

Well-Crafted Counsel

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As Alma approached the end of his life, he drew his sons together to give final words of counsel. To Helaman, his firstborn, Alma bequeathed both the spiritual and physical Nephite patrimony—divine revelation and priceless covenants along with the records that documented a relationship of deliverance across generations. Alma was cognizant of the value and vulnerability of the legacy, since he had previously fumbled the transfer of faith from his own father, which was recovered only by angelic intervention. Alma was later entrusted with the tangible inheritance, and he reports to Helaman that since that time he has faithfully kept the ancestral faith and its sacred records of conveyance. He sets himself up as a model steward, urging Helaman to “do as I have done” (Alma 36:2, 29–30; 37:1–2). Alma 36–37 was a single chapter in the earliest Book of Mormon manuscripts and editions, where it was marked off by its own headnote: “The commandments of Alma to his son Helaman.” It opens in

a didactic mode as Alma enumerates principles of divine deliverance and provides an array of personal and ancestral salvation (including examples of both individual and collective, and temporal and spiritual deliverance). He admonishes Helaman to remember these examples and learn from them before shifting to an imperative mode, emphatically extending specific commandments as he describes the irreplaceable artifacts he will be transferring.

In passing on the faith and scriptures that have sustained him, Alma is hoping to transfer his life's work and meaning to his son. His attempt is a display of rhetorical skill and thoughtful reflection that demonstrates that he has not just safeguarded the legacy he has received but has studied and treasured it, expanded it, and expounded it to others. In doing so, Alma serves as an example not just to Helaman but to all his subsequent readers of how to keep the word of God, whether it has come by the voice of an angel, a parent, or a repository of sacred records.

Within the scope of this paper, it is not possible to present all that Alma may be seeking to accomplish rhetorically in his counsel to Helaman. Rather, I will touch briefly on some of his representative strategies and exemplary flourishes, with the widely recognized device of chiasmus being just one of the many he employs throughout. Because Alma's writing here is dense and complicated, I will enlist a readily accessible analogy to structure my abbreviated analysis—that of a pieced heirloom quilt.

Patchwork Quilts

Perhaps you have either made or received a patchwork quilt yourself. I happened to marry into a family of quilters, and my husband and I were presented with a beautiful hand-pieced blanket on our wedding day by his maternal aunts. The pattern evoked Chinese lanterns, chosen in recognition of my husband's recently completed Latter-day Saint mission to Taiwan. The design incorporated many pieces of coordinated fabric, including both old cloth and new. I marveled not

only at the skill and creativity manifest in the gift, but also at its labor-intensive, love-filled, inclusive welcome. We were being embraced literally and symbolically as a new family unit in an extended and growing clan. These good women—and countless others like them—celebrated joyful family transitions with their sociable stitching.

I like the image of Alma carefully crafting a verbal patchwork for Helaman to mark the important transfer of centuries-old birthright treasures. Like quilters everywhere, pattern and repetition are his primary mode with thoughtfully selected, repurposed words, rather than fabric, as his primary medium. As in heirloom quilts, many of Alma's component pieces have been salvaged from earlier contexts and deliberately incorporated into the new artifact, bringing with them a wealth of history and meaning. The design reveals the intentions, sensibilities, and skill of its maker, and the finished product serves as a reflection of the maker's tender, intergenerational concern.

Fabric

An early stage in the design of any heirloom quilting project is the gathering, sorting, and coordinating of fabrics in accordance with an overall color scheme appropriate to the occasion at hand. A finished patchwork quilt may feature as few as two different fabrics, as in traditional red-and-white quilts, but it is more likely to showcase dozens of distinct swatches of both solids and prints gleaned from newly acquired fat quarters as well as from favorite salvaged scraps.

Alma's composition, in this regard, is densely allusive, containing dozens of quotations and allusions to prior Nephite and biblical texts (primarily to the former). Some of these are readily identifiable, either because of their length or prominence, such as the twenty-one words from 1 Nephi 1:8 repeated verbatim at Alma 36:22 or Lehi's covenant promise from 2 Nephi 1:20 that begins Alma's counsel and is referred to several times subsequently. Other allusions draw on clusters of distinctive phrases from obvious sources as Alma retells particular stories, including his own conversion (reworked from

Mosiah 27) and the deliverance of Lehi's family from their wilderness wanderings (with several borrowings from 1 Nephi 16–18). Digital searches for distinctive wording reveal many possible repurposings. The likelihood of Alma's intentional usage of these increases with the volume and exclusiveness of the connections, or when the context of the potential source is particularly apt.

Themes

Many of the prior scriptural texts that Alma incorporates into his counsel to Helaman can be categorized according to a handful of themes. Predominant among them, representing about three-quarters of the total, are explicit references and allusions to an assortment of personal and ancestral deliverance narratives, including Alma's own conversion story and postconversion evangelizing, as well as accounts of the spiritual or physical deliverance of the children of Israel, Lehi's family, King Benjamin's people, Limhi's people, Alma the Elder's people, and the Lamanite converts taught by the sons of Mosiah. Also included is a cluster of phrases from Psalm 34, whose overall theme is praising God for deliverance from troubles.

We also find many swatches in Alma 36–37 from prominent Nephite record keepers, including Lehi, Nephi, Benjamin, and Mosiah (from whom Alma received the artifacts he is here transmitting to his son; see Mosiah 28:20). Alma incorporates their words regarding the making, keeping, and transferring of sacred records. He also appropriates phrasing from their testimonies regarding their own experiences of deliverance.

Additionally, Alma's counsel to Helaman includes shared strings of words from his own prior sermons, likely reflecting his personal idiom. Most of these connections are to his sermons at Zarahemla and Antionum (Alma 5 and 32–33). More surprising, perhaps, but still in keeping thematically with Alma's counsel to Helaman, are his clear allusions to each of the two psalms (34 and 35) that refer to the personal ministration of angels, and several borrowings from the handful of scriptural injunctions to teach one's children (including

the very distinctive “when thou liest down . . . and when thou risest” that appears only in Deuteronomy 6:7, 11:19, and Alma 37:37).

Combinations

Sometimes swatches with particular commonalities are intricately linked within a quilt’s design, based on the maker’s aesthetic sensibilities. One technique Alma frequently employs is combining allusions based on a common key word or phrase. Several examples follow to provide a sense of Alma’s craftsmanship. The shared words will be presented in italics; what follows in brackets is the number of times the specified word combinations appear in the Old Testament-New Testament-Book of Mormon.

- In Alma 36:26, Alma combines “taste(d) and *see(n)*” from Psalm 34:8 [1-0-1] with “*see(n)* eye to eye” from Isaiah 52:8, a favorite Nephite text of redemption [1-0-6].¹
- In the latter half of Alma 37:12, Alma combines “he counsel(eth) in wisdom . . . over all his works” from Jacob 4:10 [0-0-2] with “paths . . . straight” + “course is one eternal round” from 1 Nephi 10:8, 19 [0-0-3]. The common word, *mysteries* [of God], that links these two sources is found in Jacob 4:8, 1 Nephi 10:19, and Alma 37:11.
- In Alma 37:14, 16, 18, Alma deftly merges two different texts from Nephi, one referring to his making of the plates and the other to his family’s deliverance on the ocean. Verses 14 and 18 each pick up “for a wise purpose in him” from 1 Nephi 9:5 [0-0-3] and “show forth his *power*” from 1 Nephi 18:11 [0-0-10]. Verse 16 adds that God “(is *powerful*/has “*power*) . . . (un)to the fulfilling of his word(s)” from both 1 Nephi 9:6 and 18:11 [0-0-3], definitively linking the two passages.

In these selections and many more, Alma demonstrates his deep familiarity with the scriptural texts that have been put in his charge,

modeling again for Helaman what it means to “do as [he has] done” in keeping the Nephite records.

Patterns

Pieced quilts are traditionally composed of independent blocks assembled in either 4- or 9-patch—that is, respectively, in either 2x2 or 3x3 grids. Each of the component squares, in turn, is additionally subdivided into smaller squares, rectangles, or triangles, in arrangements that are complicated to describe but easy to apprehend visually. There are hundreds of traditional patterns, ranging from simple geometrics to complex manipulations employing fabric variations of light and dark colors, or solids and prints, to create such designs as stars, pinwheels, school houses, spools, sun bonnets, or Chinese lanterns. Elements within individual blocks are typically incorporated elsewhere so that secondary patterns of both color and configuration abound.

Repetitions

As mentioned above, Alma’s primary mode of patterning in Alma 36–37 is the repetition of distinctive words for rhetorical effect. Borrowed phrases and those of his own devising are repeated at close range for emphatic or interpretive purposes, or at greater remove to frame particular passages or otherwise provide unity across the discourse. A few of his notable repetitions include: “If thou wilt [of thyself/be destroyed] seek no more to destroy the church of God” (at both 36:9 and 11); “he has brought our fathers out of (Egypt/Jerusalem) . . . [he has / by his power] . . . delivered them out of bondage and captivity from time to time” (twice in 36:28–29); and “[these things / preserve(d)] for a wise purpose in him, that he (may/might) show forth his power unto future generations” (37:14, 18). In each of these cases, the order of the bracketed words is reversed upon repetition, a pattern signaling Alma’s intention in the restatement.

Alma's use of repetition includes a variety of presentations of contrasts and reversals as well as of verbatim usage, as in these examples: "I was harrowed up by the memory of my sins" / "I was harrowed up by the memory of my sins *no more*" (36:17, 19); "there could be nothing so exquisite and so (bitter/sweet) as were my (pains/joy)" (36:21); and "if they did not repent they should be destroyed" / "they did not repent; therefore they have been destroyed" (37:21, 26).

Variations

There is another quilt from my husband's family in our linen closet, a baby quilt made by his grandmother to celebrate the adoption of our first child. It is a patchwork of pastel gingham on a white background and includes a single plaid triangle in its pieced border. Such rogue blocks, displaying unexpected variations of color or placement, are common in traditional patchwork and represent an aesthetic choice wherein the maker asserts her creativity in what otherwise might seem a formulaic endeavor. Alma too adds rogue variations, not just for variety's sake but also to signal his incorporation of borrowings from other sources. Like many a quilter (but unlike a plagiarist), Alma wants his readers to recognize his sources, to compare their contexts with his own, and to draw insight from his intentional juxtapositions.

We have already seen that one of Alma's variation techniques is shifting the word order in repeated phrases (see the bracketed words in 36:9, 11; 28–29; 37:14, 18 cited above, or 37:28, 31 ["destruction" / "those workers of darkness"]) for another example). He also frequently replaces a word in a commonly used phrase with a synonym as a means of signaling his incorporation of additional allusions and their broader contexts. Here are two examples:

- ✦ In 36:28, Alma replaces the "*lifted up at the last day*" of 36:3 and 37:37 with "*raise*," a word that corresponds with Ammon's description of his Lamanite converts in Alma 26:7 and is part of a cluster of Alma 26 borrowings

in 36:24–28 used to describe Alma’s own postconversion missionary work (and anticipate that of the sons of Mosiah at 37:9).

- ♦ In 37:29–34, Alma interrupts his six-time repeated instruction to “*teach* them” with the variation “*preach* unto them repentance and faith on the Lord,” a phrase taken from Mosiah 18:7 and 25:15 [0-0-3] and closely associated with his father’s historic preaching. Alma, via this allusion, is welcoming his son into an esteemed heritage of ministering.

Multiple patterns simultaneously

Phrases in Alma’s writing often function in multiple patterns simultaneously, and in this, his craft is again similar to master quilt designers. As historian Robert Shaw has written, “In the most visually compelling pieced quilts, the whole is more than the sum of the parts; the repeating blocks link to form complex patterns that often play against the eye’s ability to isolate individual blocks, shifting shapes and planes in a pulsating optical illusion.”² While Alma’s prose may not pulsate, he does effectively employ complex patterns that make isolating the role of individual phrases difficult. For example, Alma repeats a phrase at 36:12 and 17 to frame his three-day period of inner turmoil following the angel’s rebuke: “I was racked with torment . . . [and] was harrowed up [by] . . . my sins.” The second half of this is picked up again in a second frame in verse 19, this time focused on his conversion through the mercy of Jesus Christ: “I was harrowed up by the memory of my sins” with verse 19 adding “no more.” So the description in verse 17 does double duty, bridging two separate inclusions.

As another example, we’ve already seen how Alma integrates two different passages from Nephi in describing God’s power to fulfill his words (1 Nephi 9:5–6 and 18:11 at Alma 37:14, 16, 18). This composite allusion is additionally interspersed with a paraphrase and

then chiasmic reversal of Lehi's covenant promise from 36:30 (at 37:13, 15–16). To further enrich the composition, Alma adds another composite allusion, of Luke 22:31 and Psalm 35:5, at verse 15.

Lehi's covenant promise also comes into play at Alma 37:43, this time in a negation, as Alma describes the wilderness journey of Lehi's family. "They did not prosper," he tells us, echoing his own earlier confession "I had not kept his holy commandments" (36:13) and filling out his salvation matrix of both individual and collective, and spiritual and temporal deliverance, now made explicit ("these things were temporal . . . even so it is with things which are spiritual"). Moving back a couple of verses to 37:41 where Alma picks up the "by small means" from 37:6–7 (and before that from 1 Nephi 16:29), he also tells us that Lehi's family did not "progress in their journey," which completes a split quotation with verse 43's "they did not prosper" from King Benjamin's interpretation of the Liahona as he passed the family treasures on to his son at Mosiah 1:17.³ The intricacy of Alma's design can be marvelous indeed.

Blocks—Merging Fabrics and Patterns, Take 1

Fabrics and patterns are merged by quilt makers to form blocks that are then connected by sashing between and a border around. In keeping with our analogy, Alma 36–37 can be seen as comprising four major blocks. These include a narrative of Alma's conversion and subsequent ministry at 36:5–27 and the descriptions and interpretations of three sets of sacred heirlooms that he is passing on to Helaman: the Nephite records and brass plates at 37:1–12; the Jaredite plates and interpreters at 37:21–31; and the Liahona at 37:38–46. In what follows, I will highlight a noteworthy merging of fabric and pattern in each block wherein Alma interweaves scriptural texts and complex repetitions or combinations to match his form with his message.

Block 1: Alma's conversion and subsequent ministry
(Alma 36:5–27)—rhetoric of reversal

For half a century, Latter-day Saints have admired Alma 36 as the premier example of extended chiasmus in the Book of Mormon, thanks to the pioneering discovery of John W. Welch.⁴ Alma draws on the prior account of his conversion from Mosiah 27 but here presents the narrative formally with a rhetoric of reversal, such that his recognition of Christ's atonement for sin marks the turning point of his repentance, as his former wickedness is walked back to the pristine state of being born of God. Below I pick up Welch's seventeen-element chiasm at the eleventh element, *k*, with my modifications in brackets. The italics are in the original and indicate quotation from Alma 36, with corresponding verse numbers noted. Material corresponding to Welch's earlier elements (*a–j*) will be discussed in the "Borders" section below:⁵

- k [I had been] *Born of God* (5)
- l I sought to destroy the church (6–9)
- m *My limbs* were paralyzed (10)
- n Fear of being in *the presence of God* (14–15)
- o *Pains* of a damned soul (16)
- p *Harrowed up by the memory of sins* (17)
- q I remembered *Jesus Christ, a son of God* (17)
- q' I cried, *Jesus, son of God* (18)
- p' *Harrowed up my the memory of sins* no more (19)
- o' Joy as exceeding as was the *pain* (20)
- n' Long to be in *the presence of God* (22)
- m' *My limbs* received strength again (23)
- [k' I had been *Born of God* (23)]
- l' I labored to bring souls to repentance (24)
- [k" others might also be *Born of God* (24)]
- k'[" many have been] *Born of God* (26)

Welch has assigned the reversal of the opening element (k') to verse 26, apparently in order to accommodate his rendering of Alma's chiasmic scheme, despite the fact that the key phrase has already been used in two prior verses, including what seems to be a closer parallel in the out-of-order verse 23. I would argue that Alma's misplacement and three-time repetition of *Born of God* was done intentionally to highlight a significant turning point in his form—from a chiasmic repetition of reversal to one of *expansion*, in this case of extending his own conversion experience to others. This shift will also be addressed further in the “Borders” section.

Block 2: The Nephite records and brass plates
(Alma 37:1–12)—*rhetoric of continuity*

In this block, Alma focuses his repeated counsel to keep the commandments by charging Helaman to take up his position as the next Nephite record keeper. In doing so, he interweaves the words of four distinguished predecessors as he describes the divinely ordained significance of the stewardship he is transferring. In merging these phrasal borrowings, Alma again matches form with content, this time effecting a rhetoric of continuity. The intentionality of his allusions is made clear with the attribution in verse 4 that all “has been prophesied by our fathers.”

Alma 37:1–4

And now, my son Helaman, I command you that ye take the records which have been entrusted with me; And I also command you that ye keep a record of this people, according as I have done, upon the **plates of Nephi**, and keep all these things sacred which I have **kept**, even as I have kept them; for it is **for a wise purpose** that they are **kept**. And *these plates of brass*, which contain

From Nephi

plates [of Nephi] . . . kept for . . . wise purposes; the records . . . engraven . . . plates of brass; from the beginning; genealogy of his fathers (1 Nephi 19:3; 5:10, 12, 14)

From Lehi

these plates of brass; should go forth unto all nations, kindreds, tongues, and people (1 Nephi 5:18)

these engravings, which have the records of the holy scriptures upon them, which have the genealogy of our forefathers, even from the beginning—Behold, it has been prophesied by our fathers, that they should be kept and handed down from one generation to another, and be kept and preserved by the hand of the Lord until they *should go forth unto every nation, kindred, tongue and people*, that they shall know of the mysteries contained thereon.

From Benjamin
the records . . . engraven . . . plates of brass . . . knowing the mysteries; kept and preserved by the hand of God (Mosiah 1:3, 5)

From Mosiah
all the things . . . kept; the records . . . commanded . . . keep a record of the people, handing them down from one generation to another (Mosiah 28:20)

Block 3: The Jaredite plates and interpreters
(Alma 37:21–31)—*rhetoric of constriction*

In addition to family treasures, Helaman’s inheritance includes twenty-four plates containing the record of a people long since destroyed, written in an unknown script, along with divinely prepared interpreters with which to translate their cautionary tale. Alma’s instruction to Helaman regarding the Jaredite legacy is to publicize the extreme wickedness that caused their downfall without revealing the details, lest his own people embrace the secret works and “fall into darkness also and [be likewise] destroyed” (37:27). Alma emphatically affirms the Jaredite corruption, while reiterating the need for Helaman’s circumspection, by employing a rhetoric of constriction. Alma repeats the Jaredite offenses five times in the opening verses of this block in increasingly abbreviated form. In doing so, he anticipates the thrice-repeated command he will subsequently extend to his son—namely, to keep these secrets secret (see 37:27, 29, 32).

Alma begins the block with the lengthiest description of Jaredite atrocities. I have italicized its kernel to make it easier to trace his patterned development. “The works of darkness . . . *their secret works* . . . all their murders and robbings and their plunderings and all their wickedness and *abominations*” in verse 21 is reduced to “*their secret works*, their works of darkness, and their wickedness and *abominations*” in

verse 22, and further shortened to “*their secret works and their abominations*” in the first half of verse 25, then to “*their secrets and abominations*” later in the same verse, and finally to “*their secret abominations*” in verse 26.

Block 4: The Liahona (Alma 37:38–46)—rhetoric of typology

As Alma describes the last treasure he is passing on, he links the Nephite artifact in its function, naming, and origin (in reverse order) to the Jaredite interpreters. Both instruments are twice described as directors (37:21, 24, 38, 45, following Benjamin’s designation in Mosiah 1:16), given unique proper names—“Gazelem” and “Liahona” (37:23, 38), and reported to have been prepared by the Lord (37:23, 38).⁶ But the differences between a compass and a translation stone seem much more marked than their similarities, except for the fact that Alma has highlighted their equivalence by referring to one in terms of the other.

Alma follows this pattern by referring to the experience of Lehi’s family with the Liahona in terms of another group’s wilderness travels. He relates that when they were “slothful” in giving heed to the compass (37:41, 43), they were “afflicted with hunger and thirst because of their transgressions” (37:42). In each of these wordings, he is borrowing from prior texts narrating the wanderings of the children of Israel (see Alma 33:21 and Psalm 107:4–5, 17). Alma brings all of this together and makes his rhetoric of typology explicit in verses 43–46, when he describes the Nephites’ current spiritual state in terms of the wilderness experiences of both Lehi’s family and the children of Israel. He first observes, making transparent a verbal parallel initially made by Nephi, that “it is as easy to give heed to the word of Christ, which will point to you a straight course to eternal bliss, as it was for our fathers to give heed to this compass, which would point unto them a straight course to the promised land” (37:44; see also 1 Nephi 15:25 and 16:28). “Is there not a type in this thing?” he asks in 37:45, but only before extending the type to another group of their fathers via two integrated allusions.

Alma 37:46

O my son, do not let us *be slothful because of the easiness of the way*; for so was it with our fathers; for so was it **prepared** for them, that if they *would look* they *might live*; even so it is with us. The **way** is **prepared**, and if we will **look** we may live forever.

Nephi

The Lord . . . sent fiery flying serpents among them; and after they were bitten he **pre-
pared** a way that they might be healed; and the labor which they had to perform was to **look**; and **because of . . . the easiness of it**, there were many who perished. (1 Nephi 17:41)

Alma

A type was raised up in the wilderness that whosoever *would look* upon it *might live*; would ye rather . . . *be slothful*, that ye would not cast about your eyes, that ye might perish? (Alma 33:19, 21)

The way the Lord had prepared for the Nephites was the word of Christ, preserved in the records being passed on to Helaman.

Borders and Sashing—Merging Fabrics and Patterns, Take 2

Most patchwork quilts are unified by a border, which is often multi-layered, alternating solid strips with a pieced or printed layer in between. Elements of the border (either the fabric or the pattern of piecework) are typically echoed in the sashing that separates the various component blocks. While analogies do not have to fit precisely in order to be useful, Alma's counsel to Helaman actually does follow this traditional quilting formula rather remarkably, opening with a formal, multilayered border that is repeated and expanded in reverse order at Alma 36:26–30 and then repeated and expanded again, interspersed between the thematic blocks of chapter 37.

We will now consider in some detail the parallelism at the extremities of Welch's chiasm, the framing verses of Alma 36. These passages are structurally chiasmic in the way an enclosing fabric border would be, but pay particular attention to how Alma uses the

chiastic form in a manner both thematically and rhetorically distinct from his conversion narrative outlined above. He opens his counsel to Helaman not with a situation in need of reversal but rather with a series of three foundational principles—corresponding to Welch’s chiastic elements *a* through *j*. Where the later elements employ a repetition of reversal to depict Alma’s repentance, the border layers (anticipated by the *Born of God* turning point) are *expansive rather than reversing upon repetition*, as they provide ancestral examples of the foundational principles and extend their relevance first backward and then forward in time.

We will focus on the three nested layers of Alma’s border that correspond to three principles he has inherited from his fathers and is enjoining upon his son. Note in advance what these three layers share: an explicitly stated principle (each tied to a key source text), which is conceptually expanded upon repetition and then explicitly directed to Helaman and expanded again as Alma transitions in chapter 37 from a didactic to an imperative voice.

Border layer 1: “Inasmuch as ye shall keep the commandments of God ye shall prosper in the land” (Alma 36:1)

Alma follows Benjamin in quoting only the first half of Lehi’s foundational covenant on his first iteration at 36:1 (2 Nephi 1:20; see also Mosiah 1:7). He alludes to the as-yet-unstated second half in 36:13–15 (“I had not kept his holy commandments,” and he gives two references, ironically, to longing to be cut off from the presence of God rather than face the consequences of his deeds). Alma expands the principle, rather than merely repeating it, at the 36:30 border by adding the covenant negation and explicitly directing the principle to Helaman.

At the sashing between the first and second blocks of chapter 37 (37:13–20), Alma paraphrases the full quotation from 36:30, this time not only directing it in principle to Helaman but in *specific application*, regarding his commandment to safeguard the thus far carefully preserved brass and Nephite plates (37:13–14). The two halves of the

paraphrase are repeated again, in reverse order (37:15–16), with the specific consequences regarding Helaman’s care of the plates spelled out, followed by another allusion to Lehi’s covenant in verse 20.

*Border layer 2: “Remember the captivity of our fathers;
for they were in bondage . . . and [God] did deliver them”
(Alma 36:2)*

Alma’s source for this principle is the first command given by the angel at the time of his conversion (Mosiah 27:16). In the Mosiah 27 account, the angel’s specific instruction was for Alma to remember the captivity of his fathers in the lands of Helam (that is, the followers of Helaman’s grandfather, Alma,) and Nephi (that is, the people of Limhi). In Alma 36:2, he incorporates distinctive wording from each of these prior deliverances as a demonstration of his obedience to the angel’s directive. At Alma 36:2 he adds, “they were in bondage, and none could deliver them except it was the God of Abraham, and . . . Isaac, and . . . Jacob,” a conflation of Mosiah 23:23 and 24:21, the *inclusio* framing the deliverance narrative of Alma’s people. The description of deity as “the God of Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob” is also used in Limhi’s deliverance account at Mosiah 7:19.

In the chiasmic expansion at Alma 36:28–29, Alma extends the principle hundreds of years backward in time with the captivity of the “fathers” now including the children of Israel (hinted at in 36:2’s reference to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob) and Lehi’s family. In these verses, Alma conflates allusions to Mosiah 7:19–20 and 1 Nephi 17:40–42. He affirms that he has been obedient to the angel’s instruction to remember and urges Helaman to do the same.

The sashing for this principle follows the final block of chapter 37 and regards the Liahona. Verses 44–46 reprise the key words “our fathers” and “promised land” from 36:28–29, again aligning the children of Israel with Lehi’s family, this time by (as we have seen in the “Blocks” section above) typologically integrating phrases describing the instrumental means the Lord had prepared for the *deliverance* of each and applying them to both groups. Alma also expands this

second principle in its final iteration by shifting from the temporal deliverance of 36:2, 28–29 to a spiritual one: from anticipation of “the promised land” (at 36:28 and 37:44) to “eternal bliss” and “living forever” in “a far better land of promise” (at 37:44–46). In the final verse, Alma does not urge Helaman to remember only his fathers’ past deliverances but, through the instrumentality of the records in his care, to seek also for his spiritual deliverance and that of his people.

Border layer 3: “Whosoever shall put their trust in God shall be supported in their trials, troubles, and afflictions, and shall be lifted up at the last day” (Alma 36:3)

Alma’s source for this principle is again a composite from the accounts of the deliverance of Alma’s and Limhi’s peoples (see Mosiah 23:22 and 7:18–19). In its chiasmic expansion at 36:27–28, Alma applies the principle to his own experience, affirming that it has been validated temporally in his postconversion missionary challenges. He also implies that it has been validated spiritually in the present (in 36:18–22) as he expects it to be once again in the life to come (36:28).

We find Alma’s final repetition and expansion of this third principle in the sashing following the block of chapter 37 regarding the Jaredite artifacts. Alma now directs the principle to his son in poetic counsel that begins and ends with the opening and closing words of 36:3: “O my son . . . learn . . . in thy youth” and “shall be lifted up at the last day” (37:35, 37). By framing his words in this manner, Alma indicates that the exhortations in 37:35–37 are his advice as to how Helaman, though lacking the personal crises his forebears have faced, can nonetheless put his trust in God.

From this review of the borders of Alma 36–37, we have seen that Alma frames his counsel to Helaman with a chiasmic pattern that is distinct from how he used it to depict his conversion narrative. Recognizing his shift in purpose—from reversal to expansion—matters for two reasons. First, it prevents a premature closure of Alma’s counsel by asserting the natural unity reflected in the original Book of Mormon chapter XVII. Second, it makes manifest a significant

theological point that is often lost when we consider the chapter 36 chiasm in isolation: repentance is not the final objective. Through Jesus Christ's atonement we are born again in order to embrace God's commandments as a blessing and guide so that we might prosper and reach out to others as we progress collectively in our spiritual journey (see 37:41, 43). Or, as Alma concludes, "See that ye look to God and live. Go unto this people and declare the word" (37:47).

Secrets

Sometimes quilts contain coded messages for their recipients. When we adopted our daughter, we also received a handmade baby quilt from her birth mother, whom we had never met, crafted from printed fabric depicting a child's alphabet blocks. We recognized intuitively the message it was sent to convey—a young mother's enduring embrace, offered in the place of answers and ongoing personal interactions that could not be shared in a closed adoption. But fifteen years later, in a serendipitous sequence of events, we were able to meet the quilt's maker. She asked if we had figured out the puzzle and guessed from our quizzical looks that we had been oblivious to its existence. She then explained that in the corners of the quilt she had arranged the letters to display hers and the birth father's initials. We returned home, now knowing the names and the pattern that unlocked the code, to discover, of course, that all was just as she had said.

Alma too has embedded a hidden message in the fabrics and patterns of his counsel to Helaman, whose hints can similarly be discerned only after they have been made explicit. Following his explanation that, among other things, the plates had been preserved to bring the Lamanites to Christ, Alma adds some unexpected speculation: "And who knoweth but what they will be the means of bringing many thousands of . . . our stiffnecked brethren, the Nephites . . . to the knowledge of their Redeemer? Now these mysteries are not yet fully made known unto me; therefore I shall forbear" (Alma

37:10–11). “*Mysteries . . . I shall forbear*”? This is our first indication that Alma knows more than he is saying.

To decode Alma’s words, we need to recognize a pattern in the Jaredite block, wherein he recontextualizes three memorable Nephite prophecies of destruction to fit the Jaredite experience. The three passages he alludes to pronounce judgment upon those who possess a promised land in wickedness. Each of the prophecies has already been applied typologically in the Nephite record.

At Alma 37:21–23, Alma alludes to the Lord’s proclamation through Jacob that he will destroy “secret works of darkness . . . murders . . . and abominations” in a passage applying the covenant described by Lehi at 2 Nephi 1:5 to latter-day Gentiles (2 Nephi 10:15). Overlapping with this, at 37:22–25, he alludes further to a prophecy given through Abinadi that unless Noah’s people repent, the Lord will “destroy them from off the face of the earth,” and other nations which will subsequently “possess the land” will have access to their records in order that the Lord “may discover [their] abominations” (Mosiah 12:8). Phrasing from this prophecy was later applied to the Jaredite record by its Nephite translator, Mosiah (see Mosiah 28:15).

Finally at 37:28, and repeated at verse 31, Alma warns that the land will be cursed against inhabitants that become “ripe” in sin, alluding to phrasing from Nephi’s interpretation of God’s transfer of the land promised to Abraham from the Canaanites to the Israelites (1 Nephi 17:35). Lehi later applied Nephi’s words to his own family’s covenantal land in the Americas by prophesying that it too would be cursed for those who embrace iniquity (2 Nephi 1:7). Alma follows his first iteration of the curse, now recontextualized to the Jaredite destruction, with another unexpected hint, “I desire that this people [the Nephites] might not be destroyed” (37:28). In repeating the curse twice, Alma is no doubt telling us that it will be twice fulfilled. It was not just applicable to the Jaredite fall; for the Nephites, it is still in force.

There is no indication that Helaman picked up Alma's allusive clues when they were first given to him. They were revealed, instead, a year later, when the family treasures were finally transferred, and Alma once again committed his son to retaining a secret:

But behold, I have somewhat to prophesy unto thee; but what I prophesy unto thee ye shall not make known . . . even until the prophecy is fulfilled; therefore write the words which I shall say. And these are the words: Behold, I perceive that this very people, the Nephites, according to the spirit of revelation which is in me, in four hundred years from the time that Jesus Christ shall manifest himself unto them, shall dwindle in unbelief . . . even until the people of Nephi shall become extinct—Yea, and this because they shall . . . *fall into the works of darkness*. . . Thus saith the Lord God—*Cursed shall be the land, yea, this land, unto every nation, kindred, tongue, and people, unto destruction, which do wickedly, when they are fully ripe; and as I have said so shall it be.* (Alma 45:9–12, 16; with italics identifying words previously clustered at 37:21–31)

The Nephites too will be destroyed, just as Alma had said.

Conclusion

Latter-day Saints owe a great debt to John Welch, who first brought Alma's craftsmanship to our attention and identified Alma 36 as a masterpiece. But Alma's creativity in design, skill in execution, and overall artistry in Alma 36–37 go far beyond Welch's discovery of chiasmus. As we have seen, Alma uses allusion and repetition in many other ways as well. To account for these we have compared the counsel he gave Helaman to a pieced heirloom quilt.

The analogy draws its efficacy from parallels between the two artifacts: both result from the intentional composition of their makers and rely on the integration of repetitive patterns and the repurposing of prior material to communicate their message and provide

harmony and balance to the whole. Coordinated blocks are assembled and then arranged to highlight similarities as well as contrasts. The selective use of variation, the simultaneous interplay of multiple patterns, and the embedding of secrets add interest and subtlety. Sashing and borders unify the whole. The effect can be wonderfully complex while readily harmonious. It is a genuine pleasure to seek for all that the designer intended to convey.

Another correspondence between an heirloom quilt and Alma's counsel to Helaman is the shared context of passing on a hand-wrought article of lasting value to a beloved recipient. Both quilt and counsel are offered as a token of love and an expression of a cherished relationship, as Alma's twentyfold appeal to Helaman as "my son" makes evident. Along with a tangible endowment, these makers pass along a sense of their caring presence that will persist long after their lives have ended.

Quilt archivist Ruth Roberson has observed that "a person knowledgeable about history, quilt making, and culture can 'read' a quilt and learn much about the life of the quilt maker" by noticing and evaluating particular features of the artifact.⁷ So too with scripture. David Noel Freedman, eminent biblical scholar and expert on Hebrew poetry, once read through Alma 36 with John Welch, taking note of the chiasmus and offering this assessment, "Mormons are very lucky. Their book is very beautiful."⁸ It is not necessary to notice all the intricacies of source material and pattern to receive warmth and comfort from either quilts or scripture. But as we take the effort to recognize and marvel at the details of their construction, our appreciation for the craft and effort of talented scripture writers like Alma is enhanced. We can learn to discern what has been lovingly created, preserved, and passed on for our insight and delight.

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Notes

1. Alma's incorporation of anachronistic scriptural phrases is beyond the scope of this paper.
2. Robert Shaw, *American Quilts: The Democratic Art, 1780–2007* (NY: Sterling, 2009), 80.
3. For other examples of split quotations in Alma 36–37, see Matthew 11:19 at 36:3 and 37:33–34; Mosiah 27:36 at 37:19 and 10; and Alma 36:3 at 37:35 and 37.
4. John W. Welch, "Chiasmus in the Book of Mormon," *BYU Studies* 10, no. 1 (1969): 69–84.
5. John W. Welch, "A Masterpiece: Alma 36," in *Rediscovering the Book of Mormon*, ed. John L. Sorenson and Melvin J. Thorne (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1991), 117.
6. The reading of "directors" for the Jaredite stone in 37:21 and 24 is from the printer's manuscript. It was changed in the 1920 edition to "interpreters." The grammar of 37:23 is ambiguous such that "Gazelem" could refer to either the stone or the servant designated to translate texts with its aid. Note that these two instruments are also linked as being "given" by the Lord in Doctrine and Covenants 17:1.
7. Ruth Haislip Roberson, ed., *North Carolina Quilts* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1988), xii.
8. John W. Welch, "What Does Chiasmus in the Book of Mormon Prove?," in *Book of Mormon Authorship Revisited*, ed. Noel B. Reynolds (Provo, UT: FARMS, 1991), 207.