

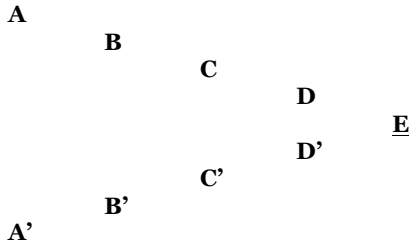
Chiastic structures in Scripture

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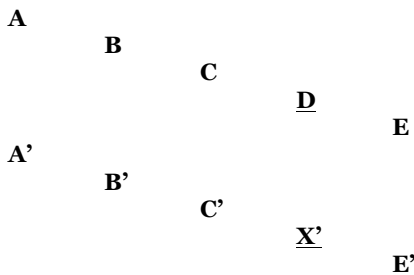
A *chiasmus* “is a rhetorical or literary figure in which words, grammatical constructions or concepts are repeated in reverse order, in the same or a modified form.”²

In the Hebrew Scriptures, chiasmi are common. Sometimes the pattern is within one chapter, across several chapters, in an entire book (Esther) or across several books. Like a poetic rhyming and literary structures such as haiku, chiasmi are easy to learn to write. In Scripture we read about figures living the patterns — not easy to do over decades or centuries of time. Two witnesses confirm a matter, but we’ll see repetition of themes in Scripture also are a shadow of something — or someone — substantial.

Basic, common chiasmic structures in the Bible



This pattern is the most common. Subject matter A corresponds to A’, B to B’, C to C’, D to D’ and E stands alone. The objective is to draw your attention to turning point E. Point the point of the subject



This is the second-most common. Concept A corresponds to A’, B to B’, C to C’, D to X’ and E to E’. The objective is to draw your attention to the differences between D and X’ to tell you more information about the topic being discussed.

Examples of chiasmic structure in 2nd Samuel 9

The chiasmic structure of 2nd Sam. 9:1–3a highlights that the prophesy is about David the King and the kindness being shown (by David’s love for Yahunathan³) is actually by Messiah’s love for God. This is done by the text comparing Yahunathan to God. Colors in the following passages illustrate which phrases are connect to each other in the chiasmic structure.

- A And David said, Is there yet any that is left of the house of Saul, that I may shew him kindness for Jonathan’s sake?
 B And there was of the house of Saul a servant
 C whose name was Ziba.
 D And when they had called him unto
 E David, the king
 D’ said unto him,
 C’ Art thou Ziba?
 B’ And he said, Thy servant is he.
A’ And the king said, Is there not yet any of the house of Saul, that I may shew the kindness of God unto him?

¹ Based on *The Scroll of the Gospel of David* by Tony Robinson, published in 2008 by Xulon Press.

² *New Oxford American Dictionary*, 2010.

³ *Yahunatan* is a name that is used in Hebrew for David’s best friend, Yonatan, or Jonathan. *Yahunatan* means “YHWH gives.”

The chiastic structure of 2nd Sam. 9:3b–13 highlights Mephibosheth as the turning point. This indicates that the prophesy is regarding Mephibosheth and what David/Messiah will do for Mephibosheth descendent of the one he loves.

A 3b And Ziba said unto the king, Jonathan hath yet a son, *which is lame on his feet*.

B 4 And *the king* said unto him, Where is he? And Ziba said unto the king,

C Behold, he is in the house of Machir, the son of Ammiel, in *Lo-debar*⁴.

D 5 Then king David sent, and fetched *him out of the house of Machir*, the son of Ammiel, from Lodebar.

E 6 Now when *Mephibosheth, the son of Jonathan, the son of Saul*, was come unto David, he fell on his face, and did reverence. And David said, Mephibosheth. And he answered, Behold thy servant!

F 7 And David said unto him, Fear not: for I will surely shew thee kindness for Jonathan thy father's sake, and will restore thee all the land of Saul thy father; and *thou shalt eat bread at my table continually*.

G 8 And he bowed himself, and said, What is *thy servant*, that thou shouldest look upon such a dead dog as I am?

H 9 Then the *king called to Ziba*, Saul's servant, and said unto him, I have given unto thy master's son all that pertained to Saul and to all his house.

I 10 *Thou therefore, and thy sons, and thy servants*, shall till the land for him, and thou shalt bring in *the fruits*,

J *that thy master's son may have food to eat:*

K but *Mephibosheth*

J' *thy master's son shall eat bread alway at my table.*

I' Now *Ziba had fifteen sons and twenty servants.*

H' 11 Then *said Ziba unto the king*,

G' According to all that my lord the king hath commanded *his servant, so shall thy servant* do.

F' As for Mephibosheth, *said the king, he shall eat at my table, as one of the king's sons.*

E' 12 And *Mephibosheth had a young son, whose name was Micha.*

D' And all that *dwelt in the house of Ziba* were servants unto Mephibosheth.

C' 13 So Mephibosheth dwelt in *Jerusalem*⁵:

B' for he did eat continually at *the king's table*;

A' and was *lame on both his feet*.

This chiastic structure points to Mephibosheth as the “turning point.” This indicates that the prophecy regards Mephibosheth and what David/Messiah will do for Mephibosheth's descendent of the one he loves. In other words, David's love for Yonatan translates to, “I will make your son my son.” From the first chiastic structure, God is saying to David, “I will make your son My Son.”

Patterns of three in 2nd Samuel 9

A pattern some have discovered in the TaNaK (Torah, Prophets and Writings) is use of the number 3 in conjunction with themes of death and then life. This pattern of three also is found in messianic prophecies. If you look at this chapter, you will not see the number 3. However, please note the following:

Phrase or word	Frequency used
“he will eat at my table” (vv. 7, 11, 13)	Three
Lo-debar or Jerusalem (where he lives; vv. 4, 5, 13)	Three
“kindness” or “deal kindly” (vv. 1, 3, 7)	Three

⁴ לֹא-דִבָּר *lo-debar* means “no word.”

⁵ “For the law will go forth from Zion and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem.” (Isa. 2:3)

Substantial chiasmic ‘shadows’ of Messiah

Chiastic structures for the Messiah in the Prophets are not pictures of the Messiah but rather “shadows” of the Messiah. The TaNaK frequently uses thematic equivalents to indicate who and what the Messiah will be.

Put in another way:

If A=B, therefore B=A.

If B=C, then C=B and C=A.

This may seem like a trivial example, but this is the foundation of understanding thematically equivalent chiastic structures and how to apply them forward and backward in Scripture.

In the following example from Josh. 2:1–5 and Judg. 16:1–3, we see a Messianic figure (Samson) thematically equivalent to the two spies in Jericho. Put in the pattern mentioned above, situation A = situation B, therefore B=A.

Josh. 2:1 And Joshua the son of Nun sent out of Shittim two men to spy secretly, saying, Go **view** the land, even Jericho. And **they went, and came into a harlot's house**, named Rahab,

and lodged there.

2:2 And it was **told the king of Jericho, saying, Behold, there came men in hither tonight** of the children of Israel to search out the country.

2:3 And the king of Jericho sent unto Rahab, saying, **Bring forth the men that are come to thee**, which are entered into thine house: for they be come to search out all the country.

2:4 And the woman took the two men, **and hid them**, and said thus, There came men unto me, but I knew not whence they *were*:

2:5 And it came to pass *about the time* of shutting of **the gate, when it was dark, that the men went out** whither the men went I know not: pursue after them quickly; for ye shall overtake them.

Judg. 16:1 Then went Samson to Gaza, and **saw** there **a harlot, and went in unto her.**

16:3 And Samson **lay till midnight,**

16:2 And it was **told the Gazites, saying, Samson is come hither.**

And they compassed him in, and laid wait for him all night in the gate of the city, and were quiet all the night, saying, In the morning, when it is day, we shall kill him.

16:3 ... **and arose at midnight (Unseen)**

and took the doors of the gate of the city, and the two posts, and went away with them, bar and all, and put *them* upon his shoulders, and carried them up to the top of a hill that *is* before Hebron.

Other similarities from the accounts:

Josh. 2:6 But she had brought them up to the roof of the house, and hid them with the **stalks of flax**, which she had laid in order upon the roof.

Judg. 15:14 And when he came unto Lehi, the Philistines shouted against him: and the Spirit of the LORD came mightily upon him, and the cords that *were* upon **his arms became as flax that was burnt with fire**, and his bands loosed from off his hands.

In this further example, we see the two spies connected to the Messiah:

Jos 2:16 And she said unto them, Get you to the mountain, lest the pursuers meet you; and hide yourselves there three days, until the pursuers be returned: and afterward may ye go your way.

Jos 2:17 And the men said unto her, We **will be** blameless of this thine oath which thou hast made us swear. Jos

2:18 Behold, *when* we come into the land, thou shalt **bind this line of scarlet thread in the window** which thou didst let us down by: and thou shalt bring thy father, and thy mother, and thy brethren, and all thy father's household, home unto thee.

Jos 2:19 And it shall be, **that** whosoever shall go out of the doors of thy house into the street, his blood **shall be** upon his head,

and we will be guiltless.

and whosoever shall be with thee in the house, his blood shall be on our head, if *any* hand be upon him.

Jos 2:20 And if thou utter this our business, then we will be quit of thine oath which thou hast made us to swear.

Jos 2:21 And she said, According unto your words, so *be* it. And she sent them away, and they departed: **and she bound the scarlet line in the window.**

Jos 2:22 And they went, and came unto the mountain, and abode there three days, until the pursuers were returned: and the pursuers sought *them* throughout all the way, but found *them* not.

This structure is simple to follow. Clearly, the elements of Messiah are here, life and death with the number 3 (three days). The message I focus on in this chiasmic structure is the central axis — the turning point in the story: The spies are blameless or guiltless.

Tied to Samson, a messianic figure⁶, the two spies are shadows of the Messiah and indicate He will be “blameless” in the death of anyone outside the scarlet-marked house.

This should sound very familiar to us. Think of the blood-marked doorposts in Egypt on the first Passover blocking those inside from the Destroyer, the wrath of God on Egypt. Rahab and her family thematically went through their own Passover during the season of Passover (Josh. 4:19).

The account in Josh. 2:1–24 also is thematically tied to 2nd Sam. 17:15–24. We will discuss this important connection at a later time. For now, note that this thematic connection and the thematic events that happened to David’s spies are an example of the pattern described earlier: B=C, therefore C=B and C=A. In other words, David’s two spies and Joshua’s two spies are thematically equivalent to Samson.

Samson is a shadow of Messiah, as suggested by the chiasmus in Judg. 13:3–7. Samson’s “power” over death is suggested in the account of his killing a lion. What normally happens when you encounter a lion and have no weapons?

Judg. 13:3 **And the angel of the LORD appeared unto the woman**, and said unto her, Behold now, thou *art* barren, and bearest not:

but thou shalt conceive, and bear a son.

13:4 Now therefore beware, I pray thee, and **drink not wine nor strong drink, and eat not any unclean thing**:

13:5 For, lo, thou shalt conceive, and bear a son; and no razor shall come on his head: for the **child shall be a Nazarite unto God from the womb**

and **he shall begin to deliver Israel out** of the hand of the Philistines.

13:6 Then the woman came and told her husband, saying, **A man of God came unto me, and his countenance *was* like the countenance of an angel of God**, very terrible: but I asked him not whence he *was*, neither told he me his name:

13:7 But he said unto me, **Behold, thou shalt conceive, and bear a son;**

and **now drink no wine nor strong drink, neither eat any unclean thing**:

for the **child shall be a Nazarite to God from the womb to the day of his death.**

⁶ Listen to Daniel Agee’s recorded studies, “Judges 15 — Samson’s mysterious jawboning about donkeys” <www.hallel.info/judges-15-samson-jawbones-donkeys/> and “Judges 16 — Samson’s prophetic downfall” <www.hallel.info/judges-16-samson-and-delilah/>.