

BODY	SOUL
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WORD | PAIRS

AND DISTINCTIVE COMBINATIONS IN THE BOOK OF MORMON

—JAMES T. DUKE—

THE BOOK OF MORMON IS A MASTERPIECE of literature comparable to the Bible in the richness of its literary styles and expressions. This judgment, however, depends on an appeal to the standards of Hebrew literature, not 19th-century English literature. Ethelbert W. Bullinger found more than 200 different figures of speech in the Bible,¹ and Latter-day Saint scholars are now identifying many of these within the Book of Mormon.² Additional literary forms that can

be traced to ancient authors of the Near East are now being recognized by both Latter-day Saint and non-Latter-day Saint scholars.

One of the most significant literary forms found in the Bible consists of word pairs.³ These are variously referred to as parallel pairs, synonymous pairs, stock word pairs, standing pairs, fixed pairs, A-B pairs, and sound pairs.⁴ Professor Yitzhak Avishur of the University of Haifa defined word pairs as

pairs of synonymous, antonymous, or heteronymous words, whose components are found in tandem as a result of mutual affinity . . . combined in one of the established and accepted modes of pairing that reflect coordination . . . between the components, and there must exist sufficient examples confirming its provenance. The usage of the pair must be repeated in well-defined and formulated stylistic phenomena; and not be a unique, single occurrence in a manner of casual affinity.⁵

Under that definition, a large number of word pairs also appear in the Book of Mormon. Moreover, substantial linkages tie these pairs to the language and culture of the Israelite people. Biblical studies of word pairs developed gradually as investigators have discovered more and more instances.⁶ We would expect that the study of word pairs in the Book of Mormon will also go forward as more and more scholars discover them. Previous studies of word pairs by Latter-day Saint scholars, discussed below, have introduced this subject and brought to light many word pairs, but obviously many more remain to be identified.

“TWO COMPLEMENTARY WORDS CAN CREATE A SPECIAL EFFECT IN THE MINDS AND HEARTS OF THE READERS, HEIGHTEN EMOTION, AND PRODUCE SAYINGS THAT ARE MORE EASILY REMEMBERED. THIS IS TRUE OF THE ALLITERATIVE EXPRESSION MARVELOUS WORK AND A WONDER.”

Assuming a standard of at least four occurrences, I have identified a total of 81 word pairs that arise at least four times each in the Book of Mormon. I also recognize 13 triplets (three complementary words) occurring four times each, with another five triplets appearing three times. There are also 11 quadruplets (four complementary words) used at least two times each. In addition, there are 40 larger groups, called literary lists, of more than four words. I also want to review three other types of word groups: combinations of (1) adjectives and nouns (7 instances), (2) verbs and nouns (13 instances), and (3) prepositional phrases (17 instances). I also discuss the possible purposes or literary func-

tions of these word combinations. The purpose of this analysis is to underscore the observation that the Book of Mormon is an authentic record of an ancient civilization whose roots were based in the language customs of the Israelite people.

Word Combinations in Ancient Israel

It is widely known that Israelite and other Canaanite peoples frequently employed standard, formulaic combinations of two words.⁷ In comparing Ugaritic and Hebrew poetry, language experts found many pairs of words that occurred in both languages. Building on the work of previous scholars, Mitchell Dahood published in 1972 a list of 609 word pairs found in both languages. He added 66 more in 1975 and 344 in 1981.⁸ Adele Berlin concluded that

There existed a stock of fixed word pairs which belonged to the literary tradition of Israel and Canaan, and poets [and prophets], specially trained in their craft, drew on this stock to aid in the . . . composition of parallel lines. . . . That

leaves us with the notion of a stock of fixed pairs—the poets’ dictionary, as it has been called. . . . This stock of pairs, once numbering a few dozen, is now over a thousand and still growing.⁹

Berlin called the discovery and analysis of word pairs “one of the major achievements of modern Biblical research.”¹⁰ This study gained a great boost with the discovery of Ugaritic texts in the 1930s¹¹ and the comparison of these texts with Hebrew literature. But we must acknowledge that there is still a dearth of manuscripts of ancient date, so it is difficult to draw broad conclusions concerning literary conventions of these early cultures.

Calvert Watkins noted that what philologists call *formulas* are set word pairs that “make reference to culturally significant features—‘something that matters’—and it is this which accounts for their repetition and long-term preservation.”¹² For example, the word pair *goods and chattels* is a formula with at least a thousand-year history that is still repeated in English today.¹³ “The collection of such utterances, such formulaic phrases, is part of the poetic repertory of . . . individual . . . languages.”¹⁴

Literary scholar Inna Koskenniemi found the following word pairs that were developed in Old English but have become standard in modern English: *far/wide, part/parcel, honest/true, really/truly, lo/behold, words/deeds, and fame/fortune*.¹⁵ We might expect Joseph Smith to have employed

likely that the association of the two words in the pair is mere coincidence,” according to Barney.¹⁶

Word Pairs in the Bible

Many words in the scriptures occur in pairs, such as *gold/silver* and *eat/drink*. Such word pairs are typical of Hebrew literary usage,¹⁷ but many occur in other languages and cultures as well.¹⁸ Watson argued that in the Hebrew language and culture, many word pairs were “ready-made and already existing in tradition.” Word pairs, he contended, were “handed down through tradition and known to both poet and audience.” For example, Watson compared the Hebrew language to the classical language of Greece and noted that word pairs

“THE BOOK OF MORMON CONSISTS OF COMBINATIONS OF THREE, FOUR, OR MORE WORDS AND PHRASES THAT ARE PURPOSELY ARRANGED IN PARALLEL OR CONJOINED FORMATS.”

such words if he were the author of the Book of Mormon. But they do not appear, thus lending support to the claim that the book is of ancient origin. The American people employ stock word combinations so frequently that they are commonplace and even trite in our language.

Many contemporary authors write two or more words or expressions with synonymous or complementary meanings. Such combinations usually appear only once in such authors’ works, and these simply reflect ordinary usage when an author seeks to expand the meaning of a word or idea by adding a synonym. At other times, however, the intent of the writer is more symbolic and poetic. Two complementary words can create a special effect in the minds and hearts of the readers, heighten emotion, and produce sayings that are more easily remembered. This is true of the alliterative expression *marvelous work and a wonder*. Many word pairs are stock components of a language, but many may be the creation of an author who writes a poetic pair of words to catch the attention of a hearer or reader. If a word pair occurs frequently in a language, it is likely a standard feature of that language and “less

appear frequently in Homer.¹⁹ Word pairs among ancient peoples were important in oral communications, especially sermons.

It would be difficult to imagine a society without words for *up/down, in/out, male/female, hot/cold, father/mother*, and many other combinations. However, some combinations are more unusual and less obvious, such as *honey/oil* and *David/son of Jesse*. Watson also noted that the A-word (the word in the first parallel phrase) is more common and important, whereas the B-word (the word in the second phrase) may be more varied and perhaps archaic.

Formats for Word Pairs

In the Bible, word pairs typically are found in two different formats: parallel pairs and conjoined pairs.

Parallel Pairs. Most word pairs in the Bible occur in parallel constructions, with the A-word in the first parallel line and the B-word in the second parallel line. Watson and most other biblical scholars argued that one of the important criteria for

identifying a word pair is that the two words occur in parallel lines, such as

like *snow* in summer,
and like *rain* at harvest. (Proverbs 26:1; emphasis added)²⁰

Conjoined Pairs. A second format, which is more common than parallel pairs in the Book of Mormon, features two words connected with a conjunction such as *and*, as in *gold and silver*. I call these conjoined pairs. They display a different type of parallelism—both words are adjacent to each other and appear on the same line. As we examine biblical usage more closely, we note that conjoined pairs also occur frequently in the Bible. This type of parallelism is more obvious than general pairs but also less noticed by biblical scholars.²¹ The pair *good/evil*, for example, is used 40 times in a parallel construction in the Bible, and only 17 times in conjoined constructions, whereas *good/evil* presents itself 25 times in parallel constructions in the Book of Mormon and 24 times in conjoined constructions.

Types of Word Pairs

Watson's classification of word pairs is more extensive than other classification systems. I will discuss only the four most important types here:²²

Synonymous ("components are synonyms or near-synonyms and therefore almost interchangeable").²³ Examples include *flocks/herds*, *sins/iniquities*, *prophecy/revelation*, and *wicked/perverse*.

*Antithetical*²⁴ (words with opposite meaning). Examples include *heaven/earth*, *night/day*, *quick/slow*, *temporally/spiritually*, and *first/last*.

Correlative (both words indicate examples of the same category).²⁵ Examples include *blind/lame*, *gold/silver*, *eat/drink*, *fear/tremble*, and *broken heart/contrite spirit*.

Figurative (poetic words or phrases). Examples include *great/abominable*, *plain/precious*, and *true/living*.

Extended Word Combinations

In addition to word pairs, biblical scholars have observed the occurrence of three parallel words,

which Avishur calls "triplets."²⁶ Avishur also recognizes the existence of "quadruplets," or four parallel words.²⁷ Five or more words or phrases may be referred to as "literary lists," which Koskenniemi calls "word-groups,"²⁸ of which there are many instances in the Bible.²⁹ Donald Parry's discussion of synonymia³⁰ identifies extended lists of synonymous words or expressions in the Book of Mormon. Thus, a significant literary form found in the Bible and in the Book of Mormon consists of combinations of three, four, or more words and phrases that are purposely arranged in parallel or conjoined formats.

The Significance of Word Combinations

What might be the literary or spiritual reasons for repetitive word pairs in the Bible and Book of Mormon? To be sure, the authors of the scriptures did not indicate that they were writing poetry, creating parallelistic patterns, or drawing on other literary forms and figures of speech. We are left to study these forms in an attempt to arrive at thoughtful conclusions about their literary impact. The following discussion suggests possible reasons behind the scriptural use of word pairs.

Literary Functions. Biblical and Book of Mormon authors took great care in constructing poems and sermons that feature figures of speech as well as theological teachings. One reason that prophets employed so many literary devices was

to facilitate smooth, imaginative verse composition and so maintain the attention of a potentially critical audience. By using the technique of adding style, a set of traditional patterns and a measure of economy, the trained [prophet] is able to keep up the flow. . . . The listening [or reading] audience needs aids to attention, and assistance in following the movement of the [sermon or scripture]. . . . It must also be charmed by the familiar, yet aroused and captivated by the unexpected.³¹

Book of Mormon writers appealed to such literary patterns in order to enliven their expressions and to sway the minds and hearts of their readers.

Several word combinations are notable because they use alliteration (at least when they are translated into English). It is almost certain that in the original language of the people of the Book of

Mormon many more expressions were alliterative simply because there are many alliterative expressions in the Hebrew Old Testament. Examples appearing in the English translation of the Book of Mormon include *work/wonder*, *weep/wail*, *plain/precious*, and *life/light*.

Other groupings have become notable, such as *a broken heart/a contrite spirit*, *strait/narrow*, *wars/rumors of war*, *gall of bitterness/bonds of iniquity*, *carnal/sensual/devilish*, *weeping/wailing/gnashing of teeth*, and *the hardness of their hearts/the deafness of their ears/the blindness of their minds/the stiffness of their necks*. Perhaps they have special meaning to us because we have read and spoken them many times.

Some expressions, such as *great/abominable*,³² are utilized by a single author only, in this case Nephi. Some combinations, such as *great/marvelous* and *power/authority*, are surprisingly frequent among virtually all Book of Mormon authors.

Echoes of the Law of Moses. The word pair *statutes/judgments* and the triplet *judgments/statutes/commandments* turn up frequently in both the Book of Mormon and the Old Testament and repeat the language of the law of Moses, especially in Deuteronomy. Ellis Rasmussen noted that Deuteronomy

teaches that those who inherit a promised land do so on condition that they remain faithful to the Lord, pure in heart, generous to the poor, and devoted to God's Law. In a formula that appears several times, the people are promised that they will receive blessings for obedience to God and punishment for disobedience (Deuteronomy 27:30). Book of Mormon prophets taught similar doctrines, and they also indicated that such principles were divinely given long before Moses.³³

The Book of Mormon also highlights the pairs that apply specifically to the law of Moses: *oaths/covenants* and *performances/ordinances*.

Theological Terms. Some word combinations carry special theological significance. This is true of *justice/mercy*,³⁴ *life/light*, *flesh/blood*, and *rock/salvation*. Other expressions with theological significance for understanding the character of God include *true/living God*, *life/light of the world*, *God of Abraham/God of Isaac/God of Jacob*, *in the name of the Father/and of the Son/and of the Holy Ghost*,

and *for thine is the kingdom/and the power/and the glory*.

Universals, or Merisms. Some word pairs or phrases are intended to be encompassing, universal statements. A *merism* is a linguistic term that points to a combination of two, three, or more words that stand for a larger, whole entity. For example, the combination *head and foot* not only identifies these two body parts but also signifies the whole body. Likewise, *body and soul* refers to the whole person.³⁵ Examples in the Book of Mormon include *nations/kindreds/tongues/peoples*, *yesterday/today/forever*, *power/might/majesty/dominion*, and *henceforth/forever*. Some word combinations, such as *heaven/earth*, *great/small*, and *good/evil*, express opposites (antitheticals) but are also intended to project universal application.

Repetition. Some word combinations are significant simply because of their frequency. I assume that their repetition derives from their status as stock expressions in the language of the Nephites. The word pair *gold/silver* appears 43 times in the Book of Mormon and at least 153 times in the Old Testament. Other sayings arise frequently in the Book of Mormon, especially *wickedness/abominations* (42 times), *great/marvelous* (27 times), *wars/contentions* (27 times), and *power/authority* (26 times). Most modern authors would avoid such repetition in their writings, but biblical authors employed repetition frequently.

Mnemonic Function. Finally, word combinations serve to help listeners and readers remember ideas and doctrines. When the Book of Mormon prophets delivered sermons, they employed key phrases that were easily recognizable to listeners. The expression *great/marvelous* comes to mind as an example, but all frequent sayings served this function. Sermons on religious themes were an extremely important aspect of Nephite culture, and the organization of the Book of Mormon presents sermons alternating with historical narrative.³⁶

Because some biblical and Book of Mormon expressions occur many times, some people may consider them to be trite. Other expressions employed only once or twice are notable because of their wonderful literary value. For example, we note the striking pair of expressions "the gulf of *misery* and *endless wo*" (Helaman 5:12). The prophets clothed the language of God in the language of their people, but they did so with great flair and literary significance.

Word Pairs in the Book of Mormon

While kneeling beside my father in family prayer, I often heard him pray for “the poor and the needy, the sick and the afflicted.” Only later did I realize my father was repeating a saying from the Book of Mormon (see Alma 1:27). Many other scriptural expressions combine words that have a poetic ring to them and are familiar to those of us who read the book frequently. Other examples include *carnal/sensual/devilish*, and *nations/kindreds/tongues/peoples*.

Many scriptural word combinations are familiar only within Latter-day Saint cultural circles. Members of the church today may communicate with other knowledgeable Latter-day Saints simply through the use of word combinations. For example, just saying the expression “great and abominable” carries a wealth of meaning to hearers who are familiar with the Book of Mormon, while leaving other people wondering about its meaning.

Kevin L. Barney and John A. Tvedtnes have both made major contributions to the study of word pairs and word groups in the Book of Mormon. Barney’s contribution was the first and most extended discussion, and its importance cannot be overestimated. Barney articulated a fundamental ambition: “For some time I have felt that an analysis as to whether word pairs exist in the Book of Mormon would provide an interesting test of the Book of Mormon’s authenticity.”³⁷ After an extended discussion of the use of word pairs by religious and nonreligious authors in the Near East, Barney identified 40 word pairs that are found in both the Book of Mormon and the Bible, with many also found in Canaanite languages.³⁸ He concluded that his list was not exhaustive, and he expected that “other scholars will be able to add to this list.”³⁹

Tvedtnes responded by identifying and discussing a number of other word groupings in the Book of Mormon. He recognized the existence of triplets and other clusters of four or more words, including *firm/steadfast/immovable*, *old/young*, *bond/free*,

flocks/herds, and *gold/silver/precious things*, among others. He identified several types of lists, including a precious-metals word group, an implements-of-war word group, and an animal group.⁴⁰

In the remainder of this study, I propose additional word pairs that I found in the Book of Mormon and that I believe offer further support for the authenticity of that great book of scripture.

As noted earlier, Avishur argued that a word pair, to be accepted as a standard Hebrew deriva-



Signs and Wonders, by Jorge Cocco Santángelo. In the Book of Mormon, the stock phrase *signs and wonders* and scores of other word pairs with linkages to ancient Israelite culture are themselves subtle signs and wonders indicative of the book’s authenticity.

tive, must not be a “single occurrence in a manner of casual affinity.”⁴¹ I have arbitrarily set four occurrences as the standard by which to judge if a pair is not likely a result of “casual affinity” and may therefore be regarded as a stock pair in the Nephite language. To my knowledge, biblical scholars have not established any standard number of occurrences in their analyses of word pairs.

I present the more extensively used word pairs in chart 1. The words sometimes appear in a different order or sentence format. For example, some pairs may be reversed so that *vain and foolish* becomes

CHART 1: WORD PAIRS FOUND IN THE BOOK OF MORMON

gold/silver (43) ⁵⁶	statutes/judgments (9)	faith/diligence (6)
wickedness/abominations (42)	saw/bear record (8)	wicked/perverse (6)
wars/contentions (27)	flesh/blood (8)	heard/bear record (5)
great/marvelous (27)	last/first (8)	heed/diligence (5)
power/authority (25)	strait/narrow path (8)	liberty/freedom (5)
priests/teachers (21)	true/living God (8)	meek/lowly (5)
faith/repentance (18)	king/ruler (8)	unbelief/wickedness (5)
justice/mercy (17)	will/pleasure (8)	beginning/end (5)
great/terrible (15)	riches/vain things of world (8)	light/knowledge (5)
signs/wonders (14) ⁵⁷	henceforth/forever (8)	mourning/lamentation (5)
life/death (13)	lost/fallen (8)	quake/tremble (5)
prophecy/revelation (13)	just/true (7)	rock/salvation (5) ⁶⁰
mortal/immortal; also mortality/ immortality (12)	rights/privileges (7)	fear/tremble (5)
great/abominable church (12)	driven/slain (7)	good/bad (4)
body/soul (11)	life/light of the world (7)	joy/gladness (4)
death/hell (10)	wars/rumors of wars (7)	gall of bitterness/bonds of iniquity (4)
plain/precious things (10)	oaths/covenants (7)	strong/mighty (4)
gift/power of God (10)	in/through (7)	steadfast/immovable (4) ⁶¹
great/last day (10)	iniquities/abominations (7)	performances/ordinances (4)
revelation/prophecy (10)	smitten/afflicted (7) ⁵⁸	pain/anguish (4)
kept/preserved (10)	wives/concubines (7)	kindreds/friends (4)
fast/pray; also fasting/mighty prayer (10)	vain/foolish (7)	just/holy (4)
spiritual/temporal (10)	hunger/thirst (7) ⁵⁹	justice/equity (4)
forever/ever (9)	first/last (6)	unbelief/wickedness (4)
famine/pestilence (9)	poor/needy (6)	lawyers/judges (4)
eat/drink (9)	broken heart/contrite spirit (6)	faith/works (4)
sins/iniquities (9)	power/glory (6)	
	great/eternal (6)	

foolish and vain. However, other pairs always stand in the same order, such as *great and abominable* and *wives and concubines*. Some pairs contain closely related words, and so I have combined, for example, *spiritual/temporal* with *spiritually/temporally*, and *fast/pray* with *fasting/prayer*.

In chart 1, the numbers in parentheses are the number of times each word pair appears in the Book of Mormon. (I have not included any of the word pairs identified by either Barney or Tvedtnes.) Most of these word pairs also can be found in either the Old or New Testaments in some form—that is, using the same root words but perhaps in a different arrangement.

Chart 1 reports 81 word pairs that occur at least four times in the Book of Mormon. In my notes I identify another 8 pairs used at least three times, and Dana M. Pike points to one other instance. I have not counted word pairs that appear infrequently (i.e., once or twice).⁴² Six pairs occur

more than 20 times, with two used over 40 times. I should also note that I have not counted instances of word pairs quoted from Isaiah or Malachi by the authors of the Book of Mormon.

Triplets

Triplets are three words or phrases with complementary though not identical meanings presented in a distinctive and poetic way.⁴³ Usually the three words would not appear in a thesaurus as synonyms, so the term *complementary* is a more accurate characterization than *synonymous*. For example, the triplet *grain/wine/oil* appears in both the Bible and in the Ugaritic language, but these words could not accurately be called synonyms.⁴⁴ When a writer presents three words or clauses together, they are even more conspicuous and remarkable than word pairs. I present these triplets

in chart 2. Occasionally, one of the words in these word combinations may be replaced with another word with similar meaning. Again, the numbers in parentheses identify the instances in the Book of Mormon.⁴⁵

CHART 2: TRIPLETS FOUND IN THE BOOK OF MORMON⁶²

- gold/silver/precious things (16)⁶³
- Abraham/Isaac/Jacob; also God of Abraham/God of Isaac/God of Jacob (13)
- men/women/children (9)

- Father/Son/Holy Ghost (7, with an additional four in other formats)
- faith/hope/charity (7)
- judgments/statutes/commandments of the Lord (7)

- yesterday/today/forever (6)
- hunger/thirst/fatigue (5)
- carnal/sensual/devilish (4)

- death/hell/eternal torment (4)
- might/mind/strength (4)
- famine/pestilence/sword (4)

- eat/drink/be merry (4)
- signs/wonders/miracles (3)
- power/mercy/justice of God (3)

- diligence/faith/patience (3)
- envyings/strifes/malice (3)
- might/mind/strength (3)

Chart 2 identifies 13 triplets that occur in the Book of Mormon at least four times each, with five more arising three times. It would be difficult to argue that any triplets occur because of “casual affinity,” but I feel confident in establishing a standard of three occurrences when suggesting the triplet as part of the stock of the Nephite language.

Quadruplets

Quadruplets is a somewhat inelegant term put forward by Avishur⁴⁶ to label four words or phrases with complementary meanings presented

in a poetic fashion. Quadruplets typically possess a recognizable and noteworthy meter that makes them especially poetic and beautiful. Watkins gave the example in English of the quadruplet *oats, peas, beans, and barley grow*, which he called “a masterpiece of the Indo-European poet’s formulaic verbal art.”⁴⁷

Such combinations of words or phrases are obviously not simple, run-of-the-mill attempts by ordinary authors to convey everyday meaning. They are wisely and poetically arranged to be striking and memorable. A few of these quadruplets are utilized several times by Book of Mormon authors, but most appear only once in the text (see chart 3). Again, the number of occurrences stands in the parentheses after the quotation.

Chart 3 reports two instances of quadruplets used four or more times, plus another nine used either two or three times. There are 24 other quadruplets used once by Nephite authors.⁴⁸ I believe that any quadruplet found in the Book of Mormon

CHART 3: QUADRUPLETS IN THE BOOK OF MORMON

- north/south/east/west (7)

- nations/kindreds/tongues/people (used 4 times in the text of the Book of Mormon, but also in the Testimony of the Three Witnesses and the Testimony of the Eight Witnesses)⁶⁴

- Lord/Savior/Redeemer/Mighty One of Jacob [Israel] (3)

- murder/plunder/steal/adultery [whoredoms] (3)

- faith/diligence/patience/long-suffering (2)

- hardness of their hearts/deafness of their ears/blindness of their minds/stiffness of their necks (2)

- poor/needy/sick/afflicted (2)

- power/might/majesty/dominion (2)

- wisdom/power/justice/mercy (2)

- lands/houses/wives/children (2)

- lands/country/rights/liberties [religion] (2)

CHART 4: SELECTED LITERARY LISTS IN THE BOOK OF MORMON

FIVE: *glory/might/majesty/power/dominion* (Alma 5:50)⁶⁵

SIX: *bows/arrows/swords/cimeters/stones/slings* (Mosiah 10:8)⁶⁶

SEVEN: *thou/son/daughter/man-servant/maid-servant/cattle/stranger* (Mosiah 13:18; Exodus 20:10)⁶⁷

EIGHT: *thunderings/lightnings/tempest/fire/smoke/vapor of darkness/opening of the earth/mountains which shall be carried up* (1 Nephi 19:11)⁶⁸

TEN: *flocks/herds/fatlings/grain/gold/silver/precious things/silk/fine-twined linen/homely cloth* (Alma 1:29)⁶⁹

THIRTEEN: *wicked ways/evil doings/lyings/deceivings/whoredoms/secret abominations/idolatry/murders/priestcrafts/envyings/strifes/wickedness/abominations* (3 Nephi 30:2)⁷⁰

FOURTEEN: *sorceries/idolatry/idleness/babblings/envyings/strife/wearing costly apparel/pride/lying/thieving/robbing/committing whoredoms/murdering/all manner of wickedness* (Alma 1:32)

NINETEEN: *Lamanites/Nephites/wars/contentions/dissensions/preaching/prophecies/shipping/building of ships/building of temples/synagogues/sanctuaries/righteousness/wickedness/murders/robblings/plunderings/abominations/whoredoms* (Helaman 3:14; see also Ether 9:17–19)

TWENTY-SIX: *haughty/stretched-forth necks/wanton eyes/mincing/tinkling with their feet/tinkling ornaments/cauls/round tires like the moon/chains/bracelets/mufflers/bonnets/ornaments of the legs/headbands/tablets/ear-rings/rings/nose jewels/changeable suits of apparel/mantles/wimples/crisping-pins/glasses/fine linen/hoods/veils* (2 Nephi 13:16–23; Isaiah 3:16–23)

cannot be said to be the result of “casual affinity,” so I am assured that all of these instances can be considered to be stock phrases in the Nephite language. Others may wish to establish another standard. It is without question, however, that the Book of Mormon contains many quadruplets of significant literary and mnemonic value.

Literary Lists

Finally, numerous passages in the Book of Mormon contain more than four complementary words or clauses (see chart 4). What I call literary lists (Watson calls them “tours”) are words or phrases presented in a kind of enumeration that has a poetic or literary style.⁴⁹ Such lists are usually classified as “synonymia” by Donald W. Parry.⁵⁰ The classic example is found in Isaiah 3:18–23, and repeated in 2 Nephi 13:18–23, in which Isaiah notes the ways that the “daughters of Zion” act in provocative ways, especially in their dress.⁵¹ These are not merely lists of words but take on special meaning because they form an ensemble that exhibits a unity and purpose. Watson noted that a selective listing is another form of merismus.⁵²

Because of space limitations, chart 4 is not comprehensive, but further instances of literary lists are found in the accompanying notes. Counting these

instances is often arbitrary and complicated, either because the author presents a subject and then gives instances of the subject or because the beginning and the ending of a list are not always clear. Also, two things are sometimes combined into a single entity, such as *flocks/herds*. Since none of these literary lists occur more than once in the Book of Mormon, they should not be regarded as stock phrases. However, they possess literary and mnemonic value in their own right.

Other Literary Combinations

Most commentators on biblical literature argue that word pairs should belong to the same grammatical class, that is, belong to the same parts of speech.⁵³ This rule applies to the word combinations I have identified. It is obvious, however, that the Book of Mormon prophets wrote and spoke other formulaic combinations of words that involve different parts of speech. These are yet to be studied fully, and I hope they will be the subject of further research in coming years. They involve the following types of stock word combinations (again, the numbers in parentheses are the numbers of each occurrence in the Book of Mormon):

1. Combinations of an adjective and a noun, such as *eternal life* (30), *everlasting destruction* (9),

deep sleep (6), *holy order* (6), *mighty power* (4), *mighty change* (4), and *eternal round* (3).

2. Combinations of a verb and a noun, such as *harden your hearts* (37), *stir up his people* (33), *shedding of blood* (23), *get gain* (18), *take up arms* (17), *set your hearts upon* (12), *lift up your heads* (10), *harrow up his mind* (10), *inquired of the Lord* (9), *laid before [the judges]* (8), *labor with their hands* (6), *pour out his spirit* (6), and *publish peace* (3).⁵⁴

3. Prepositional phrases, or two nouns linked by a preposition, such as *face of the land* (77), *face of the earth* (60), *Son of God* (57), *kingdom of God* (37), *remission of your sins* (28), *voice of the people* (25), *ends of the earth* (23), *foundation of the world* (22), *spirit of prophecy* (19), *traditions of your [their] fathers* (19), *spirit of God* (18), *sins of the world* (17), *bands of death* (13), *holy order of God* (10), *lake of fire and brimstone* (9), *instrument in the hands of God* (8), and *chains of hell* (6).

I have not counted any of these expressions as word pairs because they do not fit the criteria for word pairs identified by Watson and others. However, they claim a significance in their own right. All present themselves frequently enough to qualify as traditional stock expressions in the language of the Nephites.

Conclusion

My conclusion echoes that of Kevin Barney:

The Book of Mormon is what it claims to be—an ancient text with roots in seventh-century B.C. Jerusalem. Word pairs [of Semitic origin] exist in the Book of Mormon because Lehi and his family were direct participants in the oral and literary traditions of that time and place, traditions which, to some extent at least, they passed on to their descendants.⁵⁵

In this study I have identified a total of 174 pairs, triplets, quadruplets, and literary lists. Because many of these arise frequently, there are well over a thousand occurrences of these newly discovered word combinations. I am assured that there are many more

word combinations yet to be enumerated in this sacred scripture.

In addition, I recognized other types of word combinations, such as 7 combinations of an adjective and a noun, 13 combinations of a verb and a noun, and 17 prepositional phrases, for a total of 37 such combinations. All of these seem to be as traditional, formulaic, and significant as word pairs.

There is much work still to be done in the study of word combinations. Further research might profitably be directed to the following areas:

- Discovering new word pairs and word combinations to add to those discussed by Barney, Tvedtnes, Pike, and me.
- Studying word combinations favored by the individual authors of the Book of Mormon. As noted, Nephi was the only author to use the pair *great/abominable*.
- Linking the usage of word pairs to the Bible and to other Near Eastern records. Many stock combinations arise repeatedly in both the Bible and Book of Mormon. Others appear only in the Book of Mormon and seem to derive from the postexilic culture and language of the Nephites.
- Studying variations in the ordering of pairs, including (1) why the order of some pairs are invariant (*wives* always stands before *concubines*, and *flocks* always appears before *herds*), while other pairs are frequently reversed, and (2) why substitutions occur in longer word combinations (*murder/plunder/steal/adultery* becomes *murder/plunder/steal/whoredoms*, and *Lord/Savior/Redeemer/Mighty One of Jacob* becomes *Lord/Savior/Redeemer/Mighty One of Israel*).

The frequency of word pairs and other combinations of words is one of the most notable and as yet unappreciated aspects of the literary style of the Book of Mormon. It is a further witness of the Hebrew roots of the language of the Book of Mormon and its authenticity as sacred scripture. It is my hope that we will ponder the deeper meanings of these expressions and that they will give us, to conclude with a familiar Book of Mormon word pair, further light and knowledge. ❏