two nights, the limbs of Alma

36:23
 36:26
 36:10

36:23 received their strength, and he stood up and began to speak unto them, bidding them to be of good comfort. For, said he,

"I have repented of my sins, and have been redeemed of the Lord; behold I am born of the Spirit.

36:5,23,24,26 And the Lord said unto me: Marvel not that all
36:4 mankind, yea, men and women, all nations, kindreds, tongues and people, must be born again; yea, born of God, changed from their carnal and fallen state, to a state of righteousness, being redeemed of God, becoming his sons and daughters; and thus they become new creatures; and unless they do this, they can in nowise inherit the kingdom of God.

36:15 I say unto you, unless this be the case, they must be cast off; and this I know, because I was like to be cast off.

36:18, 27 Nevertheless, after wading through much tribulations,
36:5,23,24,26 repenting nigh unto death, the Lord in mercy hath seen fit to snatch me out of an everlasting burning, and I am born of God.

36:18 My soul hath been redeemed from the gall of bitterness
36:27 and bonds of iniquity.

36:20 I was in the darkest abyss; but now I behold the marvelous light of God.

36:12, 14 My soul was racked with eternal torment; but I am
36:19 snatched, and my soul is pained no more.

I rejected my Redeemer, and denied that which had been spoken of by our fathers; but now that they may foresee that he will come,

That he remembereth every creature of his creating,
He will make himself manifest unto all.

Yea, every knee shall bow, and every tongue confess before him.

36:3, 28 Yea, even at the last day when all men shall stand to be
36:15 judged of him, then shall they confess that he is God;

Then shall they confess, who live without God in the world, that the judgment of an everlasting punishment is just upon them;

And they shall quake, and tremble, and shrink beneath the glance of his all-searching eye."

36:24 And now it came to pass that Alma began from this time forward to teach the people, and those who were with Alma at the time the angel appeared unto them, traveling round about through all the land, publishing to all the people the things which they had heard and seen, and preaching the word of God in much tribulation, being greatly persecuted by those who were unbelievers, being smitten by many of them. But notwithstanding all this, they did impart much consolation to the church, confirming their faith, and exhorting them with long-suffering and much travail to keep the commandments of God. And four of them
36:1, 30 were the sons of Mosiah; and their names were Ammon, and
36:6 Aaron, and Omner, and Himni; these were the names of the

36:6

sons of Mosiah. And they traveled throughout all the lands of Zarahemla, and among all the people who were under the reign of king Mosiah, zealously striving to repair all the injuries which they had done to the church, confessing all their sins, and publishing all the things which they had seen, and explaining the prophecies and the scriptures to all who desired to hear them. And thus they were instruments in the hands of God in bringing many to the knowledge of the truth, yea, to the knowledge of their Redeemer. And how blessed are they! For they did publish peace; they did publish good tidings of good; and they did declare unto the people that the Lord reigneth.

This account in Mosiah 27 is interesting enough in its own right. The purpose for examining it here is simply to point out its close connections with Alma 36. Not only is the basic story the same; many words are precisely the same in both accounts. Some of the similarities are rather subtle. For example, Alma's father and the priests prayed that Alma's "limbs might receive their strength" (Mosiah 27:22), and this exact expression is used again to report that their prayers were answered (Mosiah 27:23; Alma 36:23), etc.

Most relevant to the present examination of chiasmus in Alma 36 are the words in Mosiah 27:24-32. These abrupt antithetical parallelisms ("I was in the darkest abyss, but now I behold the marvelous light of God"; "my soul was racked, but now I am snatched," etc.) are the kinds of terse statements one would expect to find in a spontaneous declaration of excited amazement and relief. Later in life, after he has had time to reflect on the experience and to gather his thoughts, Alma groups the elements on the dark side of his conversion into the first half of the account in Alma 36, and then concentrates the joyous factors of this experience into the second half of that chapter,

thereby placing the two in bold contrast to each other and amplifying the focal point of his conversion. The fact that Alma 36 is obviously a retelling of these events by the same Alma quoted in Mosiah 27--if not a very reworking of that written account--adds further evidence that the restructured organization of Alma 36 was intentional. Parts of the one have been reformatted and reorganized. It appears that achieving this required conscious and purposeful effort.

G. Comparison of Alma 36 and Alma 38. Finally, in his blessing to Shiblon, Alma tells the story of his conversion again, producing for our record the third iteration of this experience. As noted above, the blessing to Shiblon in Alma 38:1-8 consists of essentially the first half of Helaman's blessing. Before concluding with moral exhortations directed to Shiblon (Alma 38:10-15), this text takes the listener through the central turning point of Alma 36 (compare Alma 36:17-19 and Alma 38:8). The fact that this text breaks at this climactic point further solidifies the conclusion reached above that the turning point in Alma 36:18 divides that account into two halves. Moreover, many of the extended phrases in Alma 38 are precisely the same as their counterparts in Alma 36. It seems unlikely that these phrases should be duplicated so exactly unless the latter account relied directly on the former. Thus, linguistic grounds support the idea that the two texts were composed by the same individual and that the shorter account was taken from the longer. These points further reinforce the idea that the chiasmic associations identified in Alma 36 above were not

accidental. That text was carefully constructed and its order was meaningful enough to Alma that he adhered to it as he gave half that blessing again, this time to his son Shiblon.

The text of Alma 38 is set forth below, with the phrases taken verbatim from Alma 36 being underlined:

Alma 36	Alma 38:1-15	
36:1	<u>My son, give ear to my words.</u>	1
36:1, 30	For I say unto you, even as I said unto Helaman, <u>that inasmuch as ye shall keep the commandments of God ye shall prosper in the land; and inasmuch as ye will not keep the commandments of God ye shall be cut off from his presence.</u>	
36:30		
36:3, 25	And now, <u>my son</u> . I trust that I shall have <u>great joy</u> in you, because of your steadiness and your faithfulness unto God; for as you have commenced in your youth to look to the Lord your God, even so I hope that you will continue in <u>keeping his commandments</u> ; for blessed is he that endureth to the end.	
36:25	I say unto you, my son, that I have had <u>great joy</u> in thee already, because of thy faithfulness and thy diligence, and thy patience and thy long-suffering among the people of the Zoramites.	
36:2, 27	For I know that thou wast <u>in bonds</u> : yea, and I also know that thou wast stoned for the word's sake; and thou didst bear all these things with patience because the Lord was with thee;	4
36:2, 27	and now thou knowest that the <u>Lord did deliver thee</u> .	
36:2	And now my son, Shiblon, I would that ye should <u>remember</u> , that as much as ye shall <u>put your trust in God</u> even so much ye shall be <u>delivered</u> out of your <u>trials</u> , and your <u>troubles</u> , and your <u>afflictions</u> , and ye <u>shall be lifted up at the last day</u> .	5
36:3		
36:3		
36:4	Now, my son, <u>I would not that ye should think that I know these things of myself</u> . <u>but</u> it is the Spirit <u>of God</u> which is in me which <u>maketh these things known unto me</u> ; for <u>if I had not been born of God I should not have known these things</u> .	6
36:5		
36:6	<u>But behold, the Lord in his great mercy sent his angel</u> to declare unto me that I must <u>stop</u> the work of <u>destruction</u> among <u>his people</u> ;	7
36:14		

yea, and I have seen an angel face to face,
 and he spake with me,
 36:7 and his voice was as thunder, and it shook the whole earth.

36:10, 16 And it came to pass that I was three days and three 8
 36:21, 16 nights in the most bitter pain and anguish of soul:

36:17-18 And never, until I did cry out unto the Lord Jesus Christ for
mercy, did I receive a remission of my sins.
 But behold, I did cry unto him and I did find peace to my soul.

37:35; 36:3 And now, my son, I have told you this that ye may 9
learn wisdom,
 that ye may learn of me
 that there is no other way or means whereby man can be saved,
 only in and through Christ.

36:20 Behold, he is the life and the light of the world.
 Behold, he is the word of truth and righteousness.

And now, as ye have begun to teach the word 10
 even so I would that ye should continue to teach;

And I would that ye would be diligent and temperate in all
 things.

See that ye are not lifted up unto pride; 11
 Yea, see that ye do not boast in your own wisdom,
 nor of your much strength.

Use boldness, but not overbearance; 12
 And also see that ye bridle all your passions,
 that ye may be filled with love;
 See that ye refrain from idleness.

Do not pray as the Zoramites do, 13
 for ye have seen that they pray to be heard of men,
 and to be praised for their wisdom.

Do not say: O God, I thank thee that we are better 14
 than our brethren;
 But rather say: O Lord, forgive my unworthiness,
 and remember my brethren in mercy--
 Yea, acknowledge your unworthiness before God at
 all times.

And may the Lord bless your soul, and receive you 15
 at the last day into his kingdom, to sit down in peace.
 Now go, my son, and teach the word unto this people.
 Be sober. My son, farewell.

Again, the words of Alma are remarkably precise: Whole phrases,
 from Alma 36, not mere paraphrases, reemerge in this third
 account. The many relationships between Alma 36 and Alma 38 are

easily ascertained. The fact that Alma 38 constitutes essentially the first half of Alma 36 confirms the assertion that Alma himself perceived the longer text as divisible into two halves. This reinforces the conclusions reached above and enhances yet further the high degree of chiasticity perceivable in Alma 36.

H. Conclusions. A burden of persuasion rests on anyone asserting that a passage is chiastic. This paper attempts to discharge that obligation with respect to Alma 36. In my opinion, the case is established. On all accounts, from the objective to the aesthetic, this text ranks as one of the best utilizations of chiasmus one can imagine. It deserves careful, extensive examination, and it merits high acclaim and recognition as literature. I hope that this analysis has begun to do some justice to this masterpiece.

Much work remains to be done in fully understanding and appreciating Alma 36. Further research and commentary on this text would be welcome. Yet to be considered are many implications of this study, both spiritual and intellectual. Alma's words are both inspired and inspiring, religious and literary, historic and timeless, simple and complex. Further study of this text will undoubtedly yield additional ideas, as its interconnections and contrasts are pondered. Insights derived from the chiastic analysis of this text should not be limited to any single approach. This classic chiastic case invites many further aspects of interpretation and appreciation.

Appendix 1

Table of Words Appearing Only a Single Time in Alma 36

<u>word</u>	<u>verses 1-17</u>	<u>verses 18-30</u>
Abraham	2	
according		30
against	13	
always		29
amazement	11	
any	5	
arise	8	
arose	8	
art	3	
atone	17	
attitude		22
away	14	
banished	15	
because		26
become	15	
beheld	8	
beneath	7	
beseech	3	
bitter		21
bitterness		18
body	15	
bonds		27
both	15	
brethren	11	
can		21
carnal	4	
caught		18
ceasing		24
chains		18
children	14	
Christ	17	
concerning	17	
concourses		22
cried		18
cut		30
damned	16	
deeds	15	
degree	12	
destruction	14	
doth		25
down		29
dwell		28
ear	1	
encircled		18
eternal	12	
every		27
except	2	
extinct	15	

<u>word</u>	<u>verses 1-17</u>	<u>verses 18-30</u>
fine	14	
forever		28
fruit		25
gall		18
ghost		24
glory		28
hand		21
heart		18
Helaman	3	
hell	13	
hold		18
horror	14	
imparted		26
inexpressible	14	
Isaac	2	
Jacob	2	
Jerusalem		29
judged	15	
kept	13	
kind		27
knowledge		26
learn	3	
Lehi		22
lest	11	
lifted	3	
light		20
long		22
made	5	
manifest		23
manner		27
marvelous		20
mercy		18
methought		22
Mosiah	6	
murdered	14	
neither	10	
none	2	
numberless		22
off		30
one	17	
open	10	
or	14	
other		21
perhaps	11	
present		29
prison		27
promised		28
prophecy	17	
raise		28
rather	14	
rebelled	13	
receive		23
Red		28
repentance		24
Sea		28

<u>word</u>	<u>verses 1-17</u>	<u>verses 18-30</u>	
sent	6		
singing		22	
sitting		22	
space	10		
spiritual	4		
spoken		26	
stand	15		
still		27	
stop	6		
strength		23	
struck	11		
such	11		
surely	2		
surrounded		22	
swallowed		28	
swear	1		
sweet		21	
temporal	4		
thee	3		
think	4		
throne		22	
thunder	7		
thus	17		
thy	3		
tremble	7		
under		27	
until		24	
use	10		
very	14		
way	6		
we	7		
went	6		
while	17		
who		18	
whole	7		
whosoever	3		
within		18	
without		24	
world	17		
worthiness	5		
youth	3		
	<hr/>	<hr/>	
	80	64	Total: 144

Appendix 2

Table of Words Appearing More than Once in Alma 36

<u>word</u>	<u>count</u>	<u>verses 1-17</u>	<u>verses 18-30</u>	<u>Distribution</u>
a	2	16, 17		2/0
about	2	6/H	18/K'	<u>1/1</u>
afflictions	3	2/D, 3/E	27/E'	2/1
again	2		21, 23	0/2
all	5	7/H, 12/I, 13/I	27/E', 30/B'	3/2
also	6	17	24, 29(3), 30	1/5
am	2		18(2)	0/2
and	70	2(4), 3(6), 4, 7(3), 8(3), 9(2), 10(2), 11(3), 12, 13(2), 14(2), 15(2), 16(2), 17	18, 19, 20(2), 21(3), 22(2), 23(2), 24(2), 25, 26(3), 27(7), 28(6), 29(5), 30	<u>34/36</u>
angel	5	5/G, 6/H, 8/H, 11/H	22/I'	4/1
as	17	1, 2, 7, 17	18, 20(2), 21(2), 22, 26(3), 29, 30(3)	4/13
at	2	3/E	28/E'	<u>1/1</u>
be	14	3(2), 9, 11(2), 15(3)	21(2), 22, 24(2), 30	8/6
been	5	5, 14	23, 26, 27	2/3
behold	12	3/E, 5/G, 6/H, 7/H, 8/H, 17/J	19/J', 20/I', 23/H', 25/G', 26/G', 30/B'	<u>6/6</u>
bondage	3	2/D	28/D', 29/D'	1/2
born	4	5	23, 24, 26	1/3
bring	2		24(2)	0/2
brought	3	15	28, 29	1/2
but	9	4(2), 5, 6, 8, 11, 12	23, 30	7/2
by	8	5/G, 6/H, 11/H, 17/J	18/K', 19/J', 28/D', 29/D'	<u>4/4</u>
came	3	7, 10, 17		3/0
captivity	5	2	28, 29(3)	1/4

<u>word</u>	<u>count</u>	<u>verses 1-17</u>	<u>verses 18-30</u>	<u>distribution</u>
church	3	6, 9, 11		3/0
coming	2	14, 17		2/0
commandments	4	1/B, 13/I	30(2)/B'	<u>2/2</u>
could	5	2/D, 10/H, 15/I	19/J', 21/I'	3/2
day(s)	5	3/E, 10/H, 16/I	28/E', 29/D'	3/2
death	2		18, 27	0/2
deliver	3	2(2)/D	27/E'	2/1
delivered	3		27, 28, 29	0/3
destroy	3	6, 9, 11		3/0
destroyed	3	9, 11(2)		3/0
did	11	2, 7, 11(2), 13, 14	20, 22, 23(2), 24	6/5
do	6	2, 3	26(2), 27, 30	2/4
done	2	2/C	29/C'	<u>1/1</u>
earth	4	7(2), 10, 11		4/0
Egypt(ians)	2		28(2)	0/2
even	4	16	22, 24, 29	1/3
everlasting	2		18, 29	0/2
exceeding(ly)	3		20, 24, 25	0/3
exquisite	2		21(2)	0/2
eye	2		26(2)	0/2
father	2	17/K	22/I'	<u>1/1</u>
fathers	3	2/C	28/D', 29/D'	1/2
fear	2	7, 11		2/0
feet	2	7/H	23/H'	<u>1/1</u>
fell	3	7, 10, 11		3/0
filled	2		20, 24	0/2
for	15	1, 2, 3, 5, 7, 10, 11, 12, 13, 16(2), 17	26, 28, 30	12/3
from	7		24, 27(3), 28, 29, 30	0/7
give	2	1/A	25/G'	<u>1/1</u>
God	26	1/B, 2(3)/D, 3/E, 4/F, 5(2)/G, 6(2)/H, 9/H, 11/H, 13/I, 14/I, 15/I, 17/K	18/K', 22(2)/I', 23/H', 24/G', 26/G', 26/F', 27/E', 30(2)/B'	16/10
great(est)	4	11, 12, 14	25	3/1
had	7	5, 10, 13(2), 14(2)	23	6/1
harrowed	3	12/I, 17/J	19/J'	2/1

<u>word</u>	<u>count</u>	<u>verses 1-17</u>	<u>verses 18-30</u>	<u>distribution</u>
has	8	5	26, 27, 28(3), 29(2)	1/7
have	15	2, 5, 17	18, 24, 26(7), 27, 29(2)	3/12
he	12	2, 7, 9	26, 27, 28(5), 29(2)	3/9
hear	3	3, 11(2)		3/0
heard	3	11(2), 17		3/0
him	3		27, 28(2)	0/3
his	9	5/G, 6/H, 13/I, 14/I	22/J', 28/D', 29/D', 30/B', 30/A'	4/5
holy	4	5, 6, 13	24	3/1
I	61	1, 2(2), 3(2), 4(2), 5(3), 6, 8, 10(3), 11(6), 12, 13(5), 14, 15(3), 16, 17(3)	18, 19(3), 20, 21(2), 22, 23(2), 24(4), 26(5), 27(2), 28(2), 29(2), 30	35/26
if	3	5, 9, 11		3/0
in	19	1, 2(3), 3(3), 14, 15	18, 22, 25, 27(2), 28(2), 29(2), 30	9/10
inasmuch	3	1/B	30(2)/B'	1/2
iniquities	2	13, 14		2/0
into	2	14/I	28/D'	<u>1/1</u>
is	3		26, 30(2)	0/3
it	5	2, 7, 10(2), 17		5/0
Jesus	2	17/K	18/K'	<u>1/1</u>
joy	5		20(2), 21, 24, 25	0/5
keep	3	1/B	30(2)/B'	1/2
know	8	3, 4	26(2), 28, 30(3)	2/6
known	2	5(2)		2/0
labor(ed)(s)	2		24, 25	0/2
land	4	1	28, 29, 30	1/3
last	2	3/E	28/E'	<u>1/1</u>
led	2	14/I	28/D'	<u>1/1</u>
limbs	2	10/H	23/H'	<u>1/1</u>
Lord	2	7/H	25/G'	<u>1/1</u>
many	3	14, 17	26	2/1
me	11	3, 5, 8, 9, 11	18, 25, 26, 27(2), 28	5/6
memory	2	17/J	19/J'	<u>1/1</u>
might	4	15	24(3)	1/3
mind	2	4/F	18/K'	<u>1/1</u>