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The Literary Structure of Alma 23–27

Derek Squire

Abstract: *This article presents a macro-chiasm for Alma 23:16 through Alma 27:30 that covers the account of the people of Anti-Nephi-Lehi from the time they first take upon themselves that name to the time they relocate to the Nephite land of Jershon and are subsequently called the people of Ammon. The central element of this chiasm highlights the martyrdom of some Lamanite believers in the wilderness by the hand of the seed of Amulon in fulfillment of Abinadi's prophecy in Mosiah 17:15. The meaning behind this puzzling prophecy may be illuminated by analyzing the structure of this macro-chiasm. It underscores the role Alma 26 plays as a strategic interruption in the narrative, much like how Alma 36–42 disrupts the story of the Zoramites. Events within the account of the people of Anti-Nephi-Lehi were carefully crafted by Mormon and purposefully placed within the narrative to form a memorable foundation story justifying the acceptance and integration of the people of Ammon into Nephite society both religiously and politically. The same criteria previously used to measure the strength of a proposed chiasm are employed here.*

As a follow-up to a previous article, “The Literary Structure of Alma 17–20: A 14-unit Chiasm,”¹ this article examines the literary structure of Alma 23–27. The chiasm presented here falls within two original chapters of the Book of Mormon, comprising Alma 23–26 and Alma 27–29, respectively.² This new article focuses primarily on the

1. Derek Squire, “The Literary Structure of Alma 17–20: A 14-Unit Chiasm,” *Interpreter: A Journal of Latter-day Saint Faith and Scholarship* 60 (2024): 87–136, journal.interpreterfoundation.org/the-literary-structure-of-alma-17-20-a-14-unit-chiasm/.

2. When I use *original* in this article to describe chapters of the Book of Mormon,

proposed macro-chiasm within these chapters. The literary structure of each original chapter on its own is not explicated here, ensuring the chiasm itself is properly emphasized and examined.

In this article, I do the following:

- Provide a summary of the account shared in Alma 23–27.
- Present the nine-element chiasm for Alma 23:16–27:30.
- Analyze the matching elements from this chiasm and explain why this structure may have been deliberately formed by Mormon.
- Describe the role Ammon's words in Alma 26 play both structurally and strategically in the narrative.
- Summarize key findings and insights gleaned from analyzing the chiastic structure of this account.

Summary of Alma 23–27

Alma 23 begins with the king over all the land (Lamoni's father) sending a proclamation to his people that the sons of Mosiah and their brethren are to be kept safe from harm and given free access to preach the gospel among them. With the king's support and protection, these missionaries go forth and preach to the Lamanites throughout the land and enjoy great success. Seven cities of the Lamanites are converted unto the Lord.

The narrative arc associated with the proposed macro-chiasm begins at Alma 23:16 and runs through Alma 27. The converted Lamanites want to be distinguished from their unbelieving brethren with a new name. After some consultation, the people decide to call themselves Anti-Nephi-Lehies. Lamoni's father confers the kingdom upon his son (Lamoni's brother) and calls his name Anti-Nephi-Lehi. Lamoni's father subsequently dies.

The unbelieving Amalekites,³ Amulonites, and Lamanites prepare

I mean the chapters or sections as broken out and clearly delineated on the original and printer manuscripts of the Book of Mormon. For referencing in this article, I will use the Book of Mormon's current chapters and verses. I will use *The Book of Mormon: The Earliest Text*, edited by Royal Skousen, for all wording and grammar in the text unless otherwise specified.

3. I will use the word "Amalekites" throughout this article instead of "Amlicites" as shown in *The Book of Mormon: The Earliest Text*, edited by Royal Skousen. Most people are more familiar with the term *Amalekites* for this portion of the text. Hopefully, such treatment will avoid unnecessary confusion that might occur if the term *Amlicites* were used throughout this article.

for war against the people of Anti-Nephi-Lehi. Ammon and his brethren hold a council with Kings Lamoni and Anti-Nephi-Lehi about what they should do to defend themselves against these Lamanites. King Anti-Nephi-Lehi commands his people to never again shed the blood of their brethren, even in self-defense. They covenant with God to never use weapons again. They take all their weapons and bury them deep in the earth. If they then happened to be slain, King Anti-Nephi-Lehi promised they would go to their God and be saved.

The Lamanites come upon the people of Anti-Nephi-Lehi, who offer no resistance. Weaponless, they go out to meet the Lamanites, prostrate themselves before them, and call on the name of the Lord, praising him even while they are being slain. One thousand five are massacred by the Lamanites in this manner. Many of the Lamanites are "stung for the murders which they had committed" (24:25). They repent, throw down their weapons of war, and join the people of Anti-Nephi-Lehi upon the ground, "relying upon the mercies of those whose arms were lifted to slay them" (24:25). More Lamanites end up joining the people of God that day than the number who had been slain.

A series of battles and contentions then follows in the narrative. "Actual descendants of Laman and Lemuel" (24:29) are angry because the Amalekites and Amulonites were mainly responsible for the deaths of their brethren. They swear vengeance upon the Nephites and destroy the people in the city of Ammonihah, who were mainly after the order of Nehor. The Lamanites have more battles with the Nephites in which almost all the seed of Amulon are slain. The remainder of them flee into the wilderness and end up usurping power over Lamanites there. Many of these Lamanites remembered the words of Aaron and his brethren and are converted unto the Lord while in the wilderness. The seed of Amulon cause these Lamanite believers to be put to death by fire. This martyrdom causes many of their Lamanite brethren to be stirred up to anger against the seed of Amulon. They begin to hunt the seed of Amulon and slay them. When the Lamanites eventually return to their own lands, many of them join the people of God and bury their weapons of war.

There is a break in the narrative at this point. Alma 26 consists of Ammon's words to his brethren in which he summarizes their labors among the Lamanites. He praises and thanks the Lord for the great blessings he had bestowed upon them. He rejoices in the Lord for his mercy and for the many mighty miracles wrought in the land. The

inclusion of Ammon's words here appears to serve distinct structural and strategic purposes that will be detailed in a separate section below.

The narrative resumes in Alma 27 with a second episode of Amalekites' stirring up the Lamanites to anger against their brethren, the people of Anti-Nephi-Lehi. They begin again to destroy them, and the people of Anti-Nephi-Lehi again refuse to take up their arms and suffer themselves to be slain. Ammon and his brethren see this great work of destruction and tell King Anti-Nephi-Lehi that he should gather his people together and flee out of the land to avoid further destruction. Ammon inquires of the Lord and receives confirmation that the people should leave to be preserved. King Anti-Nephi-Lehi obeys the Lord's command.

The people then depart out of the land and come to the borders of the land of Zarahemla. Ammon and his brethren go into the land of Zarahemla to see if the people of Anti-Nephi-Lehi will be allowed to enter Nephite lands. They meet Alma along the way and have a joyous reunion after being separated for 14 years. Alma takes them to see the chief judge who sends a proclamation to the people about admitting the people of Anti-Nephi-Lehi into their land. The Nephites offer to give them the land of Jershon for their inheritance and promise to provide protection in exchange for a portion of their substance. The people of Anti-Nephi-Lehi go down into the land of Jershon and take possession of it. The Nephites subsequently call them the people of Ammon, and they are distinguished by that name ever after.

Nine-Element Chiasm in Alma 23:16–27:30

The complete narrative episode of the people of Anti-Nephi-Lehi can be structured as a nine-element chiasm, highlighting key details from the storyline in Alma 23:16–27:30 as shown below:

- A** Lamanite converts desire to be *distinguished* (x2) by a new name; they *call* their *names* *Anti-Nephi-Lehies*; they open a correspondence with the Nephites; the Lamanites prepare for war; Lamoni's father confers the kingdom upon his son and calls his name Anti-Nephi-Lehi (23:16–24:4).
- B** “Now when Ammon and his brethren . . . saw the preparations of the Lamanites *to destroy*” the Anti-Nephi-Lehies, they went to the land of Ishmael to hold a *council* with *two kings*; along the way, *Ammon met* all his brethren; King Anti-Nephi-Lehi speaks to his people; he thanks God for his forgiveness of the

people's *sins and many murders committed*; they bury their weapons and make a covenant with God (24:5–19).

C Lamanites come up to *destroy the people of Anti-Nephi-Lehi*; 1,005 of the Anti-Nephi-Lehies are slain *without offering any resistance* (24:20–22).

D Many Lamanites repent and *throw down their weapons of war*; the *people of God* are joined by more than the number slain; those slain were *righteous people*; the Lord worketh in many ways to the *salvation of His people* (24:23–27).

E Lamanites destroy the city of Ammonihah; Nephites slay almost all the seed of Amulon; many Lamanites in the wilderness begin to *believe in the Lord* and are converted; *they are put to death by the seed of Amulon because of their belief*; in anger, Lamanites hunt the seed of Amulon; Abinadi is the first to suffer death by fire for his *belief in God*; Abinadi's prophecy is fulfilled (25:2–12)

D' Many Lamanites come over and *join the people of God*; they *bury their weapons of war*; they begin to be a *righteous people*; they retain a hope through faith in Christ unto *eternal salvation* (25:13–16)

C' The Amalekites again go against *the people of Anti-Nephi-Lehi* and *destroy them*; the people of Anti-Nephi-Lehi *again refuse to take up their arms* and suffer themselves to be slain (27:1–3)

B' "Now when Ammon and his brethren saw this work of destruction" they go to *speak with the king* in hopes of fleeing to the land of Zarahemla for protection; King Anti-Nephi-Lehi worries about the *many murders and sins* his people committed against the Nephites; Ammon inquires of the Lord; the people depart out of the land; along the way, *Ammon* and his brethren met Alma; they *speak with the chief judge*; the Anti-Nephi-Lehies are given the land of Jershon and protection if they give of their substance (27:4–24)

A' The people of Anti-Nephi-Lehi take possession of the land of Jershon and are *called* by the Nephites *the people of Ammon*; they are *distinguished* (x2) by this *name* and by their zeal towards God; they are a highly favored people of the Lord (27:25–30)

Correlation Between Matching Elements

Correlations between the matching elements of this chiasm are detailed below. Notably, Ammon's words in Alma 26 are excluded

from the chiasm, but his words are a beautiful and significant addition which summarizes the 14-year mission of the sons of Mosiah among the Lamanites. A section in this article is devoted to Alma 26 to consider the role it plays in the literary structure of these chapters and why it is not included in the chiasm. It is titled “The Role of Alma 26 in the Narrative” and follows the section titled “Analyzing the Chiasticity of the Proposed Chiasm.”

Correspondences between A and A' (Alma 23:16–24:4 and 27:25–30)

The chiasm fully covers the account of the people of Anti-Nephi-Lehi. The strongest link between these two elements is the double use of the word *distinguished* in each element and the naming of the converted Lamanite people (23:16; 27:26, 27). This functions as part of an inclusio framing the entire account along with the positive attributes of the people enumerated in both elements. In element A, those Lamanites who are converted unto the Lord are “desirous that they might have a name, that thereby they might be distinguished from their brethren” (23:16). The king consults with others “concerning the name that they should take upon them, that they might be distinguished” (23:16), and “they called their name Anti-Nephi-Lehies” (23:17). In A', the people of Anti-Nephi-Lehi take possession of the land of Jershon in Nephite territory, and “they were called by the Nephites the people of Ammon; therefore, they were distinguished by that name ever after” (27:26). The second use of *distinguished* in A' emphasizes a quality that made the people distinct even from their Nephite brethren: “And they were also distinguished for their zeal towards God and also towards men” (27:27). These are the only instances of the word *distinguished* in these chapters. The word *distinguished* comes after the word *name* in both instances in A, whereas this ordering is inverted in A' with the word *name* coming after the word *distinguished* in 27:26. In both elements, the people are “called” a “name” (23:17; 27:26), which strengthens the link even further. In A, the keywords *name*, *distinguished*, and *called* appear in inverted order in A'. Other inversions occur between the matching elements B and B', C and C', and D and D', respectively. Such inversions strengthen the likelihood that this macro-chiasm was intentionally formed.

In both elements, the people's relationship with the Nephites is highlighted. In A, the people “were no more called Lamanites . . . yea, and they were friendly with the Nephites. Therefore they did open a

correspondence with them" (23:17–18). In A', the people were said to be numbered "among the people of Nephi" (27:27), suggesting that they were now connected with the Nephites, not just geographically but relationally as well.

Positive attributes of the people are enumerated in both elements. In A, the people are described as "a very industrious people friendly with the Nephites . . . and the curse of God did no more follow them" (23:18). In A', the people are "distinguished for their zeal towards God and also towards men, for they were perfectly honest and upright in all things. And they were firm in the faith of Christ, even unto the end" (27:27). Their faith in Christ is described in terms of their "hope and views of Christ and the resurrection" (27:28). They are also known for being "a zealous and beloved people, a highly favored people of the Lord" (27:30).

There is an antithetical parallel in these elements between the Lamanites who "took up arms against the people of Anti-Nephi-Lehi" (24:2) in A, and the people of Anti-Nephi-Lehi (known as the people of Ammon at this point) who "never could be prevailed upon to take up arms against their brethren" (27:28) in A'.

Correspondences between B and B' (Alma 24:5–19 and 27:4–24)

These are the only two elements in which King Anti-Nephi-Lehi's words are recorded. The king shares a key phrase that occurs only in these two elements, but the key terms *sins* and *murders* are in inverse order in B'. This inverted ordering of terms may be additional evidence of chiastic intent. In B, King Anti-Nephi-Lehi mentions three times the "sins" and "murders" that his people "committed" (24:9, 10, 11). In B', he twice mentions the "murders" and "sins" the people "committed" (27:6, 8). These are the only five instances in which these three key-words appear in the Book of Mormon. Strikingly, four out of the five references use the descriptor *many* before the word *murders* (24:9, 11; 27:6, 8). The other verse also uses the descriptor *many*, but before the word *sins* instead (24:10).

Both elements use the same lengthy phrase to introduce their respective episodes. Element B begins in the following manner: "Now when Ammon and his brethren . . . saw the preparations of the Lamanites to destroy their brethren" (24:5). Element B' begins in the same manner: "Now when Ammon and his brethren saw this work of destruction" (27:4). Further down in this same verse, there is an example of repetitive resumption using a similar phrase: "Therefore when

Ammon and his brethren saw this great work of destruction . . .” The first two references are the only two instances in the Book of Mormon of the phrase *now when Ammon and his brethren* coupled with the keywords *saw* and *destroy/destruction*. Such a lengthy and significant repeated phrase as this one suggests that these two accounts are connected in some way.

There are two meetings noted in these elements. In B, “Ammon met all his brethren” (24:5) in the land of Midian.⁴ In B’, “[Ammon] and his brethren met Alma” (27:16) as they were going forth to the land of Zarahemla. These are the only two occurrences of the word *met* within the chiasm.

In each element, Ammon and his brethren discuss the welfare of the people of Anti-Nephi-Lehi with King Anti-Nephi-Lehi and one other important political leader. In B, they hold a council with Kings Lamoni and Anti-Nephi-Lehi about how the people will defend themselves against the Lamanites (24:5). In B’, they first speak with King Anti-Nephi-Lehi about fleeing out of the hands of their enemies to avoid destruction (27:5). Once Ammon and his brethren arrive in the land of Zarahemla, they discuss the plight of the people of Anti-Nephi-Lehi with the chief judge, Nephihah (27:20).

Many other keyword parallels exist between these two elements. Both elements include a reference to angels. In B, King Anti-Nephi-Lehi expresses his gratitude that “in [the Great God’s] mercy he doth visit us by his angels” (24:14). In B’, Ammon and his brethren are said to have been treated by the people of Anti-Nephi-Lehi “as though they were angels sent from God to save them from an everlasting destruction” (27:4). The word *angels* is not used anywhere else within these chapters. The phrase *commit sin* is only found in these two elements (24:19; 27:23). Both instances illustrate the deep disdain the Anti-Nephi-Lehies held toward sin.

The phrase *take up arms against their brethren* is also found in both elements (24:6; 27:23). The people of Anti-Nephi-Lehi refuse to take up arms against their brethren in 24:6; and the Nephites see that the people of Anti-Nephi-Lehi will not take up arms against their brethren because of their fear to commit sin in 27:23. This phrase also occurs in 27:28 in the final narrative summary highlighting the people’s firmness and resolve to never take up arms against their brethren but nowhere else within the chiasm. A similar phrase, *took up arms*, is used in 24:2,

4. This is the only mention of a Nephite land called the land of Midian. This may have been a scribal error for the land of Middoni instead.

but it relates to the Lamanites taking up arms against the people of Anti-Nephi-Lehi instead of the other way around.

Repentance is another shared theme. In B, King Anti-Nephi-Lehi speaks three times of the repentance of his people (24:10–11). The two references in 24:11 are coupled with the phrase *all we could do*, accentuating the heartache the people felt during the repentance process. In B', the Nephites recognize the "sore repentance" (27:23) the Anti-Nephi-Lehies experienced. The only other time repentance is mentioned in these chapters is in 24:24, in which many Lamanites "repented of the thing which they had done" when they saw the Anti-Nephi-Lehies perish without offering any resistance.

There is a significant thematic parallel that also deserves mention. Both elements describe a covenant or agreement into which the people of Anti-Nephi-Lehi enter. In both elements, people put their lives on the line. In B, the people covenant with God "that rather than to shed the blood of their brethren, they would give up their own lives" (24:18). In B', the Nephites promise to guard the people of Anti-Nephi-Lehi with their armies, which essentially puts the lives of these guards on the line as well. In both elements, people give up a possession as part of the covenant/agreement. In B, the Anti-Nephi-Lehies bury their weapons deep in the earth. In B', the Nephites agree to give the people of Anti-Nephi-Lehi land for their inheritance, and the Anti-Nephi-Lehies agree to give the Nephites a portion of their substance to help maintain their armies.

There is also an antithetical parallel regarding the heart. In B, God gives the people of Anti-Nephi-Lehi a portion of his Spirit to soften their hearts (24:8), and he takes away the guilt and sins from their hearts (24:10, 11). In B', the Amalekites' hearts are portrayed in stark contrast to the hearts of the people of Anti-Nephi-Lehi. In this case, "Satan hath great hold on the hearts of the Amalekites" (27:12).

Correspondences between C and C' (Alma 24:20–22 and 27:1–3)

These two matching elements consist of episodes in which the people of Anti-Nephi-Lehi are martyred by the Lamanites without retaliation. In C, "without meeting any resistance [the Lamanites] did slay a thousand and five of them" (24:22). In C', "this people again refused to take their arms; and they suffered themselves to be slain" (27:3). Both elements include the combination of key terms *the people of Anti-Nephi-Lehi* and *destroying/destroy*, but they are in inverted order in C'. Again, this inverted ordering is an indication that these elements

were intentionally paired as elements in the proposed macro-chiasm. In C, the Lamanites come down to the land of Nephi for the purpose of “destroying the people of Anti-Nephi-Lehi” (24:20). In C', the Amalekites “stir up the people in anger against their brethren, the people of Anti-Nephi-Lehi. Therefore they began again to destroy them” (27:2). This combination of key terms is only found in these two verses.

Correspondences between D and D' (Alma 24:23–27 and 25:13–17)

Elements D and D' share the common theme of Lamanites converting to the Lord and throwing down or burying their weapons. In D, many Lamanites who fought against the people of Anti-Nephi-Lehi see them praise God “even in the very act of perishing under the sword” (24:23). They stop fighting and “repented of the thing which they had done” (24:24), and “threw down their weapons of war” (24:25). In D', many Lamanites join the people of Anti-Nephi-Lehi and “did also bury their weapons of war according as their brethren had” (25:14). Element B involves the original group of Anti-Nephi-Lehies burying their weapons, whereas in these two elements, subsequent groups of Lamanites give up their weapons to follow the Lord.

Another connection between these elements involves the narrator using wording from Deuteronomy 5:31–33. In element D, the Lamanites observed the following: “Neither would [the Anti-Nephi-Lehies] turn aside to the right hand or to the left” (Alma 24:23). Grant Hardy notes that this phrase “refers not to the prostrate Anti-Nephi-Lehies’ flinching, but rather to covenant language from Deuteronomy 5:32–33.”⁵ This phrase from Deuteronomy reads: “Ye shall not turn aside to the right hand or to the left.” Grant Hardy also notes the return to this covenant language in Alma 25:14 (in element D').⁶ In this verse, more Lamanites join the people of God and are described in the following manner: “And they began to be a righteous people, and they did walk in the ways of the Lord and did observe to keep his commandments and his statutes.” Much of this wording also comes from the fifth chapter of Deuteronomy. “Walk in the ways of the Lord” comes from verse 33, “observe” comes from verse 32, and “commandments” and “statutes” come from verse 31.

The key terms *join/joined* and *people of God* occur in both elements.

5. Grant Hardy, *The Annotated Book of Mormon* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2023), 383n23.

6. Hardy, *Annotated Book of Mormon*, 385n14.

However, in D', the order of these two key terms is inverted. This provides further support that these elements were intentionally paired in the proposed macro-chiasm. In D, it is noted that "the people of God were joined," whereas in D', other Lamanites "did join themselves to the people of God" (24:26; 25:13). This combination of key terms only occurs in these two verses. The phrase *righteous people* is used in each element to describe converted Lamanites (24:26; 25:14) and is not used anywhere else in the chiasm. Both elements also mention "salvation" (24:27; 25:16). The only other instance of the word *salvation* in the chiasm is in 24:14, in which it is a part of the term *plan of salvation*.

Element E (Alma 24:28–25:12)—The weighty theme of martyrdom

The verses in this element are filled with battles and events affecting numerous, and often overlapping, groups including Nephites, Lamanites, the people of Anti-Nephi-Lehi, Amalekites, Amulonites, and people after the order of the Nehors. Abinadi is also mentioned. What is so important about these verses to justify their placement at the center of the chiasm? What ties them all together into a cohesive unit?

So much information is packed into this part of the narrative that it can be easy to get lost in all the details. With so many different groups involved, it can be difficult at times to keep them all straight and to know which group is being identified by certain pronouns and possessive pronouns. Despite such complexity, the theme of martyrdom is evident throughout these verses and ties them all together. In the middle of this literary unit, many of the Lamanites who had fled into the wilderness begin to remember Aaron's and his brethren's preaching. They begin to believe in the Lord and are converted. These courageous Lamanites perish by fire at the hands of the seed of Amulon because of their belief in God. This is significantly referred to as a "martyrdom" in Alma 25:8. The word *martyrdom* only occurs twice in the Book of Mormon, here and in Alma 14:9, in reference to the women and children who were consumed by fire for their beliefs at "the place of martyrdom" in the city of Ammonihah.

This theme continues with the explicit mention of Abinadi. In 25:11, Abinadi is duly recognized as the first martyr in the Book of Mormon narrative: "And now Abinadi was the first that suffered death by fire because of his belief in God." Abinadi's prophecy in Mosiah 17:15 that the seed of the priests of Noah would cause many to be put to death for their beliefs "in the like manner as [Abinadi] was" (25:12) is fulfilled

in this central element. This prophecy demands closer inspection. As Abinadi is suffering from the flames, he prophesies, “Behold, even as ye have done unto me, so shall it come to pass that thy seed shall cause that many shall suffer the pains that I do suffer, even the pains of death by fire — and this because they believe in the salvation of the Lord their God” (Mosiah 17:15).

In context, one would expect Abinadi to be cursing the people who are killing him. So, why is Abinadi prophesying that the priests’ descendants will martyr other believers just as Noah and the priests were martyring Abinadi? Logically, it doesn’t make much sense. Noah and his priests could have even accepted this prophecy as something positive when they first heard it. Their seed would follow in their footsteps and execute those they deemed to be troublesome heretics, too. The fulfillment of this prophecy is placed at the heart of the macro-chiasm for a reason and provides a possible answer to the above question. At this point, it is worth remembering that Lamanites had been killing Nephites, and Nephites had been killing Lamanites, for hundreds of years. So when we get to the end of this episode, when Ammon leads the people of Anti-Nephi-Lehi to the borders of the land of Zarahemla and says he will go forth into the land to “try the hearts of our brethren, whether they will that [the people of Anti-Nephi-Lehi] shall come into their land” (27:15), this request for asylum was anything but trivial. Surely, the Nephites would have been suspicious, at the very least, of these new converts. It was a monumental decision to allow them into their lands and to adopt them into their people, both religiously and politically.

The text does not say what was said to Alma, Nephihah, and the rest of the Nephites that convinced them to accept the people of Anti-Nephi-Lehi as fellow citizens and saints. The narrative simply states, “And they went and told the chief judge all the things that had happened unto them in the land of Nephi” (27:20). The Nephites would certainly have been told about how the seed of Amulon burned to death some of these Lamanites because of their shared belief in God. This would have immediately resonated with the Nephites. The founder of their church was martyred in a similar fashion. These Lamanite deaths at the hand of the seed of the priests that killed Abinadi strongly mark this people’s worthiness to be incorporated into the religious polity that had as its wellspring the martyrdom of Abinadi. It may have been viewed as an important indication of their worthiness to be included among those who traced their faith back to the life and death of Abinadi.

The structure of the macro-chiasm puts the focus on this central element and underscores emphatically the equation of Abinadi to the people of Anti-Nephi-Lehi. One of the subunits from this central element, Alma 25:9–12, has a nine-element chiasm that will be presented below. For now, it is worth noting that the matching elements D and D' equate Abinadi's death by fire with the death by fire of the Lamanite believers.

Martyrdom is featured in this central element in another meaningful way. The people responsible for each of these martyrdoms suffer the consequences of their behavior and are themselves destroyed. The people in the city of Ammonihah who martyred so many women and children are themselves destroyed (25:2). The seed of Amulon who martyred Lamanite believers in the wilderness are themselves hunted and slain, just as Abinadi had prophesied (25:8–12). Abinadi's martyrdom by King Noah and his wicked priests, which occurred much earlier and is recorded in Mosiah 17, is also brought to the fore in this element. King Noah, responsible for Abinadi's death, suffered death by fire just as Abinadi had suffered earlier (Mosiah 19:20). And while the priests of Noah avoided a similar fate, their seed were not so fortunate. The fact that the seed of Amulon are scattered and slain fulfills Abinadi's prophecy and completes the retribution cycle for his martyrdom. "Almost all the seed of Amulon and his brethren" (25:4) were slain by the Nephites in this central element. These are the people largely responsible for the deaths of the 1,005 Anti-Nephi-Lehi martyrs in Alma 24:20–22.

By definition, a martyr is someone killed because of her or his religion, that is religious beliefs.⁷ The words *belief*, *believe*, or *believed* appear four times in this unit (25:5, 6, 7, 11). More specifically, belief in God or the Lord is mentioned twice (25:6, 11). Two subunits within these verses can be structured chiastically with conversion or belief in the Lord highlighted in their respective central elements. These chiasms are shown below.

Nine-element micro-chiasm in Alma 25:5–8 (within Element E)

This subunit within element E depicts the martyrdom of Lamanite believers in the wilderness by the seed of Amulon and can be organized into a nine-element micro-chiasm. These martyrs' belief in the

7. Webster's Third New International Dictionary (1993), s.v. "martyr."

Lord is prominently displayed at the center of the chiasm as shown below:

- A** The seed of Amulon “fled into the east wilderness” (25:5)
- B** The seed of Amulon usurped power and authority over the Lamanites and caused many of them *to perish by fire* because of their belief (25:5)
- C** *Many were stirred up* in remembrance of the preaching of Aaron and his brethren and to disbelieve the traditions of their fathers (25:6)
- D** They began to *believe in the Lord* (25:6)
- E** There were many of them converted in the wilderness (25:6)
- D'** Rulers of the seed of Amulon *caused Lamanites to be put to death* who *believed* in these things (25:7)
- C'** *Many Lamanites were stirred up* in anger, and there began to be contention in the wilderness (25:8)
- B'** The Lamanites began to *hunt and slay* the seed of Amulon (25:8)
- A'** The seed of Amulon “fled into the east wilderness” (25:8)

This chiasm is distinctly framed in elements A and A' by the repetition of the seed of Amulon having “fled into the east wilderness” in verses 5 and 8. This phrase is unique to these two verses in the Book of Mormon. Elements B and B' describe the killing of Lamanites and the seed of Amulon. In B, the Lamanites are put to death by the seed of Amulon, whereas in B', the roles of the two groups are reversed and the seed of Amulon are slain by the Lamanites. Elements C and C' share the distinctive phrase *stirred up*, although it is used in very different contexts. In C, the Lamanites had “suffered much loss and so many afflictions” (25:6), which caused them to be “stirred up in remembrance of the words which Aaron and his brethren had preached to them” (25:6). On the other hand, in C', the martyrdom of many of their brethren caused other Lamanites to be “stirred up to anger” (25:8). Elements D and D' highlight the very definition of martyrdom. In D, belief in the Lord is countered by the death of those who believed (D'). Element E provides a powerful center for this chiasm. Many of the Lamanites were converted in the wilderness.

Nine-element micro-chiasm in Alma 25:9–12 (within Element E)

This second subunit highlights Abinadi's martyrdom and the fulfillment of his prophecy concerning the seed of the priests of Noah. It can

be organized into another nine-element micro-chiasm with Abinadi's belief in God highlighted in the central element as shown below:

- A** *Hunted by the Lamanites* (25:9)
- B** *Words of Abinadi were brought to pass* (25:9)
- C** Concerning the seed of the priests who caused that he should suffer death by fire (25:9)
 - D** A type of things to come; Abinadi was the first that suffered death by fire (25:10–11)
 - E** *Because of his belief in God* (25:11)
 - D'** This is what he meant—many should suffer death by fire according as he had suffered (v. 11)
- C'** He said unto the priests of Noah that their seed should cause many to be put to death in the like manner as he was, and that they should be scattered abroad and slain (25:12)
- B'** These words were verified (25:12)
- A'** They were driven by the Lamanites, hunted, and smitten (25:12)

The chiasm is framed by the key terms *hunted* and *by the Lamanites* in elements A and A'. The ordering of these key terms is inverted in A'. In elements B and B', Abinadi's words are "brought to pass" (25:9) and "verified" (25:12). Elements C and C' both include references to the seed of the priests causing people to die. In C, Abinadi suffered "death by fire" (25:9). In C', many Lamanites would suffer the same fate. They are "put to death in the like manner as he was" (25:12). Additional details from Abinadi's prophecy are also provided in C'. He prophesied that the seed of the priests of Noah would be scattered abroad and slain. Elements D and D' both include the phrase *suffer(ed) death by fire* (25:11). In D, Abinadi is explicitly named. In D', he is again referred to in the phrase *according as he had suffered* (25:11). There is also a parallel between "a type of things to come" (25:10) announced by Abinadi in D, and "this is what he meant" (25:11), which begins an explanation of this type in D'. The central element in this chiasm indicates "belief in God" (25:11) as the reason why Abinadi was slain. This parallels the central element from the chiasm in Alma 25:5–8 above.

Analyzing the Chiasticity of the Proposed Chiasm

The same six criteria identified by Neal Rappleye to evaluate the strength of proposed chiasms, which were used for the macro-chiasm

in Alma 17–20,⁸ will be used here.⁹ These six criteria include the following:

- Chiasms should conform to natural literary boundaries.
- A climax or turning point should be found at the center.
- Chiasms should display a relatively well-balanced symmetry.
- The structure of chiasms should be based on major key-words, phrases, or themes.
- Chiasms should manifest little, if any, extraneous repetition or divergent materials.
- Chiastic order should typically not compete with other strong literary forms.

The proposed chiasm for Alma 23:16–27:30 exhibits many characteristics that fulfill the above criteria and thus contribute to its overall strength as a chiasm. First, the chiasm does indeed conform to natural literary boundaries but not in the way one might initially suspect. The chiasm is a part of two original chapters of the Book of Mormon, Alma 23–26 and Alma 27–29, respectively. Also, the chiasm does not start at the beginning of an original chapter, nor does it end at the close of another original chapter. How, then, does this chiasm conform to natural literary boundaries? Strong and clear framing is necessary to justify boundaries that do not fit within the chapter breaks provided by Mormon. In this case, the chiasm is framed by the converted Lamanites naming themselves the people of Anti-Nephi-Lehi in 23:16–17 and then being given a different name by the Nephites in 27:26—the people of Ammon. Therefore, the chiasm includes the entire account of the people of Anti-Nephi-Lehi while they are known by this name. Literarily, an *inclusio* makes the outer boundaries of the chiasm even more clear. The keyword *distinguished* is used twice in 23:16 and twice more in 27:26–27.

As detailed above in the “Correlation Between Matching Elements” section under “Element E (Alma 24:28–25:12)—The Weighty Theme of Martyrdom,” martyrdom is the main theme of the central element of the chiasm. Repetition, allusion, and chiasmus are all used to highlight the important themes of martyrdom and belief in God. Three

8. Squire, “14-Unit Chiasm,” 109–10.

9. Neal Rappleye, “Chiasmus Criteria in Review,” in *Chiasmus: The State of the Art*, ed. John W. Welch and Donald W. Parry (Provo, UT: BYU Studies; Springville, UT: Book of Mormon Central, 2020): 296, 301–2, scholarsarchive.byu.edu/byusq/vol59/iss5/15/.

martyrdom accounts are alluded to or explicitly identified in this unit. Lamanite believers in the wilderness and Abinadi are two parties explicitly identified as being slain for their belief in God. The narrative also describes the destruction of the city of Ammonihah in this unit. This event is not placed in this unit by accident. The word *martyrdom* in 25:8 alludes back to Alma 14:9 in which women and children are consumed by fire for their beliefs at "the place of martyrdom" in Ammonihah. This unit is also surrounded by two more martyrdom episodes in which some of the people of Anti-Nephi-Lehi are slain (24:20–22; 27:1–3).

This central element also functions as a turning point in the sense that the next martyrdom report in Alma 27:2–3 leads to additional action by the people of Anti-Nephi-Lehi besides nonresistance. The people depart from their homeland to Nephite lands with the promise that the Lord will preserve them from further destruction (27:12).

There is much to be appreciated in this central unit. Mormon does a masterful job of adding greater depth and meaning to so few verses by using various literary devices. Martyrdom for a person's belief in God is key, but the demise of the Amulonites is another critical part of the narrative. The Amulonites, or seed of Amulon, are never mentioned again in the Book of Mormon after these verses.¹⁰

The chiasm is relatively well-balanced. There are 80 verses within the chiasm (not counting Alma 26 as explained in the section on that chapter below). There are 30 verses before and 35 verses after the central element of the chiasm. The central element itself consists of 15 verses. Matching units are also of relatively similar lengths.

The structure of the chiasm is based on major keywords, phrases, and themes found within Alma 23:16–27:30. Throughout the analysis on the matching elements above, extraneous repetition has been identified and considered. However, most of the keywords and phrases included in the chiasm are unique to their matching elements. There are also multiple key terms and phrases that appear in inverted order in matching elements within the chiasm, increasing the likelihood that the chiasm was intentionally formed.

The chiasm does not compete with other strong literary forms. Donald Parry has identified some simple and extended alternates and a short chiasm within these verses, but not an overarching structure

10. The priests of Noah are mentioned once more in Alma 43:13, but that is the last we hear of them.

for these chapters.¹¹ There do not appear to be any published studies dealing with the chiasmic structure of these verses on a macro level.

The Role of Alma 26 in the Narrative

Alma 26 plays an interesting and significant role in the overall layout of these chapters. The placement of Ammon's words appears to serve as a strategic interruption of the narrative. This is like Alma 36–42, which breaks up the narrative of the Zoramite rebellion that is first referenced in Alma 35:13 but not reported until Alma 43:3. Grant Hardy wrote the following about the calculated positioning of Alma 36–42 in the narrative:

Mormon inserts Alma's instructions to his sons in the middle of the Zoramite War, where it represents a significant break in the narrative. . . . Mormon could have recounted the Zoramite affair from beginning to end and then added Alma's document without upsetting the chronology at all. . . . The surprising placement seems designed to disrupt a smooth reading of the Zoramite story, which, taken as a whole, did not go so well. By the time readers go back to the war, they may have forgotten the rather awkward truth that Alma's preaching to the Zoramites not only did not prevent hostilities but was itself a major catalyst for the fighting.¹²

Preceding Ammon's report in Alma 26 of his labors among the Lamanites and his great rejoicing and praise for God, the narrative in the original chapter consisting of Alma 23–26 details the slaughter of over a thousand converted Anti-Nephi-Lehies, the complete destruction of the city of Ammonihah, many battles with the Nephites, the destruction of almost all the seed of Amulon, and the martyrdom of even more Lamanite believers in the wilderness. Lamanites return to their own lands and many of them join the people of God, who were the people of Anti-Nephi-Lehi. At this point, the narrative is interrupted with Ammon's words of rejoicing he shares with his brethren. Positive moments within these chapters are limited and quickly followed by destruction and suffering. The positive news provided in

11. Donald W. Parry, *Poetic Parallelisms in the Book of Mormon: The Complete Text Reformatted* (Provo, UT: Neal A. Maxwell Institute for Religious Scholarship, Brigham Young University, 2007): 286–96, scholarsarchive.byu.edu/mi/61/.

12. Grant Hardy, *Understanding the Book of Mormon: A Reader's Guide* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 149.

Alma 25:13–16 becomes a suitable springboard for Ammon's words of rejoicing in Alma 26.

Ammon's words are heartfelt, riveting, and joyous. They are a great summary of the fourteen years the sons of Mosiah spent preaching to the Lamanites. After reading such a stirring account, it is easy to forget exactly where the narrative left off. The narrative resumes in Alma 27 with yet another heartbreaking episode of martyrdom as the Amalekites again stir up the people in anger against the people of Anti-Nephi-Lehi and begin to massacre them a second time. The remaining believers had to leave their homeland as a result. In these chapters, we get agonizing account after agonizing account of Lamanite converts who are slain because of their newfound beliefs, not exactly the type of success the sons of Mosiah had envisioned.

Alma "greatly feared that the Zoramites would enter into a correspondence with the Lamanites and that it would be the means of great loss on the part of the Nephites" (Alma 31:4). Alma and his brethren went to preach to the Zoramites, in part, to keep this from happening. Unfortunately, their efforts did not keep the Zoramites from later joining with the Lamanites to go to war against the Nephites. In fact, their preaching served as a catalyst for the war that broke out in Alma 43–44. Similarly, the sons of Mosiah did not achieve all their objectives when they set out for the land of Nephi to preach to the Lamanites. They had hoped to "cure [the Lamanites] of their hatred towards the Nephites" (Mosiah 28:2). Although Ammon rejoices in his dearly beloved brethren who "would still have been racked with hatred against us" (Alma 26:9) without receiving the word of God, many others became even more hardened because of their preaching (Alma 24:30) and continued to fight against the Nephites.

The people of Ammon settled in the Nephite land of Jershon with Nephite armies around about the land to protect them. The armies of the Lamanites had followed the people of Ammon into the wilderness and began to attack the Nephite armies. "And thus there was a tremendous battle, yea, even such an one as never had been known among all the people in the land; . . . yea, and tens of thousands of the Lamanites were slain and scattered abroad. Yea, and also there was a tremendous slaughter among the people of Nephi" (28:2–3). The sons of Mosiah wrought "many mighty miracles" (26:12) among the Lamanites, but their impact on minimizing wars and contentions in the land turned out to be minimal at best.

The positioning of Alma 26 also serves to strengthen the structure

of the chiasm. In elements C and D of the chiasm, the Lamanites slay over a thousand of the Anti-Nephi-Lehies “without meeting any resistance” (24:22). Many of the Lamanites see that the Anti-Nephi-Lehies dramatically choose not to fight back, so they repent of the things they have done and join the people of God. The obvious parallel episode to element C in these chapters is the second instance of the Lamanites going against the people of Anti-Nephi-Lehi in which they again refuse to take up their arms against the Lamanites and more of them are slain in Alma 27:2–3. However, this episode does not have a corresponding account of Lamanite conversion at the end of it. Instead, Alma 26 breaks up the ordering of the elements of the chiasm in such a manner that Alma 25:13–16 functions as the matching element to element D. In D', Lamanites return to their own lands after many battles with the Nephites. Many of these Lamanites decide to join themselves to the people of God. The inverted ordering of “join . . . the people of God” (25:13) in D' compared with “the people of God . . . joined” (24:26) in D suggests that these elements should be paired together.

Alma 26 also functions as a frame of the theme of joy for Alma 26–29. John Welch provided the following instructive insight:

Notice that the word “joy” appears in Ammon’s ecstatic reflection seven times. . . . Another seven-fold expression of complete joy will show up again in Alma 27:17–19, and yet a third time in Alma 29:5, 9, 10, 13, 14, 14, 16. These triple-expressions of joy to the seventh power, along with the many precise word choices in these deeply personal chapters seem far too literarily purposeful and symbolically meaningful to be accidental or unintentional.¹³

This structuring can be taken a step further when Alma 28 is taken into consideration. The three seven-fold expressions of joy in Alma 26, 27, and 29 surround a seven-fold use of the words *mourning/mourn* in Alma 28. The tremendous battle described in Alma 28 was greater than any battle the people had ever known since the time Lehi left Jerusalem, with tens of thousands slain. This resulted in overwhelming mourning, sorrow, and lamentation among all the people. The repeated expressions of joy surrounding this devastating account attempt to soften the grief and sorrow recounted in this episode.

13. John W. Welch, “Alma 23–29: John W. Welch Notes,” in *Verse by Verse Thoughts on the Book of Mormon* (Springville, UT: Scripture Central, 2020), 649, archive.bookofmormoncentral.org/content/alma-23-29.

Summary and Conclusions

The macro-chiasm has several characteristics that add to its artistic appeal, including distinct framing, multiple inverted parallels, significant repeated phrases only found in matching elements, and an illuminating center that can deepen readers' appreciation for the legacy left by the people of Anti-Nephi-Lehi. It focuses upon their incomparable zeal towards God and their heroic willingness to "suffer death in the most aggravating and distressing manner which could be inflicted by their brethren" (Alma 27:29) because of their faith in Christ.

The chiasm has readily distinguishable borders in the first matching pair of elements (A and A') formed by the double use of the word *distinguished* and by the naming of the group of converted Lamanites in each element. Each of the first four matching pairs of elements (A and A', B and B', C and C', and D and D', respectively) have an inverted ordering of key terms in their second occurrence. Multiple such inversions in multiple matching elements strengthen the possibility that these verses were intentionally structured into a chiasm. These inverted phrases include the following:

- "Name . . . distinguished . . . called"/ "called . . . distinguished . . . name" (in 23:16–17 and 27:26, in elements A and A', respectively)
- "Sins and murders . . . we have committed"/ "murders and sins we have committed" (three times in 24:9–11 and twice in 27:6,8, in elements B and B', respectively)
- "Destroying the people of Anti-Nephi-Lehi"/ "the people of Anti-Nephi-Lehi . . . to destroy them" (in 24:20 and 27:2, in elements C and C', respectively)
- "The people of God were joined"/ "join . . . the people of God" (in 24:26 and 25:13, in elements D and D', respectively)

The repeated phrase, "Now when Ammon and his brethren . . . saw . . . to destroy/destruction" in 24:5 and 27:4, is another significant structural marker of the chiasm. It serves to introduce two matching literary units and functions as a signal to the reader to look for parallels in these respective accounts. In the first episode, the people of Anti-Nephi-Lehi choose not to make any preparations for war to defend themselves against the soon-to-attack Lamanites. In the second episode, the people decide to flee their homeland to avoid further destruction at the hands of the attacking Lamanites.

Considering that the center of a chiasm usually represents the

climax or turning point, the literary unit at the center of this chiasm at first glance is not the obvious or expected candidate to serve this purpose. Other events transpire within these pages that many would judge more memorable or impactful. There are stirring sermons shared by both King Anti-Nephi-Lehi and Ammon. The people of Anti-Nephi-Lehi are perhaps most well-known for two things—burying their weapons as part of their covenant with God and their willingness to die rather than to commit sin. It makes sense that the theme of martyrdom, this willingness to die for belief in the Lord, would take center stage in the account of this people's history. A thread of this theme runs throughout the narrative, but it is most concentrated in the central element of the chiasm. This justifies the preeminent position of these verses in the chiasm.

The acceptance of the people of Anti-Nephi-Lehi by the Nephites both politically and religiously is another theme woven into the narrative. One role of the central unit is to highlight the parallel experiences of Abinadi and Lamanite believers in the wilderness. This would have provided the Nephites with incredibly strong evidence that the people of Anti-Nephi-Lehi were sincere and worthy of being incorporated into the religion Abinadi founded. Once this theme is identified within these chapters, other significant connections become apparent. One such connection is found in Alma 23:18. In this verse, the Anti-Nephi-Lehies are described as “a very industrious people.” The word *industrious* occurs in only four verses in the Book of Mormon. It is used in 2 Nephi 5:17 to describe Nephi's people after they separated themselves from Laman and Lemuel. It is also used in Mosiah 23:5 to describe Alma's people after they separated themselves from Noah. By using this word to describe the Anti-Nephi-Lehies, Mormon intentionally links them to the Nephites in general and to fellow believers specifically.¹⁴

Another significant connection comes at the end of the episode in Alma 27:27. The people of Anti-Nephi-Lehi, now called the people of Ammon, are now “numbered among the people who were of the church of God.” The phrase *church of God* is key. It first appears in the Book of Mormon in Mosiah 18:17. Alma had baptized over 200 people in the waters of Mormon, “and they were called the church of God.” This phrase next appears in Mosiah 21:30. Limhi's people “did mourn for the death of Abinadi and also for the departure of Alma and the

14. The other reference of the word *industrious* does not relate to the current point being made and comes later in the Book of Mormon. It is found in Ether 10:22.

people that went with him, who had formed a church of God." By using the phrase *church of God*, Mormon is linking the people of Ammon with Alma and his followers who first established the church.

Considerable care and attention have been given to the structure of this unit as shown by the two chiasms it contains that have corresponding central elements. The two chiasms, in Alma 25:5–8 and 25:9–12, respectively, both consist of martyrdom accounts that highlight in their central elements the person or persons' conversion or belief in the Lord. Mormon also effectively uses the literary device of allusion to pack even more meaning and insight into these verses. Multiple allusions to other martyrdom accounts are provided, both explicitly in the case of Abinadi, and implicitly in the case of what occurred in Ammonihah. In Alma 25:5–7, many Lamanites are converted in the wilderness and are put to death by the remnant of the children of Amulon. These Lamanite martyrs may not have even had the chance to be called or known as people of Anti-Nephi-Lehi since they were slain in the wilderness, but they surely would have thought of themselves as Anti-Nephi-Lehies. Belief in God is the thrice-stated fundamental reason behind the deaths in this central account (25:5, 7, 11), making for a fitting center to the overall chiasm as well. Of the five martyrdom accounts referenced or alluded to in these chapters, either implicitly or explicitly, Lamanite converts are martyred in the first, middle, and last accounts.

The dramatic account of the people of Anti-Nephi-Lehi helps readers see the Lord's great mercy in allowing and helping people to change. King Anti-Nephi-Lehi described his own people as "the most lost of all mankind" (24:11), yet they were not beyond hope in the Lord's eyes, nor beyond the reach of His merciful arm.

Ammon saw himself and his brethren in a similarly awful situation before being rescued by the Lord. He exclaimed, "Who could have supposed that our God would have been so merciful as to have snatched us from our awful, sinful, and polluted state? Behold, we went forth even in wrath with mighty threatenings to destroy his church" (26:17–18). Yet the Lord did not "consign [them] to an awful destruction" nor "doom [them] to eternal despair" (26:19).

The sons of Mosiah completely changed their lives. They suffered many afflictions, but they endured their suffering well and became instruments in the Lord's hands in bringing many of the Lamanites to the knowledge of the truth. This was the first great missionary success that the Nephites had enjoyed among the Lamanites in over 500

years. Their converts, both those who were martyred and those who lived “firm in the faith of Christ, even unto the end” (27:27), left an indelible legacy of faith and sacrifice unparalleled in scripture.



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