

# Book of Mormon Study – Alma 36-38

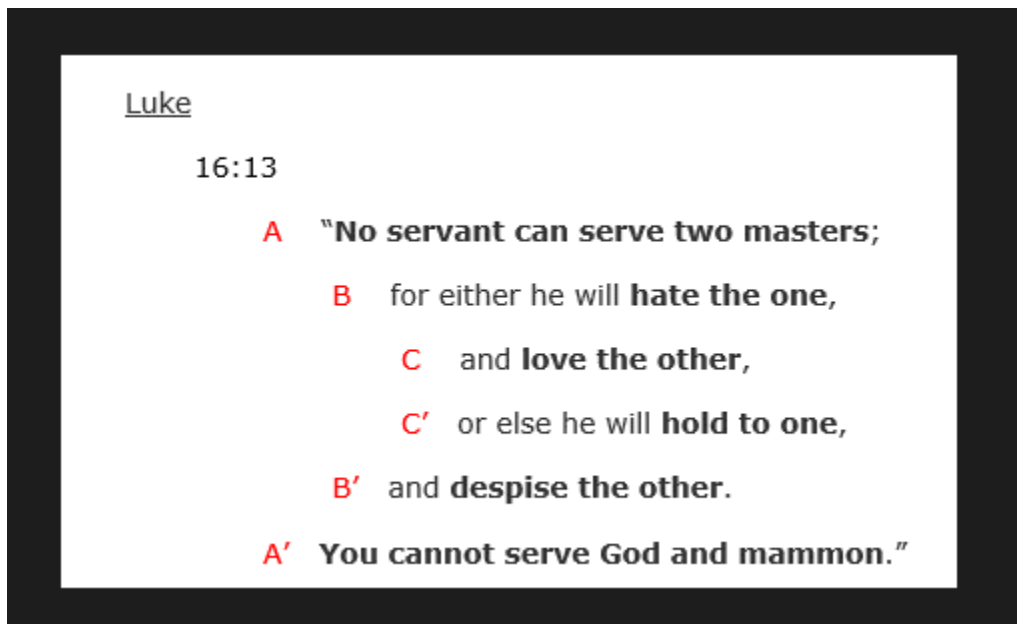
Online zoom Sunday School, 26 Jul 2020

(<https://jayball.name/book-of-mormon-study-lessons>)

## Alma 36 Chiasmus structure

What is a chiasm?

A chiasm (also called a chiasmus) is a literary device in which a sequence of ideas is presented and then repeated in reverse order. The result is a “mirror” effect as the ideas are “reflected” back in a passage. Each idea is connected to its “reflection” by a repeated word, often in a related form.



Luke  
16:13

**A** "No servant can serve two masters;  
**B** for either he will hate the one,  
**C** and love the other,  
**C'** or else he will hold to one,  
**B'** and despise the other.  
**A'** You cannot serve God and mammon."

## Discoveries in Chiasmus

In the introduction of the book *Discoveries in Chiasmus, A Pattern in All Things*, there are some enlightening points worth our attention here.

John Welch not only made the discovery of chiasmus in the Book of Mormon but has also excelled in locating and elaborating on this finding. His effort to document the initial finding has been preserved in an article he wrote for the Journal of Book of Mormon Studies, titled "*The Discovery of Chiasmus in the Book of Mormon: Forty Years Later*," Vol. 16, Issue 2, pages 74-78.

He wrote:

*"I particularly remember being on the train when I noticed the chiastic structure of Alma 36—the entire chapter! It was an overwhelmingly exciting moment to watch*

*the length and the detail of that text unfold, which turns out to be one of the very best instances of chiasmus anywhere in world literature. Gazing out of the train window and watching the Bavarian countryside roll by, I was transported by the skill and care of Alma as a writer. Amazed at the power of the chiastic form to focus the reader's attention on the central turning point of Alma's life, I thought how fortunate we are to have the Book of Mormon. I wondered where this train would take me."* That chapter is now well known as the premiere example of chiasm in all scripture, found by a young Elder, while serving in Germany, riding a train.

...

You see, for a crab to walk on dry ground, the weight of its forward arms is so great that they must be dragged along the ground. They cannot push them by going forward. Instead, that requires the crab to walk backwards. To go forward, it must walk backwards. Since all things testify of God and His ways, the crab is also a testimony of some truth. It tells us by its movement that to go forward we must go backward.

An illustration on page 201, Figure 43, [of the book *Godel, Escher, Bach: An Eternal Golden Braid*, has this commentary: "*Here is a short section of one of the Crab's Genes, turning round and round. When the two DNA strands are unraveled and laid out side by side, they read this way:*

.... TTTTTTTTCGAAAAAAAAA...AAAAAAAAAGCTTTTTTTTTT....

*Notice that they are the same, only one goes forwards, while the other goes backwards."* Interesting how this forward/backward movement goes right to the level of the crab's DNA. The sequence reminds us of chiasmus. The crab's DNA is a chiasm.

In chiasmus, the first of the pattern repeats at the last. What came first is repeated in the end. It is a literary way of depicting "the last shall be first, and the first shall be last." That same pattern appears in the Menorah. The seven lamps have arms which connect the first to the last (Ex 25:32). If you were to set the lamp stand out in the same form using "ABC," the pattern would look like: A-B-C-D-C-B-A.

...

We have a description of the Urim and Thummim from Lucy Mack Smith. She described it as follows: "[On the morning of September 22, after Joseph had returned from the hill, he placed] the article [the Urim and Thummim] of which he spoke into my hands, and, upon examination, [I] found that it consisted of two smooth three-cornered diamonds set in glass, and the glasses were set in silver bows, which were connected with each other in much the same way as old fashioned spectacles" (*Eyewitness Accounts of the Restoration* by Milton V. Backman, Jr., p.73).

One of these "two smooth three-cornered" stones pointed upward. The other pointed downward. This pattern of two triangles pointing in opposite directions is what the Star of David is made from. One pointing up, and the other pointing down. It, too, is a kind of chiasm—progression and regression set in a side-by-side pattern.

The Urim and Thummim is a chiasm. The Star of David was modeled on the Urim and Thummim and is also a chiasm.

In ceremony, we move what was on the left side to the right side. The orientation of clothing changes from the one side to the other, forming a mirror image of progression and regression. As husband and wife kneel between the mirrors of the sealing room, facing each other, the right side of the one matches the left side of the other. As the dialogue at the veil concludes, the one acting as proxy speaks words of blessing vicariously for an ancestor, who in turn blesses descendants, including the one acting as proxy. The images and symbols fold over upon each other in a repeating pattern of chiasms. Symbol and meaning merge into patterns intended to suggest to the mind a deeper level of meaning.

What do we make of these symbols? These imbedded messages seem to return to a theme. Whatever other meanings as may be contained in these forms, patterns, and types, it necessarily includes the notion that to go forward you must go backward. Perhaps this meaning reigns supreme over all the other symbolic meanings of the pattern.

This pattern also reminds us anew of the Lord's injunction: "Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven" (Matthew 18:3). Returning to the mind of a child is necessary as a precondition, according to Christ's words, for us to be able to enter His kingdom. (See introduction of *Discoveries in Chiasmus, A Pattern in All Things*, Yvonne Bent & Scott Vanatter, beginning on page 1)

Chiasmus in Alma 36

<https://byustudies.byu.edu/system/files/pdfs/charts/bom/132.pdf>

Homework: Stephen Ehat - Brief Introduction to Chiasmus in Alma 36

<https://youtu.be/liSSK0exf40>

Alma and the Four Sons of the Passover Seder

*Stick of Joseph* footnote Alma 35:16

This parallels with Ex. 13:8–16, as well as with the traditional Passover questions about the "four sons," indicating that this was a Passover Seder. (The Passover Haggadah speaks of four sons: one who is wise; one who is wicked; one who is simple; and one who does not know to ask.) Each son asks his question about the Seder in a different way, and the Haggadah recommends answering each son, according to his question, using one of the three verses in the Torah that refer to this exchange. The wise son asks, "What are the statutes, the testimonies, and the laws that God has commanded you to do?" (Deut. 6:20). One explanation for why this very detail-oriented question is categorized as "wise" is that the wise son is trying to learn how to carry out the Seder, rather than asking for someone else's understanding of its meaning. He is answered fully: "You should reply to him with [all] the laws of pesach; one may not eat any dessert after the paschal sacrifice." The wicked son asks, "What is this

service to you?" (Ex. 12:26); he is characterized by the Haggadah as isolating himself from the Jewish people, standing by objectively and watching their behavior rather than participating. Therefore, he is rebuked by the explanation; "It is because God acted for my sake when I left Egypt" (Ex. 13:8)—this implies that the Seder is not for the wicked son, because the wicked son would not have deserved to be freed from Egyptian slavery; when the four sons are illustrated in the Haggadah, this son is frequently depicted as carrying weapons or wearing stylish contemporary fashions. The simple son asks, "What is this?" (Ex. 13:14) and is answered with: "With a strong hand the Almighty led us out from Egypt, from the house of bondage" (Ex. 13:14). And the one who does not know to ask is told, "It is because of what the Almighty did for me when I left Egypt" (Ex. 13:8).

See also Stick of Joseph blog:

*Alma and the Four Sons of the Passover Seder*

<https://stickofjoseph.org/our-blog/alma-and-the-four-sons-of-the-passover-seder/>

*Alma 37:3*

Plates of brass. Nibley says this would have been bronze, but the term bronze would have been unknown to Joseph Smith. Brass was first known to exist in about 500 BC. Bronze dates to about 3500 BC.

Small Means

*Alma 37:6-7*

*Now ye may suppose that this is foolishness in me; but behold I say unto you, that by small and simple things are great things brought to pass; and small means in many instances doth confound the wise. And the Lord God doth work by means to bring about his great and eternal purposes; and by very small means the Lord doth confound the wise and bringeth about the salvation of many souls.*

Often the means used by the Lord to accomplish His "strange act," and to perform His "strange work" (D&C 101: 95), are very small indeed.

Jesus Christ came into the world unexpected, unannounced by men, unanticipated by His generation, but expected and announced by heaven. There were signs in heaven, but men were largely oblivious. When the shepherds keeping watch over the flocks by night were interrupted, it was not by an earthly herald. There was none among men. It was from beyond the veil. The Savior crept into the world with heaven noticing but precious few of us paying attention to what was afoot.

Take a look at the two disciples on the road to Emmaus when Jesus sidles up beside them, walks with them and asks "What are you talking about?" (as if He didn't know).

Look at this from their perspective. If you trusted this was Him who should have redeemed Israel, did He? Did He redeem Israel? He came, He taught, He submitted, He was killed, and it was three days since. In that circumstance, even with the rumors from the women, could you see that He had redeemed Israel? If you were part of the population, in that group, on that day, sitting in that environment, how would you answer the question of whether He redeemed Israel? The Romans were still there, Annas and

Caiaphas were still faring sumptuously, Christ was killed, His disciples had been scattered — so what evidence did they have He had redeemed Israel. There were many things to suggest the contrary. (Later, even after His disciples see Him, they would return to their everyday labor.) Did He redeem Israel? Could you have seen it then? When it was happening before the eyes of these disciples, they could not see it. They could not comprehend how it had taken place.

Because we sing on Sundays the hymn “Redeemer of Israel” we have confidence we know what Christ accomplished. He IS the Redeemer. We proclaim this as if it were so very apparent. It is no more apparent in this account in Luke that the redemption of Israel had been accomplished, than it is apparent to you and I what God is doing now, today. Do we even hear what is now sounding in our own ears?

He came, and He redeemed Israel, and all the world missed it! Even His closest disciples doubted what had happened. It would be hundreds of years before the world would come around to acknowledge Him.

### [Are We Missing Something?](#)

Is it possible we could be missing some significant things happening right before our eyes in our day? I think it's worth pointing out some of the recent signs that come to my mind. We don't need to be reminded of the craziness of things that we are witnessing with the virus and violence that is currently going on. But leading up to these things were signs, for those with eyes to see, that signaled we are in coming into interesting times foretold by prophets old and new.

Over the months of August and September 2017, there were great destructions and warning signs given. You may remember California and British Columbia experienced the most destructive wildfires in recorded history. Oregon's scenic Columbia Gorge was decimated by them, too. Montana lost 1.3 million acres to fires, and heavy smoke blanketed the Western US and Canada for months.

On Monday, the 21st of August, "the Great American Eclipse", which many of us witnessed first-hand, crossed out the United States from coast to coast, suggesting the end of the "Times of the Gentiles", as scripture refers to it. The heavenly symbol of the Mother (the moon) blocked the light of the symbol of the Father (the sun), foreshadowing the coming dimming of light in the hearts of men as the fulfillment of Book of Mormon prophecies imminently face the European-American "gentile" inhabitants of this continent.

Meanwhile in the eastern US, even as the continent-wide traffic jams resulting from the eclipse were still subsiding, Harvey, what became a category 4 hurricane, gained strength and then devastated Houston with flooding and other damage. It became the costliest storm on record. Immediately afterward in early September, category-5 Irma, struck Florida as the strongest land falling hurricane in 82 years. Following that in late September, category 5 Maria devastated Puerto Rico, as the deadliest in 118 years.

These events seem likely to be a partial fulfillment of the words Joel recorded concerning our day. The Lord said:

*"And I will show wonders in the heavens and in the earth — blood, and fire, and pillars of smoke. The sun shall be turned into darkness and the moon into blood **before the great and the terrible day of the Lord come.** And it shall come to pass that*

*whoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be delivered, for in Mount Zion and in Jerusalem shall be deliverance, as the Lord has said, and in the remnant whom the Lord shall call." (Joel 1:12)*

On Sunday, September 3, 2017, the biggest earthquake in Idaho in a generation took place, a 5.3 magnitude. It was immediately followed by a very rare swarm of 577 earthquakes, peaking on Sunday with 131 quakes and then tapering off over the following days and weeks.

Perhaps most startling were the events unseen to the naked eye that occurred on the sun. We were in the middle of the quieter part of the 11-year solar cycle, when few sunspots are normally seen. Over the week prior to this Idaho earthquake, a tiny, unremarkable sunspot had been rotating into the earth's view. (when I say tiny, I mean the size of our earth) On September 2, it suddenly began to grow very rapidly and by the next day (Sunday), had become one of the largest, most complex sunspots of the entire 11-year solar cycle. In a couple of days, the sunspot region unleashed four X-class "monster flares", the most powerful kind of solar eruptions, one of which was the largest in 12 years. Two of them were accompanied by very large "coronal mass ejections"—millions-of-miles-an-hour explosions with energies comparable to a billion hydrogen bombs and upwards of 100 billion tons of matter. To put it in perspective, that's how much matter our moon is formed from. These really were big. The smaller earth-directed ejection caused a radio blackout for hours across the entire far side of our planet and caused geomagnetic storms that made the northern lights visible in the northern US. The second, much larger coronal mass ejection was directed away from us towards Mars and caused a complete radio blackout there for 10 days. Had it been aimed at earth, our power grid would have been permanently destroyed and our civilization completely crippled, which is why when they're this big, some call them a solar "killshot" or a "planet killer". It was not aimed at us, but the magnitude of power there ought to sober any observer.

*"And it shall come to pass, saith the Father, that the sword of my justice shall hang over them at that day; and except they repent, it shall fall upon them, saith the Father, yea, even upon all the nations of the gentiles." (3 Ne. 9:7)*

As many Christians worldwide noted, three weeks later, on Sept. 23rd, 2017, the astonishing heavenly sign from the first half of Rev. 4:1 was given in the constellation of Virgo:

*"a woman, clothed with the sun, and the moon under her feet, and upon her head a crown of twelve stars, and the woman, being with child, cried, travailing in birth and pained to be delivered."*

This heralded the rebirth of the Kingdom of God. In fact, a six-hour window on that day was witnessed as being part of a holy day on nine separate sacred calendars that John Pratt has recovered. (see *Clothed with the Sun, Moon Under Her Feet*, John Pratt, 2 Nov 2016 [https://www.johnpratt.com/items/docs/2016/clothed\\_with\\_sun.html](https://www.johnpratt.com/items/docs/2016/clothed_with_sun.html)) (See opening comments, Vaughn Hughes, Sat 21 Sep 2019, Boise, Idaho, Covenant Context: Signs & Obligations)

All this is to say that simply because we may not be taking notice, or that it is not making headline news, or that church leaders are not talking about it, doesn't mean that God is not on the move in our day.

Remember that "by small and simple things are great things brought to pass", even if we may not be taking notice of them.

#### *Alma 37:12*

God's course is one eternal round. (See also Alma 7:20; Alma 37:12; D&C 3:2 and 35:1, among other places)

Recall our discussion of Alma 13. We may only achieve a limited amount of grace in this life, but to that limited amount of grace we must hold fast. We cannot receive more if we will not receive what is offered to us now. But if we will receive what is offered now, we will be added upon forever and forever. Or in other words, we move up the ladder by how we conduct ourselves in this cycle of creation, and in the next cycle we will have so much the advantage. We can choose to move upward and be added upon, or we can choose instead to remain as we are, worlds without end. The scriptures speak of things that happened "before the foundation of the world" or "in the first place" or "from the foundation of the world." These statements make it clear what went on before this creation mattered and affected who we now are. In like manner what we achieve in this life through our heed and diligence will affect what comes after. The course we are on has been ordained by God and is "one eternal round".

#### *Alma 37:13,20*

*O remember, remember, my son Helaman, how strict are the commandments of God. And he said: If ye will keep my commandments ye shall prosper in the land—but if ye keep not his commandments ye shall be cut off from his presence.*

*Therefore I command you, my son Helaman, that ye be diligent in fulfilling all my words, and that ye be diligent in keeping the commandments of God as they are written.*

I am reminded of Eve in Garden of Eden. According to the Moses account of the creation, at the time the commandment was given to "not eat of" the tree of knowledge of good and evil, the woman had not been created. (Moses 3: 15-17.) It was after giving Adam this commandment that the woman was created. (Moses 3: 21-23.)

Eve's knowledge of the commandment came from Adam, not from God. God's commandment to Adam was:

*"Of every tree of the garden thou mayest freely eat. But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it, nevertheless, thou mayest choose for thyself, for it is given unto thee; but, remember that I forbid it, for in the day thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die."*

The restriction placed on Adam was to "NOT EAT" of the fruit of that tree.

Adam's explanation to Eve was different. Eve explained her understanding to the serpent when the serpent tempted her:

*“God hath said—Ye shall not eat of it, neither shall ye touch it, lest ye die.” (Moses 4: 9.)*

Eve’s understanding of the commandment varied from what had been given to Adam by the addition of the words: “NEITHER SHALL YE TOUCH OF IT.”

Adam added to the Lord’s commandment. This additional precaution was the error which set the transgression in motion. For when Eve saw the serpent touching the fruit and not dying, it lent credibility to the assertion that “ye shall not surely die.” (Moses 4: 10.) Being innocent, and therefore vulnerable to deception, Eve could not know she was confronting a lie. Instead she saw with her own eyes that the commandment “not to touch” clearly did not result in death.

One of the great lessons of the Moses account is that adding to the commandments of God, no matter how well intentioned, is going to lead to error if not tragedy. We do as He asks. Without adding to, nor subtracting from what He has bid us to do, we should follow what we are asked by Him.

#### *Alma 37:21*

*And now, I will speak unto you concerning those twenty-four plates,*

An observation. In addition to the 30 plus page record of the Jaradite people that we have in our Book of Mormon, these 24 plates contain a record that "speaks concerning the creation of the world, and also of Adam, and an account from that time even to the great tower, and whatsoever things transpired among the children of men until that time." (see Ether 1:1-5), as well as "mysteries, and the works of darkness" and "oaths, and their covenants, and their agreements in their secret abominations; yea, and all their signs and their wonders" of the people who were destroyed that God commanded Helaman to retain (see Alma 37:27). Apparently English takes up a lot more space than whatever language Ether used.

*In room 35 (I think) of the Cairo Museum there is an inscription. I should have brought along pictures of it. The inscription is in Egyptian hieroglyphic writing, Egyptian demotic writing, and Greek. The Greek and Egyptian take up so much space. The demotic takes up just about seven lines. All the other inscriptions take up half a wall, but this one is just like that. It’s amazingly economical. That’s why they were using it. If they could write in Hebrew, they would be more understood. (Hugh Nibley, Teachings of the Book of Mormon, Semester 3: Transcripts of Lectures Presented to an Honors Book of Mormon Class at BYU, 1988-1990, pg 38)*

#### *Gazel Stone*

*Stick of Joseph footnote Alma 37:23*

Gazelem: Moshiah 12:3–4; ‘Eter 1:1 179 The original Hebrew may have been gazerim גזרים from the Aramaic root גזר (Strong’s 1505) “to determine.” As a noun, it can refer to a diviner or astrologer or one who interprets signs to foretell the future (as in Dan. 2:27; 4:7; 5:7 and 5:11, where the KJV uses the word “soothsayers”). The Stick of Joseph was written in Hebrew using Egyptian characters (1 Nefi 1:1; Moshiah 1:1; M’raman 4:11). Since the sound “L” is not written in Egyptian, when Hebrew words are transliterated into Egyptian characters, the Egyptian “R” does double duty for both “R” (ר) and “L” (ל).



Depending on how the text is punctuated (the original manuscript had no punctuation), the word may refer either to the servant or the stone.

There is an article on this verse that I found amazing:

*From Rational Faiths Blog, A Book of Mormon Mystery*  
<http://rationalfaiths.com/a-book-of-mormon-mystery/>

Some other random notes:

*gazelle* [guh-zel]

noun, plural ga·zelles, (especially collectively) ga·zelle.

any small antelope of the genus *Gazella* and allied genera, of Africa and Asia, noted for graceful movements and lustrous eyes.

'Her eyes were deep and lustrous, like the eyes of a gazelle, and with one flutter of her eyelashes she could have reduced the world to ruins'. (from Stephen Payne's *Carrying the Torch*)

We use the phrase "ελαφίσια μάτια" meaning the eyes of a deer to express admiration for a woman who has beautiful, big, expressive and innocent eyes. (<https://www.proz.com/kudoz/english-to-greek/idioms-maxims-sayings/6143249-doe-eyed-gazelle-eyed.html>)

Appreciated for its grace, it is a symbol most commonly associated in Arabic literature with female beauty. In many countries in Northwestern Sub-Saharan Africa, the gazelle is commonly referred to as "dangelo", meaning "swift deer". <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gazelle>

*Stick of Joseph* footnote Alma 37:38

Liahona: This is a unique but clearly Hebrew word: liahona יהוֹנָאֵל may come from the root lawah לוֹה (Strong's 3867), "to join, to bind around, to wreath," from which come the related Hebrew words liah לִיָּה (Strong's 3914), "a wreath," and lon לֹן (Strong's 3885), "to abide, to dwell, to remain or continue." The word "Liahona" combines these words to describe a device that joins the traveling party to God, a ball with two spindles that would wreath around and direct Lechi and his party where and when to abide, dwell, remain, or continue.

compas: This should not be confused with a magnetic compass, which had not yet come into use. The word compass, in common 1830 usage, may refer to a circular course, a boundary, or a device for navigation.

*Stick of Joseph* footnonte Alma 38:3

The repetition of the possessive pronoun here is normative in Hebrew, where a pronominal suffix is normally attached to each object of possession.

*Alma 38:4*

Shiblon was stoned. This mission to the people of Zoramites was way more involved than we have record of. Alma and his crew of missionaries did not pull out before they had done all they could to employ the word of God to have an effect on the people.

*Stick of Joseph footnote Alma 38:7*

The Hebrew word here was likely *eretz* ( ארץ ), which can mean “land” or “earth.”