Hebrew Poetry Update

by Angela M. Crowell

In earlier articles on Hebrew poetry we discussed how poetic techniques were used to emphasize the key points of the author's message. This article will further examine types of Biblical Hebrew poetry that have been identified by Biblical scholars. This identification will be compared to examples of the same type found in the Book of Mormon. We will look at one type of parallelism, two kinds of chiastic arrangements, two figures of speech, and a poetic device not covered in previous articles on Hebrew poetry.

PARALLELISM
ABCB Parallelism

In 1963 Stanley Gevirtz first identified this pattern of nouns or verbs, etc. in a parallel relationship. The second and fourth words in this sequence result in an ABCB pattern (i.e., justice, righteousness, salvation, righteousness) (Gevirtz 1963:44). In 1971 and 1982 scholars identified further examples, bringing the total in the Old Testament to 32 (Kselman 1982:228).

Old Testament

Thus says the LORD,

A   Preserve *justice*,
B   and do *righteousness*,
C   for my *salvation* is about to come
B' And my *righteousness* to be revealed.   Isaiah 56:1 NASB

A Book of Mormon example of ABCB parallelism is:

Book of Mormon

A   Therefore come and be baptized unto *repentance*,
B   that ye may be washed from your *sins*,
C   that ye may have *faith* on the Lamb of God,
B' who taketh away the *sins* of the world. . .   Alma 5:25
                                                      [7:14]

Chiasms with Matching First, Center and Last Terms

In 1943 Nils Lund identified a type of chiasm commonly used where the center contains a single line with parallel or identical terms in the first and last lines (Lund 1943:107).

New Testament

A   For even as the **body** is one
B   And yet has *many* members,
C   And all the members of the **body**,
B' Though they are *many*,
A' Are one **body**, so also is Christ.
                                     1 Corinthians 12:12 NASB

This type of chiasm is also in the Book of Mormon.

Book of Mormon

A   And now it came to pass that when Jesus had **expounded** all the scriptures in one,
B   which they had *written*,
C   he *commanded* them that they should teach the things
D   which he had **expounded** unto them.
C' And it came to pass that he *commanded* them that they should write the words which the Father had given unto Malachi, which he should tell unto them.
B' And it came to pass that after they were *written*,
A' he **expounded** them.   3 Nephi 11:1-3 [23:4-24:1]

Chiastic Structure of Entire Books in the Bible

Recognizing a chiastic structure which covers an entire book can show the reader a book's purpose or theme by what is brought out in the chiasm and emphasized in the center point (Man 1984:153).

Duane Christensen, in addition to identifying the entire book of Jonah as chiastic, also identifies the book of Deuteronomy as chiastic (Christensen 1991:xli). Yehuda Radday identifies the books of First and Second Kings, Ruth, and Esther as totally chiastic (Radday 1981:54, 62, 71).

M. Phillip Scott's study of the gospel of Mark identifies a chiastic pattern for the entire book. He states:

Having tried to understand Mark's gospel through his

chiasmus, I now wonder if, in those places where he differs from Matthew and Luke and where the differences allowed the slotting of an event into the chiasmus, he is not less the eyewitness than Matthew and Luke. For a chiastic plan necessarily creates *a priori* needs to chisel and carve the material (Scott 1985:17-18).

In other New Testament studies the books of Matthew, John, Philemon and Revelation have also been identified as chiastic.

Chiastic Structure of Entire Books in the Book of Mormon

John Welch, Professor of Law at BYU, first identified chiastic structure in the Book of Mormon in 1967. In his book, *Chiasmus in Antiquity*, published in 1981, Welch identifies the books of First and Second Nephi and Mosiah as being entirely chiastic (Welch 1981:201, 205).

FIGURES OF SPEECH

Figures of speech use "words in a way other than the ordinary or literal sense. Figurative language may be expressed by such devices as metaphor and simile" (Huey and Corley 1983:80). In addition to the metaphor and simile, other figures of speech include allusions, questions, exclamations and the apostrophe (Schökel 1988:143, 147). We will look at exclamations in general and one specific type called the woe speech.

Exclamations

Exclamations as figures of speech are used frequently in Hebrew poetry. They add "movement and liveliness to the development of the poem." Exclamations are short and forcefully express feelings of joy, sadness, praise and love. They "open or close a poem" and are most "effective when it interrupts the poem unexpectedly" (Schökel 1988:147, 152-153).

Old Testament
How excellent is thy lovingkindness, O God!   Psalm 36:7

Second Nephi 6 is a poetic gem containing numerous exclamations interrupting the verses as variant refrains.

Book of Mormon
O the wisdom of God!
O how great the goodness of our God. . . !
O how great the plan of our God!
O the greatness and the justice of our God!
O the greatness of the mercy of our God. . . !
O how great the holiness of our God!
                              2 Nephi 6:19, 24, 31, 41, 43, 44
                                   [9:8, 10, 13, 17, 19, 20]

The Woe Speech. The woe speech always begins with an exclamation (Schökel 1988:153). It can be found in both the Old Testament, the New Testament (i.e. Luke 6:24-26) and in the Book of Mormon.

Old Testament
Woe to him that increaseth that which is not his!
Woe to him that coveteth an evil covetousness to his house !
Woe to him that buildeth a town with blood . . . !
Woe to him that giveth his neighbor drink . . . !
Woe to him who says to a wooden thing, Awake!
                                   Habakkuk 2:6, 9, 12, 15, 19

Book of Mormon
Wo unto him that hath the law given . . . !
Wo unto the rich. . . as to the things of the world!
Wo unto the deaf that will not hear !
Wo unto the blind that will not see !
Wo unto the uncircumcized of heart!
Wo unto the liar!
Wo unto the murderer . . . !
Wo unto them who commit whoredoms!
Wo unto those that worship idols!
Wo unto all those who die in their sins!
                                        2 Nephi 6:56, 62, 65-72
                                           [9:27, 30, 31-38]

POETIC DEVICES

Hendiadys

Hendiadys (hen di' a dis) is a poetic device (or figure of speech) in which two nouns or two verbs with distinct meanings are connected, usually by "and," to produce a single, unified meaning of great intensity.

However, it is not simply the joining of two separate words by "and" that produces hendiadys: the words must be related to each other and the two words must create a single meaning.

Although hendiadys is found in Latin and Greek, "Weiss [Hebrew University of Jerusalem] claims that 'it has been established that hendiadys is in more frequent use in Biblical Hebrew than in any other language' and the reader should always be on the look-out for its occurrences in a text" (Watson 1984:325).

The scriptural verse which contains hendiadys takes on additional significance and interpretation of the verse is enhanced. When two nouns are used, one noun expresses meaning and the second noun intensifies that meaning (Bullinger 1968:657). For example:

He will rescue their life from *oppression* and from *violence*.
                                        Psalm 72:14 NASB

This actually means from violent oppression (Dahood 1968:183).

In other instances the first noun can become an adjective and modify the second noun. For example:

The Lord is my *strength* and my *shield*.   Psalm 28:7
(i.e., "my strong shield;" Dahood 1966:173)

Numerous examples of hendiadys are also found in the New Testament. For example:

That ye would walk worthy of God, who hath called you

unto his *kingdom* and *glory*.   1 Thessalonians 2:12
(i.e., "his glorious kingdom;" Bullinger 1968:668)

Although the New Testament was written in Greek, the writers were Hebrews. This explains why the New Testament abounds with Hebraisms, i.e., Hebrew language patterns. The New Testament *"words* are Greek, [but] the *thoughts* and *idioms* are Hebrew" (Bullinger 1968:819-820). This principle is also true for the Book of Mormon. It was written in Reformed Egyptian by Hebrew speakers so the thoughts and idioms are Hebrew.

Bible scholars have discussed whether hendiadys is a legitimate poetic device. Book of Mormon examples from Alma 17 [37] in the noun section below and from Mosiah 5 [7] in the verb section following are examples of hendiadys which give evidence that this is a legitimate device.

Examples of Hendiadys Using Nouns

Old Testament

Thus saith the Lord;
Execute ye *judgment* and *righteousness* . . .
      Jeremiah 22:3
(i.e., "righteous judgment;" Bullinger 1968:661)

And Abel, he also brought of the *firstlings*
    of his flock and the *fat* thereof: Genesis 5:7
(i.e., "the fattest firstlings;" Bullinger 1968:659)

New Testament

He shall baptize you with the *Holy Ghost* and with *fire*:
      Matthew 3:11 KJV
(i.e., with the "burning purifying" Holy Spirit; Bullinger 1968:662)

It is not surprising to discover that the Book of Mormon frequently uses this poetic device.

Book of Mormon

And behold, I have been called to preach the word of God
    among all this people according to the spirit of *revelation* and *prophecy*.   Alma 6:31 [8:24]
(i.e., prophetic revelation)

If they have been righteous, they shall reap the salvation of
    their souls, according to the *power* and *deliverance* of
    Jesus Christ.   Alma 7:43 [9:28]

This could be interpreted two ways: i.e., delivering power or powerful deliverance.

Alma's Clarification of a Hendiadys

As mentioned above, in Alma's commandments to his son Helaman we find a clear example of hendiadys:

And except they repent, I will destroy them from off
    the face of the earth;

And I will bring to light all their *secrets* and *abominations*
    unto every nation that shall hereafter possess the land.
      Alma 17:57 [37:25]

In verse 57 Alma uses the two separate words "secrets and abominations" linked by "and," but intends for us to interpret them as having a single, unified meaning, i.e., secret abominations.

Reading further in verses 58 and 59, Alma restates the hendiadys "secret abominations" so we can't miss it. He says it twice! Once in verse 58 and again in verse 59:

And now my son, we see that they did not repent;
Therefore, they have been destroyed;
And thus far the word of God has been fulfilled;
Yea, their *secret abominations* have been brought out of
    darkness and made known unto us.
And now my son, I command you that ye retain all their
    oaths and their covenants and their agreements in their
    secret abominations;
Yea, and all their signs and their wonders ye shall retain
    from this people, that they know them not,
Lest peradventure they should fall into darkness also and
    be destroyed.   Alma 17:58-59 [37:27-28]

Examples of Hendiadys Using Verbs

When the hendiadys contain two verbs in the Hebrew text, the first modifies the second, and it is best translated into English as an adverb and a verb, if possible (Lambdin 1971:238).

Old Testament

They *hastened*, they *forgot* his works;
      Psalm 106:13 (Masoretic text)
(i.e, "they quickly forgot;" Dahood 1970:70)

Book of Mormon

He is *despised* and *rejected* of men . . .   Mosiah 8:18 [14:3]
(i.e., despitefully rejected)

Here Abinadi is quoting from Isaiah 53:3.

Behold, the promise of the Lord is fulfilled;
And ye are *smitten* and *afflicted*.   Mosiah 5:51 [7:32]
   (i.e., sorely afflicted)

[Note: smite, i.e., in the sense of "chastise or send judgment upon" (Brown, Driver, Briggs, 1951:646).] In this example the intensified idea using the two verbs "smitten" and "afflicted" is clearly set forth in verses 38 and 47 where the writer says "they are smitten with sore afflictions."

And is not this, our *affliction* great? . . .
Therefore, who wondereth that they
    are in bondage,
And that they are *smitten* with
    sore afflictions?   Mosiah 5:38, 47 [7:23, 28]

Summary

Scripture interpretation is enhanced once we understand the structure of the Hebrew poetry and poetic techniques found in our Holy Scriptures. These six additional types we have examined not only help us in this understanding but give us significant evidence of the validity of the Book of Mormon.

Most of the Biblical scholarship presented in this article was completed over a century after the Book of Mormon was published. Yet the Book of Mormon still stands current with the modern Biblical poetic scholarship of our day in containing identical types of the sophisticated poetic literature of the ancient Hebrews. It is remarkable! ZRF

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