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Derek J. Squire

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The Literary Structure of Alma 63

Derek J. Squire

Abstract: *Alma 63, the concluding chapter of the book of Alma, displays a sophisticated literary structure that gives meaning and emphasis to events that might otherwise appear to be routine historical details. This paper proposes a six-element chiasm in Alma 63:1–11, framed by the transfer of sacred records and centered on large-scale Nephite migrations by ship to the land northward. Detailed verbal, thematic, and chronological correspondences among the paired elements support the possibility that Mormon purposefully constructed the arrangement. Applying established criteria for evaluating chiasmus, the analysis highlights the structure’s literary boundaries, symmetry, central focus, distinctive terminology, and relationship to the chronological framework of the chapter. The proposed chiasm also supports interpreting Alma 63:9 as a land migration and draws attention to the unusual function of verse 8. Additional literary features in Alma 63:12–17 include Donald Parry’s chiasm concerning the transmission and distribution of sacred records, an escalating progression of references to the thirty-ninth year, an inclusio framing the entire chapter, and textual links to Alma 37. Together, these features portray Mormon as a deliberate literary craftsman whose structural techniques reinforce historical developments, scriptural preservation, and the religious purpose of the Book of Mormon.*

In Book of Mormon studies, “chiasmania” has run wild the past few years, resulting in countless articles and blog posts about the latest and greatest chiasm to be identified.¹ Many of us, including myself, have been guilty of chiasmania. However, there are still occasions when

1. Scripture Central Staff, “Book of Mormon Evidence: Chiasmus Overview,”

chiasms are identified that appear to have been carefully crafted and purposefully produced. Such chiasms can provide meaning and value to scriptural scholarship and readers' understanding of the text. Alma 63 appears to include such a chiasm, which functions as a thoughtful conclusion to the book of Alma.

In this article, I will do the following:

- Provide a summary of the account in Alma 63.
- Present the six-element chiasm for Alma 63:1–11.
- Identify and examine the parallels and correspondences found between paired elements.
- Analyze the chiasticity of the proposed chiasm using established criteria to determine the likelihood this structure may have been consciously planned by Mormon.
- Summarize some of the key findings from analyzing this chiasm.
- Share literary insights found in Alma 63:12–17.

Summary of Alma 63

Helaman, a son of Alma, became the recordkeeper in the nineteenth year of the reign of the judges and dies in the thirty-fifth year. His account of those sixteen years comprises Alma 45–62. His death is recorded in the last verse of Alma 62. War between the Nephites and the Lamanites had ended four years earlier, in the thirty-first year. The Nephites were beginning to prosper again in the land. Alma 63 not only begins a new chapter, but also begins with a new recordkeeper, Helaman's brother, Shiblon, in the commencement of the thirty-sixth year.² There is no mention of Shiblon having received the plates from Helaman. This potentially glaring omission may indicate that this transfer of the records did not occur as it always had previously.

In the original chaptering of the Book of Mormon, Alma 63 is identified as the thirtieth chapter of Alma.³ It spans four years—from the

Evidence 6, 19 September 2020, scripturecentral.org/evidence/book-of-mormon-evidence-chiasmus-overview.

2. Frank F. Judd Jr., "Alma and the Sacred Things," in *Give Ear to My Words*, ed. Kerry Hull, Nicholas J. Frederick, and Hank R. Smith (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University; Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2019), 155–80.

3. The word *original* is used to describe Book of Mormon chapters and sections as specified in the original and printer manuscripts. References in this article use the Book of Mormon's current chapters and verses. Book of Mormon

thirty-sixth to the thirty-ninth year of the reign of the judges—beginning with Shiblon taking possession of the records and concluding with him conferring them upon Helaman's son, Helaman. Other than the mention of Shiblon taking possession of the records, the thirty-sixth year comes and goes without much detail. A summary of Shiblon and Corianton's faithfulness is provided as well as a note that Moroni dies sometime during this year.

Multiple accounts of large migrations of Nephites to the land northward dominate the narrative in the thirty-seventh and thirty-eighth years (Alma 63:4–9). Some of these migrations occur via the west sea on ships built by Hagoth. In the thirty-ninth year, Shiblon dies. However, Mormon stresses the point that before Shiblon's death he conferred the sacred records upon Helaman's son, Helaman.

Alma 63 ends with a note about a Lamanite attack against the Nephites and their new commander, Moronihah, son of Moroni. The Lamanites are beaten and driven back to their own lands by the Nephites after suffering great losses. The thirty-ninth year ends and so does the account of "Alma and Helaman his son and also Shiblon, which was his son" (v. 17).

The Proposed Six-Element Chiasm in Alma 63:1–11

The first eleven verses of Alma 63 appear to form a six-element chiasm that highlights the transition of recordkeepers as well as migrations of Nephites to the land northward. Element A is comprised of three distinct sub-elements that appear in inverted order in element A'. Elements B and B', and C and C', respectively, exhibit extended alternate parallelism. The proposed chiasm is shown below:

- A Sacred relics taken by Shiblon (vv. 1–2)
 - a "Shiblon took possession of those sacred things" (v. 1)
 - b "His brother" (Corianton) (v. 2)
 - c "Moroni died also" (v. 3)
- B Northward migration by land in the 37th year (v. 4)
 - a "In the . . . year"
 - b A large company (5,400 men with their wives and children)
 - c "Departed . . . into the land which was northward"
- C Northward migration by sea in the 37th year (vv. 5–6)
 - a "Hagoth . . . an exceeding curious man" (v. 5)

wording in this article is from *The Book of Mormon: The Earliest Text*, ed. Royal Skousen, 2nd ed. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2022), unless otherwise indicated.

- b “built him an exceeding large ship” (v. 5)
 - c “Many . . . which did enter therein” (v. 6)
 - d “With much provisions” (v. 6)
 - e “Took their course northward” (v. 6)
- C' Northward migration by sea in the 38th year (vv. 7–8)
 - a “This man” (Hagoth) (v. 7)
 - b “Built other ships. And the first ship did also return” (v. 7)
 - c “Many more people did enter into it” (v. 7)
 - d “Also took much provisions” (v. 7)
 - e “Set out again to the land northward” (v. 7)
- B' Northward migration by land in the 38th year (v. 9)
 - a “In this year”
 - b “Many people”
 - c “Went forth into the land northward”
- A' Sacred relics transferred from Shiblon (vv. 10–11)
 - c' “Shiblon died also” (v. 10)
 - b' “Corianton” (v. 10)
 - a' “Shiblon to confer those sacred things . . . upon the son of Helaman, who was called Helaman” (v. 11)

Correlation between Matching Elements

Correlations between the matching elements of this chiasm are detailed below. The sub-elements are presented in such an orderly manner that they lend support to the idea that this structure was intentionally crafted by Mormon.

Correspondences between A and A' (verses 1–3 and 10–11)

These two elements cover events in the thirty-sixth and thirty-ninth years of the reign of the judges, respectively. As stated earlier, there are three parallel sub-elements that appear in inverted order in element A'. While these sub-elements could each be labeled as their own elements in the chiasm, it makes more sense to keep them together as a group since they all occur within one year in each. In element A, “Shiblon took possession of those sacred things” (Alma 63:1), there is explicit mention of Shiblon’s brother, Corianton (v. 2), and there is a report that “Moroni died also” (v. 3). These three sub-elements appear in inverted order in element A' (vv. 10–11). There is a report that “Shiblon died also” (v. 10), mention of Corianton (v. 10), and a statement that Shiblon did “confer those sacred things . . . upon the son of Helaman, who was called Helaman” (v. 11). In A', the ordering of events feels forced and inconsistent with the natural flow of historical narration.

It would be more intelligible to report Shiblon conferring the sacred records before he died. Stating that Shiblon died first and only afterward describing his actions shortly before his death seems awkward, but actually strengthens the case that this is an intentional inversion of element A.

It is possible that a fourth parallel pair of sub-elements could be added to the above structure. This parallel would consist of the four characteristics attributed to Shiblon and Corianton in v. 2 and the description of Corianton's activities in v. 10. These are the only personal descriptions of Shiblon and Corianton in this chapter. Conceptually, these could also be seen as matching sub-elements. However, the other parallels in the chiasm are clearly based on similar terminology. Therefore, it has not been included here.

The wording is very precise in these matching sub-elements. In the first pair, not only does the record state that Shiblon and Moroni died, but that they both "died also" (vv. 3, 10). This phrase does not occur anywhere else in the book of Alma. The word *also* most likely refers back to Alma 62:52 in which Helaman's death is recorded. The only two mentions of Corianton in this chapter are in the second pair of matching sub-elements. His name is explicitly stated in Alma 63:10, whereas he is identified only as Shiblon's brother in verse 2.

The third and last pair of sub-elements declares who oversees the records and shares the phrase *those sacred things*. There is a slight difference in wording here. In v. 1, "Shiblon took possession of those sacred things." In v. 11, Shiblon did "confer those sacred things . . . upon the son of Helaman, who was called Helaman." Two points need to be made about this wording difference since the remainder of the parallels in the chiasm are more straightforward. First, it appears that Shiblon did not have "those sacred things" conferred upon him in v. 1 as he conferred them upon Helaman, son of Helaman, in v. 11. Rather, in v. 1 he "took possession of those sacred things." This wording is most likely chosen because Helaman did not transfer these sacred things to Shiblon before his death. Second, an argument can be made to revise the last sub-element in element A' to be the following: "Those sacred things . . . in the possession of Helaman" (vv. 11–12). This is an appealing alternative because the ordering of the two phrases *those sacred things* and *possession of* are inverted from v. 1. However, the amount of text in between these two phrases in vv. 11 and 12 makes this less likely.

Correspondences between B and B' (verses 4 and 9)

In elements B and B' and C and C', two migrations northward by land and two migrations northward by sea are documented. In elements B and B', the two migrations to the land northward are most likely both by land. They occur in the thirty-seventh and thirty-eighth years, respectively. The language in Alma 63:9 is somewhat unclear about this being a migration by land: "There were many people which went forth into the land northward." However, structure and context suggest that this was almost certainly a land migration. It is noted as a separate migration event, distinct from the sea voyages described in the preceding verses. If this were not the case, and these people also migrated northward by ship, the repetition in v. 9 would be unnecessary. If this chiasm is determined to be strong and sound structurally, and if it seems most likely to be intentionally arranged in this manner, then it provides further evidence that v. 9 is indeed referring to a land migration.

Within the immediate context of sea voyages and the building of more ships, it's possible to assume that the people who "went forth" were actually sailing forth. However, it should be remembered that land migration is also part of this context (v. 4), and that Mormon had just reported that "one other ship also did sail forth; and whither she did go we know not" (v. 8). After this he introduced the next details about migration with the phrase "And it came to pass" which often acts as a marker between separate ideas (v. 9). It would seem odd for Mormon to explicitly mention "one other ship" (which sort of has a tone of finality to it) and remark upon its uncertain fate, and then report an *additional* seafaring journey without even mentioning that it was by ship. Because of the difficulty of such a reading, it seems much more likely that this chapter's final—though unspecified—mention of a journey northward was by land rather than by sea.⁴

Elements B and B' both contain three sub-elements that exhibit synonymous parallelism in an extended alternate structure. The first pair of parallel sub-elements marks the year in which the migrations occur. Alma 63:4 begins, "And it came to pass that in the thirtieth and

4. Scripture Central Staff, "Why Did Mormon Mention Hagoth?" KnoWhy 171, n3, 27 August 2020, scripturecentral.org/knowwhy/why-did-mormon-mention-hagoth.

seventh year." Similarly, v. 9 begins "And it came to pass that in this year," which depends upon v. 7 in which the thirty-eighth year is explicitly mentioned.

The second pair of sub-elements designates these two migrations as large migrations. In v. 4, "There was a large company of men — even to the amount of five thousand and four hundred men, with their wives, and their children" who migrated. In v. 9, the description is brief and less specific: "Many people" migrated. The intent behind labeling this as a large migration is still there despite the brevity of the description. The third pair of sub-elements states that these people "departed" (v. 4) or "went" (v. 9) "into the land . . . northward" (vv. 4, 9).

Correspondences between C and C' (verses 5–6 and 7–8)

The two migrations to the land northward documented in these matching central elements are by sea. The first migration occurs in the thirty-seventh year and the second in the thirty-eighth year. Each element consists of five sub-elements exhibiting synonymous parallelism in an extended alternate structure.

The first pair of sub-elements identifies a man, Hagoth, who builds ships. In v. 5, he is identified as "Hagoth, he being an exceeding curious man." In v. 7, he is referred to again simply as "this man." The second pair of sub-elements indicates that he built ships. In v. 5, Hagoth "built him an exceeding large ship." In v. 7, Hagoth "built other ships." The third pair of sub-elements affirms that *many* people enter these ships, and more specifically, into the first ship he built. In v. 6, "many of the Nephites . . . did enter therein." In v. 7, "The first ship did also return; and many more people did enter into it." The fourth pair of sub-elements includes a detail about provisions that the people take with them. In v. 6, they sail forth "with much provisions." In v. 7, they also take "much provisions." The fifth pair of sub-elements describe the direction they travel. In v. 6, "they took their course northward." In v. 7, they "set out again to the land northward."

Such extended parallelism consisting of five synonymous pairs in sequential order make it much more likely that this arrangement was intentionally fashioned by the author.

At this point, there is a potential gap in the chiasm. Verse 8 is unique and does not contribute to the overall chiasmic structure. Wording shifts to the present tense in the phrase *are drowned*⁵ and shifts from

5. In *Book of Mormon: The Earliest Text*, Alma 63:8 reads in part, "And we suppose that they *are* drowned up in the depths of the sea."

third-person voice to first-person voice with the word *we* used twice. Scholars have differing interpretations of who contributed this verse. Grant Hardy makes this observation:

While most of this chapter could be Mormon's paraphrase, the two occurrences of "we" in this verse suggest that Shiblon is writing about contemporary events. In addition, [the Original Manuscript] used the present tense "are drowned."⁶

On the other hand, Brant Gardner suggests that Mormon writes the passage:

The "we" in this verse refers to Mormon and his time. For Mormon, there was no record of any further return, nor any indication in the subsequent years of what happened. Apparently, these ships planned to return since their failure to do so led to the assumption that its passengers and crew "were drowned in the depths of the sea."⁷

One cannot tell for certain whether these are Mormon's or Shiblon's words. Throughout the chapter, it is impossible to decipher whether Mormon is quoting Shiblon verbatim or simply abridging details Shiblon shares in the large plates. For purposes of this article, the assumption is that Mormon had editorial control over this chapter and responsibility for its final structural form, which then remained intact through the translation process.

In addition to v. 8 possibly being written by Shiblon, it appears to serve a different structural function. It primarily functions as part of an *inclusio* with Alma 45:18–19 that ties all of Alma 45–63 together. These verses share the phrases *never heard of more*, *and we suppose*, and *we know not*. The phrase *never heard of more* only occurs elsewhere in Helaman 16:8. In Alma 45:18, Alma appears to set off for the land of Melek, while the people in the ship in Alma 63:8 intend to go the land northward, but neither party is confirmed to have reached their respective destination. In each case, the people make their own supposition of what happened. While it is possible for verses to serve more than one structural function, in this case v. 8 is instead left out of the chiasm completely.

6. Grant Hardy, ed. *The Annotated Book of Mormon* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2023), 501.

7. Brant A. Gardner, *Second Witness: Analytical and Contextual Commentary on the Book of Mormon* (Salt Lake City, UT: Greg Kofford Books, 2007), 4:770.

Analyzing the Chiasmaticity of the Proposed Chiasm

The six criteria identified by Neal Rappleye to evaluate the strength of chiasms are used here.⁸ These six criteria are:

- 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.
- Chiasmic order should typically not compete with other strong literary forms.

The proposed chiasm for Alma 63:1–11 exhibits many characteristics that satisfy the above criteria and thus contribute to its overall strength as a chiasm as well as to the likelihood that the chiasm was intentionally developed by Mormon.

Regarding the first criterion, the chiasm does not span multiple chapters in the Book of Mormon and thus adheres to the natural boundaries of the text. More importantly, the chiasm is strongly framed by *inclusio* — Shiblon and then Helaman, son of Helaman, obtaining “those sacred things” in vv. 1 and 11, respectively. The phrase *those sacred things* appears only twice in the Book of Mormon — in these two verses. This framing creates an appropriate, well-defined literary boundary for the chiasm.

Concerning the second criterion, as far as a climax or turning point being found at the center of the chiasm, the central elements, C and C', both describe Nephite migrations into the land northward by sea. This apparent Nephite advancement to migrate northward in large numbers by ship makes for a fitting center to the chiasm. Mormon crafted other chiasms to highlight or summarize particularly unique years in Nephite history such as those found in Alma 62:48–51⁹ and Helaman

8. Neal Rappleye, “Chiasmus Criteria in Review,” in *Chiasmus: The State of the Art*, ed. John Welch and Donald Parry (Provo, UT: BYU Studies; Springville, UT: Book of Mormon Central, 2020), 289–309, scripturecentral.org/archive/books/book-chapter/chiasmus-criteria-review. See also 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), 109–110, journal.interpreter-foundation.org/the-literary-structure-of-alma-17-20-a-14-unit-chiasm/.

9. Scripture Central Staff, “How Does Chiasmus Teach Us to Reverse the Pride

6:7–13.¹⁰ This chiasm appears to be another such instance, although this chiasm covers a four-year period instead.

Regarding Rappleye's third criterion, the well-balanced symmetry in this chiasm is one of its strongest features. Each element consists of multiple sub-elements presented either in inverted order, as in the case of elements A and A', or in parallel order, as in elements B and B' and C and C'.

The structure of the chiasm is based on major keywords, phrases, and themes found within Alma 63:1–11.

Throughout the analysis on the matching elements discussed earlier, extraneous repetition has been considered, thereby satisfying Rappleye's fifth criterion. However, the keywords, phrases, and events included in the chiasm are unique to their matching elements, increasing the likelihood the chiasm was intentionally designed.

Finally, this chiasm does not compete with, but rather complements, one other strong literary form present in this same set of verses. Mormon employs the customary historical literary form throughout this chapter of marking the years in which events occur. The thirty-sixth, thirty-seventh, thirty-eighth, and thirty-ninth years are each noted as beginning in some manner (vv. 1, 4, 7, 10) and ending (vv. 3, 6, 9, 16). The chiasm complements the documentation of these years. Events in elements A and A' transpire in the thirty-sixth and thirty-ninth years, respectively. Elements B and C detail activities from the thirty-seventh year, whereas C' and B' describe proceedings from the thirty-eighth year. Donald Parry has identified a chiasm for Alma 63:11–13, but no other structures within this chapter.¹¹ There do not appear to be any published studies dealing with the chiastic structure of these verses on a macro level.

Key Findings from the Proposed Chiasm

One of the most exciting things about the study of chiasmus is the influence it has on interpretation of the text. Five key findings will be addressed here.

First, evaluating the center of the chiasm should reveal a lot about

Cycle?," KnoWhy 468, 21 August 2019, scripturecentral.org/knowwhy/how-does-chiasmus-teach-us-to-reverse-the-pride-cycle.

10. John Welch, ed. *Reexploring the Book of Mormon: The F.A.R.M.S. Updates* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1992), 230–32.

11. Donald W. Parry, *Poetic Parallelisms in the Book of Mormon: The Complete Text Reformatted* (Provo, UT: Maxwell Institute, 2007), 390.

the purpose of the chiastic structure. The center of this chiasm focuses on the sea voyages of the Nephites into the land northward, made possible by Hagoth's shipbuilding expertise. Outside of one Isaiah passage quoted in 2 Nephi 12:16, this is the first reference to ships in the Book of Mormon since Lehi and his family arrived by ship at the beginning of the record (1 Nephi 18:22). This must have been a significant development among the people. Another chiasm in this chapter, identified by Donald Parry (vv. 11–13), highlights another critical achievement of the people—the distribution of the scriptures throughout all the land (v. 12).

Second, the chiasm also assists in highlighting other literary structures within these verses. Extended alternate structures are present, particularly in vv. 4–9. Verses 4 and 9 are extended alternates in an A-B-C pattern. Verses 5–6 and vv. 7–8 are also extended alternates in an A-B-C-D-E pattern. The use of this literary technique provides evidence of the author's intent to carefully lay out the information he had at his disposal. It appears evident that there was purpose and skill behind Mormon's writing.

Third, the chiastic structure strengthens the interpretation of v. 9 as a land migration. Contextual evidence was provided above in support of this being a land migration, but it is not explicitly stated in the text. Structurally, the migration in v. 9 pairs with the land migration in v. 4, framing the two migrations by sea in vv. 5–7, thus providing additional support for this being a land migration.

Fourth, the chiasm is adeptly framed by elements A and A' in which the ordering of their respective three sub-elements is inverted in A'. The precise verbal parallels of "those sacred things" (vv. 1, 11) and "died also" (vv. 3, 10) and the double mention of Corianton (vv. 2, 10) make it more likely that these verses are to be treated together for structural purposes.

Finally, the exclusion of v. 8 from the chiasm leads the reader to ask more questions and study this verse more thoroughly. Why is the first-person plural pronoun *we* used twice in this verse and nowhere else in the chapter? What keywords or phrases are used? How does this verse function within the text? Answers to these questions have already been considered earlier in this paper.

The Literary Function of Alma 63:12–17

There may be a tendency for the reader to overlook verses such as the last six verses of this chapter which do not fit into the adjacent

dominant literary structure. However, a careful reading of these verses shows how rich, deep, and well composed they are. Four key literary insights are considered here.

1. A Chiasm in vv. 11–13 with an intriguing center

First, vv. 12–13 finish the thought begun in v. 11 concerning the conferral of the records from Shiblon to Helaman, son of Helaman. These verses are structured chiasmically.

Donald Parry identified a chiasm in Alma 63:11–13.¹² This chiasm is included below with his identified parallels in italics:

- A Expedient for *Shiblon* to confer those sacred things before *his death*
- B Upon the son of Helaman, who was called *Helaman*
- C Being *called after the name of his father*
- D All *those engravings* which were in the possession of Helaman
- E Written and *sent forth* among the children of men throughout all the land
- E' Save . . . those parts . . . commanded by Alma should not *go forth*
- D' Nevertheless *these things* were to be kept sacred
- C' And handed down from *one generation to another*
- B' In this year they had been conferred upon *Helaman*
- A' Before the *death of Shiblon*

Parry's proposed parallels are quite persuasive overall. However, a new central element to this chiasm could be added. This new element, element F, consists of the phrase *among the children of men throughout all the land* (v. 12) that is currently in element E. This new central element shifts the focus of the chiasm and alters its purpose and meaning.¹³ Instead of one of the two central elements highlighting the things Alma did not want to go forth to the people (in E'), the focus shifts in the new central element to the momentous fact that the scriptures were now available to all. The center of this chiasm then also

12. Parry, *Poetic Parallels*, 390.

13. In this article, the terms *chiasmus* and *chiasm* are used to denote all inverted parallel structures. Some scholars prefer to label inverted parallel structures with one central element as concentric structures and those with two central elements as chiasms. See, e.g., Jerome T. Walsh, *Style and Structure in Biblical Hebrew Narrative* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2001), 13, archive.org/details/stylestructurein0000wals/page/12/mode/2up.

parallels the center of the chiasm for Alma 63:1–11. The center of each chiasm highlights a significant development among the people—the widespread distribution of the sacred Nephite records among the people, and large-scale Nephite migrations by ship to the land northward, respectively.

2. The literary gem in vv. 13–15

Second, a “literary gem”¹⁴ can be mined and polished from vv. 13–15. A subtle, yet significant, progression in these verses demonstrates just a small part of Mormon’s literary skill and artistry. In v. 10, the thirty-ninth year of the reign of the judges is first noted. Verse 16 then marks the end of the thirty-ninth year. Between these verses, this year is referenced three more times. In v. 13, the reference is simply “in this year.” In v. 14, the word *also* is added to the reference from the previous verse, becoming “also in this year.” Then, in v. 15, the lengthier phrase from v. 14 is retained, but the word *same* is added for further emphasis, resulting in “also in this same year.” This progression gives more prominence to the events described in these verses. It is as if Mormon wants the reader to know that several consequential things happened during this year and that they all stand on their own weight. Not only did this thing happen “in this year,” but this *other* thing happened “also in this year,” and then even *one more* thing happened “also in this same year.”

In his capacity as a reviewer for this paper, Stephen Ehat generously shared the following five insights that enhance the multifaceted appreciation of the literary gem in vv. 13–15.¹⁵ I have tried to capture his insights and his wording to the best of my ability.

- **A drumbeat of consequence.** First, this progression creates a drumbeat of consequence. Each event is not merely listed; it is *hammered* into the timeline, forcing the reader to slow down and register the cumulative weight of the thirty-ninth year. This technique of narrative pacing transforms a chronicle into a commentary, a short story into a novel.

14. E. Cecil McGavin, “Literary Gems in the Book of Mormon,” *Millennial Star* 104, no. 45 (5 November 1942): 707–9, scripturecentral.org/archive/periodicals/magazine-article/literary-gems-book-mormon.

15. As with other papers submitted to *Interpreter*, my paper went through a process of double-blind peer review. These insights were shared during that process and their author remained anonymous until after my paper was accepted. It was only then that my editor reached out to Stephen and asked if he would mind being named as the contributor of the insights.

Mormon isn't just recording *what* happened; he is signaling *how* significant this cluster of events was.

- **A causative chain.** Second, it establishes a causative chain, not just a chronological list. The rhetorical linking suggests the events are more than isolated events. The progression implies a tight, *causative* sequence within a single, fateful year. First off, Shiblon dies in v. 13. Then, some dissenters go forth to the Lamanites and stir them up to anger in v. 14. Did Shiblon's death contribute in some fashion to these dissenters joining the Lamanites? Finally, a numerous army comes to war against the Nephites in v. 15 as a direct result of the dissenters convincing the Lamanites to do this very thing.
- **An emphasis on rapid decline.** Third, this progression highlights Mormon's theme of rapid decline. This literary technique is a microcosm of Mormon's broader historical thesis. Throughout his editing of Alma and Helaman, he illustrates how quickly covenant society can unravel. The intensifying repetition in these three verses is a miniature model of this theme: the loss of one righteous leader (v. 13) leads directly to internal strife (v. 14), which blooms immediately into an existential military threat (v. 15). The rhetorical escalation mirrors the escalation of the crisis itself.
- **A pivot point between eras.** Fourth, this progression serves as a structural "pivot point" between eras. This is the final chapter of the book of Alma. The thirty-ninth year is the fulcrum between the era of the Nephites' greatest generals and judges (Moroni, Helaman, Pahoran, and Teancum) and the era of decline that will characterize much of the book of Helaman. By dwelling on this year with such emphatic repetition, Mormon is signaling a major historical turning point. He may be saying, in effect: "Pay close attention. The conditions that made the 'golden age' of Alma possible are now ending, and here is the precise moment it began."
- **A contrast to other date markers.** Fifth, the emotive, rhetorical dating in this progression stands in stark contrast to the formulaic, structural dates found in the proposed chiasm (e.g., "in the thirty and sixth year," "in the thirty and ninth year"). That contrast is itself meaningful. The chiasmic dates provide the *framework*; this rhetorical progression provides

the *editorial emphasis*. It shows Mormon the artist working within the scaffolding of Mormon the annalist.

Mormon could have easily omitted the third reference to the year in v. 15. Instead, he *amplifies* it, a clear signal of authorial intent. This small detail is a window into Mormon's mind as he shapes his tragic epic, urging his future readers to see the ominous patterns of the past that will inevitably reappear. It is the first documented battle with Moronihah as the commander of the Nephite armies and foreshadows further conflict to come involving Moronihah's armies in the first chapter of the book of Helaman. It is also the first such battle in eight years since the end of the Amalickiah/Ammoron wars between the Nephites and the Lamanites. The Lamanites are driven out of Nephite lands just as they were earlier (v. 15; 62:38). They suffer "great loss" (v. 15), echoing the great losses experienced by Amalickiah and the Lamanites earlier (Alma 49:25; 51:11).

3. The *inclusio* in vv. 1, 17

Third, there is a well-defined *inclusio* in vv. 1 and 17 which neatly frames the entire chapter. In v. 1, three recordkeepers are noted — Shiblon, Helaman, and Alma. In v. 17, these same three recordkeepers are listed but their names appear in reverse order — Alma, Helaman, and Shiblon.

4. The links to Alma 37

Fourth, Alma 63:12–13 draws heavily from Alma 37 in which Helaman counseled his son, Helaman, to take the records and keep all these things sacred. Shared keywords and phrases include *handed down from one generation to another* (37:4; 63:13); *these/those sacred things* (37:2, 14, 15, 16, 47; 63:1, 11, 13); and *engravings* (37:3; 63:12). Also, Alma 63:13 mentions the parts of the record that Alma commanded should not go forth among the people. Alma's commandment regarding this part of the Jaredite record which was to be retained from the people is found in Alma 37:27–32.

Conclusion

Why does any of this matter? Alma 63 could easily have been written without all the bells and whistles of literary devices and sophisticated structural techniques. However, the incredible attention given to

form and style, structure and content, is consistent with what is found throughout the book of Alma.

Chiasmus adds to the artistic appeal of the Book of Mormon. The chiasm in Alma 63:1–11 exhibits greater precision than many larger chiasms which have been identified in the Book of Mormon. The matching extended alternate structures in elements B and B' and C and C' are crisply constructed and add much to the overall appeal of the structure. Mormon also creatively highlights the multiple migrations that occurred in the thirty-seventh and thirty-eighth years in a memorable manner.

Mormon appears to give particular care and thought in crafting conclusions to large sections of text in the Book of Mormon.¹⁶ Even what some may consider mundane historical details in this account are shared in an elegant and pleasing manner to attempt to match the prominence of the principal project at hand—the writing of scripture and testifying of Jesus Christ as the Son of God, the Savior and Redeemer of the world. I believe that Mormon has achieved this objective here, again eliciting wonder and amazement in how he has compiled this great book of scripture.



Derek J. Squire was born and raised in Orem, Utah. President Ezra Taft Benson's call to make the study of the Book of Mormon a lifetime pursuit changed his life when Derek was a teenager. Derek graduated from BYU with a master's degree in accounting and has been a CPA, nursing home administrator, and business owner of a home health and hospice company with his brother. He is currently a real estate investor. He and his brother, Ryan, are the authors of the book *A Christlike Heart: A Study of the Heart in the Book of Mormon (CFI, 2019)*. Derek served a mission in the Russia Rostov-na-Donu Mission. He and his wife, Elizabeth, are the parents of three girls and a boy. They currently reside in Bountiful, Utah.

16. Alma 16, 28, and 29 are good examples of highly structured chapters that include the use of chiasmus and numerous other parallels and literary devices. There are two large chiasms spanning all of Alma 16. Alma 28 consists almost entirely of parallelisms. Donald Parry and Brant Gardner have identified a couple of them, but there are many more. See Parry, *Poetic Parallelisms*, 297; and Gardner, *Second Witness*, 4:393. Alma 29 consists of two chiasms that cover the entire chapter, Parry, *Poetic Parallelisms*, 298–99.

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