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## REFRAIN

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“but his hand is stretched out still” (2 Nephi 15:25)

A *refrain* is a recurring identical expression in a hymn, psalm, or prose passage.<sup>1</sup> Latter-day Saints will readily recognize various refrains in *Hymns of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*—for example, the chorus “We’ll sing and we’ll shout with the armies of heaven” in the hymn “The Spirit of God” and the eight repetitions of “Come to Zion, come to Zion” in the hymn “Israel, Israel, God Is Calling.”

Occurring at the beginning, middle, or end of passages, refrains serve multiple purposes. They can give prominence to doctrines or truths (see first example below), invite participation by the audience (second example below), or emphasize the repeated words, effectively setting them apart from other expressions in the passage (third example below).

The Old Testament contains multiple instances of refrains. Here are two examples:

O give thanks unto the Lord; for he is good:  
because *his mercy endureth for ever*.  
Let Israel now say, that *his mercy endureth for ever*.

Let the house of Aaron now say, that *his mercy endureth for ever*.  
 Let them now that fear the Lord say, that *his mercy endureth for ever*.  
 (Psalm 118:1–4)

*Let the people praise thee*, O God;  
*let all the people praise thee*.  
 O let the nations be glad and sing for joy:  
 for thou shalt judge the people righteously,  
 and govern the nations upon earth. Selah.  
*Let the people praise thee*, O God;  
*let all the people praise thee*. (Psalm 67:3–5)

Some Old Testament refrains occur multiple times throughout a chapter or book. For example:

*Yet have ye not returned unto me, saith the Lord* is repeated five times in Amos 4 (see verses 6, 8, 9, 10, 11).

*For his mercy endureth forever* is found twenty-six times in Psalm 136 (at the end of every verse).

*His hand is stretched out still* occurs five times in Isaiah (5:25; 9:12, 17, 21; 10:4).

*Turn us again, O God, and cause thy face to shine; and we shall be saved* is repeated three times in Psalm 80 (verses 3, 7, 19).

*How are the mighty fallen* is used three times in 2 Samuel 1 (verses 19, 25, 27).

*The Lord of hosts is with us: the God of Jacob is our refuge* is found twice in Psalm 46 (verses 7, 11).

Like the writers of the Hebrew Bible, the Book of Mormon authors used refrains.<sup>2</sup> In his speech to the people of Zarahemla, Alma repeatedly asks, “Have you sufficiently retained in remembrance . . . ?”

O give thanks unto the Lord; for he is good: <b>for his mercy endureth for ever.</b>	הודו ליהוה כי טוב כי לעולם חסדו.
O give thanks unto the God of gods: <b>for his mercy endureth for ever.</b>	הודו לאלהי האלהים כי לעולם חסדו.
O give thanks to the Lord of lords: <b>for his mercy endureth for ever.</b>	הודו לאדני האדנים כי לעולם חסדו.
To him who alone doeth great wonders: <b>for his mercy endureth for ever.</b>	לעשה נפלאות גדלות לבדו כי לעולם חסדו.
To him that by wisdom made the heavens: <b>for his mercy endureth for ever.</b>	לעשה השמים בתבונה כי לעולם חסדו.
To him that stretched out the earth above the waters: <b>for his mercy endureth for ever.</b>	לרקע הארץ על המים כי לעולם חסדו.
To him that made great lights: <b>for his mercy endureth for ever.</b>	לעשה אורים גדלים כי לעולם חסדו.
The sun to rule by day: <b>for his mercy endureth for ever.</b>	את השמש לממשלת ביום כי לעולם חסדו.
The moon and stars to rule by night: <b>for his mercy endureth for ever.</b>	את הירח וכוכבים לממשלות בלילה כי לעולם חסדו.
To him that smote Egypt in their firstborn: <b>for his mercy endureth for ever.</b>	למכה מצרים בבכוריהם כי לעולם חסדו.
And brought out Israel from among them: <b>for his mercy endureth for ever.</b>	ויוצא ישראל מתוכם כי לעולם חסדו.
With a strong hand, and with a stretched out arm: <b>for his mercy endureth for ever.</b>	ביד חזקה ובזרוע נטויה כי לעולם חסדו.
To him which divided the Red sea into parts: <b>for his mercy endureth for ever.</b>	לגור ים סוף לגזרים כי לעולם חסדו.
And made Israel to pass through the midst of it: <b>for his mercy endureth for ever.</b>	והעביר ישראל בתוכו כי לעולם חסדו.
But overthrew Pharaoh and his host in the Red sea: <b>for his mercy endureth for ever.</b>	ונער פרעה וחילו בים סוף כי לעולם חסדו.
To him which led his people through the wil- derness: <b>for his mercy endureth for ever.</b>	למוליך עמו במדבר כי לעולם חסדו.

An example of refrain from Psalm 136:1-16 in English and Hebrew. Psalm 136 is a remarkable thanksgiving hymn that begins with the words "O give thanks unto the Lord." The next two verses begin with the expressions of thanks, "O give thanks unto the God of gods" and "O give thanks to the Lord of lords." The hymn is extraordinary because it features an expression that is repeated in every *single* verse, for a total of twenty-six times—for *his mercy endureth for ever*. The point is effectively made that one should give thanks to the Lord because of his mercy, which lasts forever!

And now behold, I say unto you, my brethren, you that belong to this church, *have you sufficiently retained in remembrance* the captivity of your fathers? Yea, and *have you sufficiently retained in remembrance* his mercy and long-suffering towards them? And moreover, *have ye sufficiently retained in remembrance* that he has delivered their souls from hell? (Alma 5:6)

In an epistle to Pahoran, the Nephites' chief governor, Moroni, whose armies were in desperate need of provisions and reinforcements from the government, wrote, "Have ye forgotten . . . ?" three times:

*Have ye forgotten* the commandments of the Lord your God?

Yea, *have ye forgotten* the captivity of our fathers?

*Have ye forgotten* the many times we have been delivered out of the hands of our enemies? (Alma 60:20)

After atmospheric upheavals and destructive forces of nature had destroyed several Nephite cities following the crucifixion of Christ, survivors of the destruction heard the Savior declare, "Wo, wo, wo unto this people." As Jesus continued to speak, he repeated four times a close variation of the words "to hide their wickedness and abominations from before my face, that the blood of the prophets and the saints should not come up any more unto me against them" (see 3 Nephi 9:5, 7, 8, 11).

Here are other examples of refrain in the Book of Mormon:

*there was silence in the land for the space of many hours* (twice in 3 Nephi 10:1–2)

*out of the mouth of the Jew* (three times in 1 Nephi 14:23)

*daughters of Ishmael to wife* (three times in 1 Nephi 16:7)

*the law of Moses* (four times in Mosiah 12:31–32)

*as never had been known in all the land* (twice in 3 Nephi 8:5–7)

*like unto a dish* (five times in Ether 2:17)

*did go up to battle against the Lamanites* (twice in Mosiah 10:10)

King Benjamin's words, revealed by God's angel (see Mosiah 3:2; 4:1), include the refrain "both in heaven and in earth":

Believe in God;  
believe that he is,  
and that he created all things,  
*both in heaven and in earth*;  
believe that he has all wisdom,  
and all power,  
*both in heaven and in earth.* (Mosiah 4:9)

This elegant refrain emphasizes that God's creative activities were not limited to our planet, for "he created all things," *both in heaven and in earth*. Moreover, his almighty power and wisdom are not limited either, for he has all wisdom and he possesses all power, *both in heaven and in earth*.

## Notes

1. For a brief treatment of refrain in the Bible, see Bullinger, *Figures of Speech Used in the Bible*, 343–44.
2. On the topic of repetition in the Book of Mormon (with several examples), including refrains, consult Parry, *Poetic Parallelisms in the Book of Mormon*, xxxiv–xliv.