

**CHIASMUS IN CHRONICLES: INVESTIGATING THE
STRUCTURES OF 2 CHRONICLES 28:16-21;
33:1-20; AND 31:20–32:33**

MARY KATHERINE YEM HING HOM
University of Cambridge
Cambridge, England

This article is a brazen, but wary, demonstration of chiasmus in three narrative passages of varying length and complexity from the last half of 2 Chronicles: 2 Chron 28:16-21; 33:1-20; and 31:20–32:33. After necessary methodological discussion, we will evaluate and explore the particular ways *chiastic aspect* functions in these texts. Some comments on the literary-theological implications of the chiastic aspect of each passage then follow, though it is the hope of this author that investigation and dialogue will continue beyond this study with regard to the presence of chiastic aspect in Chronicles and its relevance for interpretation.

I. Methodology

The term *chiastic aspect* is coined here to denote literary counterpositioning, which can vary in degree of strength. For example, all else being equal, a rare word is more likely to have a greater chiastic aspect than a common word, and two verses equidistant from the pivot will almost always have greater chiastic aspect than two verses not equidistant from the pivot. *Chiastic aspect* may be contrasted to *chiasmus* in that the latter implies that the *entirety* of a text explicitly exhibits chiastic aspect. It seems safe to say that chiasmus proper in biblical narrative prose is extremely rare, and when it does occur, it borders on—if not crosses over—the gray divide between prose and poetry. Perhaps it would help if we qualify as *narrative chiasmus* a narrative text with overall strong chiastic aspect approaching chiasmus proper.

In line with this, it may be said that I have a somewhat circular perspective of chiasmus. A legitimate narrative chiasmus has a strong enough overall chiastic aspect that it may be recognized as an intentional structure. Elements of the text signify the chiasmus; the chiasmus, in turn, contributes its own meaning to the text. As seen in the relationship between other literary biblical structures and their content, one may expect that the chiastic structure's contribution is consistent with other meanings and emphases clearly conveyed through the text's content.

Chiastic aspect, on the other hand, does not necessarily render a text as a chiasmus. Weak chiastic aspect may help to delineate a pericope, or mildly accentuate its unity, but the text of which it is a part may not be further involved in the chiastic dynamic. Strong chiastic aspect draws more of the text into chiastic relation. The stronger the chiastic aspect, the more a text approaches chiasmus proper and the “circular” effect of structure-informing-content dynamics may be considered.

The most rigorous procedure for discerning chiasmus that I have encountered so far is by Butterworth, of “Isaiah 67” fame.¹ I have summarized his procedure below:

1. Establish the text form and its divisions independently of structural considerations.
2. Examine *all* repetitions, and discard those that seem to be insignificant.
3. Estimate the likely importance of the repeated words that remain. Butterworth gives more priority here to repetitions of whole phrases, rare words, words used in characteristic ways, and clusters of related words. He gives less priority to technical terms.
4. Consult and compare conclusions with the work of scholars in various branches of OT research.
5. Attempt to explain the purpose(s) of the authors in presenting material in this particular way.

In addition to my focus on *chiastic aspect* instead of *chiasmus*, there are two matters on which I diverge from Butterworth’s approach that deserve further comment here. The first regards his evaluation of the repetition of common words. While I agree with Butterworth that, in general, “common words are of minimal value in indicating structure” because of the natural frequency of common words in longer passages,² I cannot agree that this necessarily calls for complete disregard of common vocabulary. True, more often than not common vocabulary is simply used in a common way. But let’s not throw the baby out with the bathwater. Common words may indeed be used chiastically; their chiastic aspect may not be strong and one should approach common words with more reserve than not, but still their potential contribution to structure should not be presumed null.

Second, with regard to the more subjective element of a text (i.e., its conceptual content), Butterworth finds it “strange for a writer to avoid using certain words more than once, if he wanted to draw the reader’s attention to the correspondence [between one part and another].”³ This assumes a particularly rigid style on the part of the writer, and that is a presumption I am not led to make concerning the authors of the ancient Hebrew text. Furthermore, Butterworth’s wariness of eisegetic misinterpretation of subjective material is such that it results in a complete avoidance of the consideration and evaluation of subjective elements. I readily concur that the evaluation of subjective aspects of a text is difficult. Yet, difficult as these

¹See Mike Butterworth, *Structure and the Book of Zechariah*, JSOTSS 130 (Sheffield: Academic Press, 1992), 13-61, esp. 53-61. Butterworth’s randomly created “Isaiah 67” entertainingly demonstrates that repetitions can sometimes be mere coincidences.

²Ibid., 55-56.

³Ibid., 59.

matters are, subjective elements remain a vital part of the text and should not be excluded from evaluating its structure.

For this article, the chiasmic structures presented were incidentally found during exegetical translation of the passages. The texts and delineation of units had already been established independently of any consideration of chiasmus or chiasmic aspect. Unusual repetition of vocabulary, phrases, and motifs presented themselves, however, and chiasmic aspect appeared evident. To evaluate the apparent chiasmic features in the passages, I applied Butterworth's procedure, *mutatis mutandis*, and further tested the strength of my own observations by discussing, presenting, and forwarding them to various colleagues for critical feedback. Naturally, for good or ill, I assume full responsibility for the final results regarding the presence of chiasmic aspect in 2 Chron 28:16-21; 33:1-20; and 31:20–32:33, as shown below.

II. *The Structure of 2 Chronicles 28:16-21*

The chiasmic structure of 2 Chron 28:16-21 may be discerned as follows:

- A 28:16: King Ahaz sends to Assyria for help
(על-מלכי אשור לעזר לו).
- B 28:17-18: Invasion by foreign enemies
(Edomites and Philistines).
- C 28:19: The reason for Judah's troubles: YHWH humbles (בנע) Judah as judgment on Ahaz's infidelity against him (ביהודה—ומעול מעל—ביהודה).
- B' 28:20: Enmity from foreign enemy (Assyria).
- A' 28:21: Ahaz gives tribute to Assyria, but receives no help
(למלך אשור ולא לעזרה לו).

A/A' (28:16, 21): These verses share the keyroot עזר, "to help."⁴ The root עזר occurs thirty-one times in Chronicles, four times in chapter 28: in vv. 16 and 21, and twice in v. 23. On its own, the occurrence of עזר is not exceptional. However, vv. 16 and 21 also have end-phrases that are similar in meaning and sound:

2 Chron 28:16 בעת ההיא שלח המלך אחז על-מלכי
אשור לעזר לו

2 Chron 28:21 כי-חלק אחז את-בית יהוה ואת-בית המלך
והשרים ויתן למלך אשור ולא לעזרה לו

⁴Unless otherwise indicated, figures for occurrences of roots do not include proper nouns.

In addition to the above, these verses are evidently located at the terminal positions of the unit. Taken together, the chiasmic aspect of vv. 16 and 21 is high.

B/B' (28:17-18, 20): The correspondence I have identified here is based purely on content and is fairly subjective, hence chiasmic aspect for this pair is low.

C (28:19): **ביהודה—ומעול מעל—ביהודה**, a strongly chiasmic construction, is continuous in the text. The paronomasia of **ביהודה** and **ביהודה** is strong and reinforces a symbolic relation in which Judah is posited opposite YHWH because of Ahaz's faithlessness.

Verse 19 is distinctly theological in vocabulary and tone. The tetragrammaton appears twice, as does **יהודה**, in addition to a single occurrence of **ישראל**. The Hiphil of **בנע**, "to humble," occurs in this chapter in v. 19; root **מעל**, "to be/act unfaithfully," appears twice in v. 19, but also once in v. 22. Add to all the above the central location of v. 19 in the unit, and its overall pivotal function should be recognized as evident and strong.

In comparing my results with the work of other scholars, it seems that vv. 16-21 are well-recognized as a unit, though not as a chiasmus (e.g., Williamson, De Vries, Japhet).⁵ The NIV, NJPS, NRSV, GNB/TEV, and NASB reflect this as well. The connection between vv. 16 and 21 through the keyroot **עזר** is also acknowledged.⁶ Verse 19 has been recognized by other scholars as distinct for its theological, explanatory nature.⁷ On the whole, the general conclusions of secondary literature regarding 28:16-21 do not recognize the chiasmic structure, but are harmonious with our proposed structure.

The overall function of the passage's chiasmic aspect appears to be (1) to delineate vv. 16-21 as a unit; (2) to emphasise the folly of Ahaz's reliance on Assyria for help; and (3) to emphasise Ahaz's responsibility in Judah's afflictions.

Considering the whole of the unit, 2 Chron 28:16-21 appears to have high chiasmic aspect for biblical narrative and may be considered a narrative chiasmus.

⁵H. G. M. Williamson, *1 and 2 Chronicles*, NCBC (London: Marshall, Morgan and Scott, 1982), 347-348; Simon J. De Vries, *1 and 2 Chronicles*, FOTL 11 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989), 362, 364-365; Sara Japhet, *1 and 2 Chronicles: A Commentary*, OTL (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 1993), 904-907; and Martin J. Selman, *2 Chronicles*, TOTC (Leicester: InterVarsity, 1994), 481-482; implied in Gary N. Knoppers, "Treasures Won and Lost: Royal (Mis)appropriations in Kings and Chronicles," in *The Chronicler as Author: Studies in Text and Texture*, ed. M. Patrick Graham and Steven L. McKenzie, JSOTSS 263 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1999), 181-208, see esp. 200-201; and Michael E. W. Thompson, *Situation and Theology: Old Testament Interpretations of the Syro-Ephraimite War*, Prophets and Historians Series 1 (Sheffield: Almond Press, 1982), 94.

⁶E.g., Japhet, 907; Williamson, 348-349; De Vries, 364-365; Knoppers, 200-201.

⁷E.g., Japhet, 906; De Vries, 362, 364-365; Thompson, 95.

III. *The Structure of 2 Chronicles 33:1-20*

To my knowledge, there has been no extensive treatment of the chiasmic structure of 2 Chron 33:1-20, the pericope concerning Manasseh. Smelik, Japhet, and Abadie all present basic chiasmic outlines of 2 Chron 33:1-20,⁸ but none goes beyond discussing general content and broad, somewhat subjective description in identifying their chiasms.⁹ If indeed 2 Chron 33:1-20 is chiasmic, it needs to hold up to more rigorous testing.

On the basis of repeated words and phrases, as well as content, 2 Chron 33:1-20 appears to have the following complex structure. Correspondences are matched by number, and those within a subunit are connected by a solid, curved line, while those uniting the overall passage are connected by straight

⁸Klaas A. D. Smelik, "Portrayal of King Manasseh: A Literary Analysis of 2 Kings 21 and 2 Chronicles 23," in *Converting the Past: Studies in Ancient Israelite and Moabite Historiography*, OTS 28 (Leiden: Brill, 1992), 129-189, see 170:

- Part I (v. 1)
- Part II (vv. 2-8)
- Part III (v. 9)
- Part IV (vv. 10-13)
- Part V (v. 14)
- Part VI (vv. 15-17)
- Part VII (vv. 18-20)

Japhet, *1 and 2 Chronicles*, 1000:

- (a) Introduction: Manasseh is king (v. 1)
- (b) Manasseh's transgressions (vv. 2-8)
- (c) Punishment: exile to Assyria (vv. 10-11)
- (d) Repentance and delivery (vv. 12-13)
- (e) Manasseh's earthly enterprises (v. 14)
- (f) Religious restoration (vv. 15-17)
- (g) Conclusion: death and burial (18-20)

Philippe Abadie, "From the Impious Manasseh (1 Kings 21) to the Convert Manasseh (2 Chronicles 33): Theological Rewriting by the Chronicler," in *The Chronicler as Theologian: Essays in Honor of Ralph W. Klein*, ed. M. Patrick Graham, Steven L. McKenzie and Gary N. Knoppers, JSOTSS 371 (London: T. & T. Clark, 2003) 89-104, see 96:

- A Manasseh is king (v. 1)
- B The religious *in fidelities* of Manasseh (vv. 2-9)
- C In punishment, Manasseh is deported to Babylon (vv. 10-11)
- D Repentance of the king, following his deliverance (vv. 12-13)
- C' Manasseh restores Jerusalem (v. 14)
- B' The religious *reforms* of Manasseh (vv. 15-17)
- A' The end of the reign. Amon is king (vv. 18-20)

⁹Abadie, 96, offers one exception in that it contrasts Manasseh's deportation to Babylon in v. 11 with his restoration of Jerusalem in v. 14.

lines. Though incidental to our discussion, the frequent occurrences of **בנה** are in 50% grayscale:

Subunit I

v. 1: Introductory formulae

v. 2: יהוה מפני בני ישראל⁵, הוריש⁴, הגוים אשר³, בעיני יהוה², ויעש הרע¹v. 3: אשרות⁷, הבמות, ויבן⁶

v. 4: ובנה

v. 5: ויבן

v. 6: לעשות הרע¹, בעיני יהוה²v. 7: דויד⁹, הסמל⁸

v. 8: -----

v. 9: יהוה מפני בני ישראל⁵, השמיד⁴, הגוים אשר³, לעשות רע¹v. 10: וידבר יהוה אל¹⁰v. 11: ויבא יהוה עליהם¹⁰**Subunit II**

- low chiasmic aspect contributes cogency and emphasizes theme of M.'s apostasy
- content: M.'s apostasy and reign before Y. acts

Subunit III

- pivot
- content: Y. acts

Subunit IV

- no chiasmic aspect within subunit
- inclusion emphasizes M.'s humbling and prayer, and Y.'s receipt of both
- content: M.'s faithfulness and reign after Y. acts

v. 12: ויכנע¹¹v. 13: ויעקר לו¹³, ויתפלל¹²v. 14: בנה, דויד⁹v. 15: הסמל⁸, בנה

v. 16: [יבן]

v. 17: בבמות⁶

v. 18: -----

v. 19: הכנעו¹¹, האשרים⁷, במות בנה⁶, והעתר-לו¹³, וחפלתו¹²**Subunit V**

v. 20: Closing formulae

I will first discuss the structure of 2 Chron 33:1-20 with regard to its subunits. Subunits I and V are fairly self-explanatory in that they mark the terminal points of the unit as a whole. They also feature standard introductory and concluding formulae, respectively.

Subunit II contains the thrice-repeated combination **עשה + רע** in vv. 2, 6, 9. Though it is a phrase, it is also a technical term, or idiom, that occurs elsewhere in Chronicles—notably, eleven times in 2 Chronicles; and even a fourth time in chapter 33, in v. 22. Still, 27% of the total occurrences of **עשה + רע** in 2 Chronicles are in subunit II. The combination that follows, **בעיני יהוה**, also is an idiom appearing fairly frequently in Chronicles (19 times; 18 of which are in 2 Chronicles). The repeated idioms and distinctive locations of vv. 2, 6, 9 contribute some chiastic aspect. An envelope figure, or inclusio, is strongly made between vv. 2 and 9's verse-ending phraseology of **הגוים אשר—(Verb in the Hiphil Perfect 3ms)⁴—יהוה מפני בני ישראל³**.

The remainder of subunit II lacks further chiastic aspect. The overall chiastic aspect for the subunit is low, and its function appears to be simply that of emphasizing (1) the cogency of vv. 2-9 as its own subunit; and (2) the overall theme of subunit II as the apostasy of Manasseh.

Subunit III is composed of two verses, both of which begin with the construction (*wayyiqtol* 3ms form) + **יהוה** + (guttural-**ל** preposition), which is generally unexceptional in biblical literature. However, being that the constructions here are chapter-unique, parallel, and centrally located in the pericope, they distinguish vv. 10, 11 as the pivot. This differs from the more subjective, content-based conclusions of Smelik, Japhet, and Abadie, all of whom include at least vv. 12-13 in the pivot, shifting the center's emphasis to Manasseh's action and condition instead of YHWH's action, which vv. 10-11 convey and which seems more theologically resonant with the emphases of the Chronicler (e.g., the sovereignty of YHWH and the decisive quality of His intervention in the course of history).¹⁰

Moving on to subunit IV, we bear in mind that **כנע** is frequent vocabulary in Chronicles. **כנע** occurs 19 times in Chronicles, 16 of which are in 2 Chronicles. The verb also occurs later in chapter 33, in v. 23, and nearby, in 32:26. On its own, the repetition of this root could be coincidental. However, the clustering in subunit IV of **כנע** with forms derived from root **פלל** and the more unique occurrences of **ל** + **ל** + **עתר** strengthens its distinctive use here.¹¹ The parallel aspect for subunit IV's beginning and end, which suggests an inclusio, may not seem to be strong at first because of the distance between elements in vv. 12 and 13. It could be argued that vv. 12 and 13 belong together, but in such cases one must be especially careful to make judgments independently of structural concerns. With that in mind, it may be

¹⁰For further discussion, see Sara Japhet, *The Ideology of the Book of Chronicles and Its Place in Biblical Thought*, BEATAJ (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 1989), 62, 125-136.

¹¹In addition to these unique occurrences of **ל** + **עתר**, it is worth noting that **עתר** occurs twenty-four times in the OT, of which three are in Chronicles, of which two are in 2 Chronicles (namely, in these verses).

seen that vv. 12 and 13 do share similar content and are distinguished from the rest of subunit IV by the **וְאֶחָרֵיכֵן** that begins v. 14. No other inner subunit features are present. In terms of content, vv. 12-19, along with the formulaic conclusion of v. 20 (i.e., subunit V), share the subject of Manasseh's reign *after* YHWH acts.

Thus far repetitions have formed inclusios and appear to delineate subunits. Taking a look now at the general structure of 33:1-20, we may recall that subunit I includes a standard introductory formula, naturally placed in counterposition to subunit V, which features a standard concluding formula. Subunit II has shared phraseology at the beginning, center, and end (vv. 2, 6, 9), which demarcates the boundaries of that unit while also emphasising its primary motif of Manasseh's apostasy against YHWH. In contrast to the focus on Manasseh by the overwhelming majority of verses, subunit III (i.e., the pivot; vv. 10-11) emphasises a different subject: YHWH. In both verses of this pivot, YHWH appears immediately after the initial verb and before a guttural-ל preposition (**עַל** and **אֶל**). As we observed, this is *not* unusual for the OT. However, the constructions gain distinction here as the only chapter-wide occurrences, and the verse pair overall is reinforced as a subunit by their central location and parallel positioning. Subunit IV is marked by an inclusio of shared vocabulary between vv. 12-13 and v. 19. While the repeated words and roots underline the key changes in Manasseh's behavior to which God responded and thus enabled the king's recovery in subunit IV, the lack of repetition at the center of subunit IV (which one might expect, in correspondence to subunit II) may be because the emphases of other significantly located verses (i.e., the subunit's inclusio) also do not entirely reflect the general content of its subunit. Or, this situation may simply be because the portrayal of the reinstated Manasseh is more complex (cf. v. 17; 2 Kgs 21:10-16). At any rate, subunits II and IV clearly present a contrast of "before" and "after" the events of the pivot, Manasseh's apostasy and recovery.

Considering the unit as a whole, there do appear to be some chiasmic elements functioning across it. In particular, note the occurrences of **בְּמוֹת**, **אֲשֶׁרוֹת/אֲשֵׁרִים**, and **הַסִּמֶל**. **בְּמוֹת** occurs 106 times in the OT, 17 times in 2 Chronicles. In 2 Chron 33, **בְּמוֹת** occurs in vv. 3 and 19, which are generally equidistant of the pivot. However, **בְּמוֹת** also occurs in v. 17, which lowers its chiasmic potential. That said, **בְּמוֹת** also appears in vv. 3 and 19 with the only chapter-wide occurrences of **אֲשֶׁרוֹת/אֲשֵׁרִים**. This combination of **בְּמוֹת** and **אֲשֶׁרוֹת/אֲשֵׁרִים** occurs 10 times in the OT, in the books of Kings and 2 Chronicles alone. Of its six occurrences in 2 Chron, two are here in vv. 3 and 19. I would rate the chiasmic aspect of vv. 3 and 19 as low. While the pairs of words are, as I pointed out, fairly equidistant, it is not clear that the clustering of cultic technical terms **בְּמוֹת** and **אֲשֶׁרוֹת/אֲשֵׁרִים** is significant, nor that **בְּמוֹת**'s multiple occurrences are not merely dependent on the message of the content. Our third cultic reference, **סִמֶּל**, is not a technical term, though it is rare.¹²

¹²See Butterworth, 60, regarding the importance of rare words and relative unimportance of technical terms in discerning chiasmic structure.

occurs a total of five times in the OT, two times in 2 Chronicles (those two occurrences being vv. 7 and 15), and is attested outside the OT only in Phoenician and Punic inscriptions.¹³ Further, the combination סמל + ה occurs in the OT only in 2 Chron 33:7 and 15. Even more distinction is added when it becomes apparent that the Chronicler deliberately chose הסמל in place of האשרה in his Kings *Vorlage* (cf. 2 Kgs 21:7).¹⁴ Possibly the chiasmic use of אשרות/אשרים, במות, and הסמל functions to underline Manasseh's idolatry, though the frequent use of such terms may be coincidental to the content, which focuses heavily on Manasseh's apostasy and restoration.

Less certain, though perhaps worth mentioning, is the appearance of דויד in vv. 7 and 14. דויד occurs in Chronicles 261 times; in 2 Chronicles, 74 times. Its only appearances in chapter 33 are in these two verses, but given the high concentration of דויד instances in 2 Chronicles—such that a chance double occurrence of דויד in any one chapter of 2 Chronicles is more likely than not—I consider the chiasmic aspect of vv. 7 and 14 as very low. Another weak connection may be between vv. 4-5 and v. 17. With regard to content, the contrast between vv. 4-5 (in which pagan worship is conducted in YHWH's temple) and v. 17 (in which YHWH worship happens at pagan sites) is striking. Still, given the subjective nature of this correlation and the absence of clearer "signals," the chiasmic aspect of vv. 4-5 and 17 is relatively insignificant.

The general infrequency of these chiasmic elements and the relatively minor role of their subject matter suggest that their function is simply to tighten the whole together. By linking individual parts of two large and clearly demarcated subunits together (that is, subunits II and IV), the whole gains

¹³John W. McKay, *Religion in Judah under the Assyrians: 732-609 B.C.*, SBT 26 (London: SCM Press, 1973), 21-22. The other three uses of סמל are in Deut 4:16; Ezek 8:3, 5.

¹⁴Looking at other scholars' work on this matter, the chiasmic relationship between vv. 7 and 15 has heretofore not been observed, though the marked change by the Chronicler of אשרה to סמל in v. 15 has been undeniable. Scholars since McKay, 22, usually explain the change as reflecting specification of an idol type, probably Phoenician. J. M. Hadley, "סמל," *NIDOTTE* 3:271-272, makes a different suggestion: סמל in chap. 33 emphasizes a sense of image, in contrast to a being. She remarks that the use of סמל "may suggest that סמל is specifically the goddess Asherah, but it is more likely that the Chronicler wished to remove any suggestion that an existent deity was involved, and asserted it was merely an image." Either or both of McKay and Hadley's proposals may be operative for סמל in 2 Chron 33. It seems to me, however, that a chiasmic relationship best explains both unique occurrences of הסמל. It is possible to harmonize the theories and suggest, e.g., that the Chronicler wished to emphasize through the chiasmic pairing the foreign, Phoenician nature of the Asherah that Manasseh erected. Being that the etymological evidence for סמל remains inconclusive, however, I hesitate to advocate such theories. What one can more confidently forward is the strong presence of chiasmic aspect through הסמל in 32:7 and 15. See "סמל," *HALAT* 3:717. For further discussion on the term סמל itself, see Christoph Dohmen, "Heißt סמל 'Bild, Statue?'" *ZAW* 95 (1984): 263-266.

more of a sense of cogency as one large unit concerning Manasseh. The seven occurrences of keyroot **בנה** serve no apparent chiastic function, though their relatively high frequency here serves to unite the passage further.¹⁵

Taking into account the broader chiastic structure of 33:1-20 in terms of its repetition-delineated subunits (which are affirmed by content) and the few occurrences of detailed chiastic aspect within that broader structure, 2 Chron 33:1-20 has an overall chiastic aspect that, in terms of clarity, is high for its general structure; in terms of chiastic complexity, it is low. All that to say, chiastic aspect is present in 33:1-20—it functions generally, in the service of structure, contrast, and cogency. Most would consider 2 Chron 33:1-20, by way of its general outline, to be a chiasmus, though it should be further qualified as a weak or “general” narrative chiasmus.

IV. *The Structure of 2 Chronicles 31:20–32:33*

Finally, 2 Chron 31:20–32:33 demonstrates strong enough chiastic aspect that, for all intents and purposes, it may be considered a narrative chiasmus. Chiastically arranged verses and elements exhibiting strong chiastic aspect are described in plain, black print in the following diagram. Elements with weaker chiastic aspect are noted in 50% grayscale, though my discussion in this paper will concentrate on the stronger chiastic pairs in this pericope.

The chiastic structure of 2 Chron 31:20–32:33:

- A. Summary formulae about Hezekiah (31:20-21)
- B. Foreign power (Assyria) tests Hezekiah’s faithfulness (32:1-2)
- C. Hezekiah **סוּם** the springs (32:3)
- D. **ב-ג** occurs twice; abundant resources for Jerusalem in time of war (32:4)
- E. **מגני** made; Hezekiah’s building projects in time of war (32:5)
- (32:6)
- (32:7)
- (32:8)
- F. Introductory statement, **זוה אחר**; “to Hezekiah, king of Judah”; content: foreign nation hostile to Jerusalem (32:9)
- G. cluster: “Sennacherib king of Assyria” and issue of what happens to **בירושלם** . . . **שבים**; Sennacherib’s questions . . . (see G’, v. 22) (32:10)
- H. Content: Hezekiah defamed by the king of Assyria; Sennacherib predicts death for Jerusalemites . . . ; Sennacherib challenges the ability of the Jerusalemites’ God to save them (32:11)
- I. Content: Sennacherib looks at the Israelite cultus and begins his challenge of the exclusivity of the one God YHWH and the centralized cultus (32:12)

¹⁵**בנה**, “to build,” occurs 61 times in 2 Chron. Its various uses in 33:1-20 may be seen to draw attention to Manasseh’s dramatic change in relation to his political and religious building projects.

- J. cluster: “the lands”; root עָשָׂה; “my [Sennacherib’s] hand”; implicit comparison of YHWH to other gods (32:13)
 (32:14)
 (32:15)
- K. **PIVOT**: self-contained chiasm and assonance (32:16)
 (32:17)
 (32:18)
- J'. cluster: “the land”; root עָשָׂה//radicals עֲשֵׂה; “the hands of humanity”; explicit comparison of YHWH to other gods (32:19)
- I'. Content: Hezekiah and Isaiah appeal exclusively to YHWH in a way not restricted by the formalisms of the cultus, but pray “(to) the heavens” (32:20)
- H'. Content: Hezekiah proven correct by YHWH; Assyrian enemy forces and Sennacherib himself die; Sennacherib not saved in “the house of his own god” (32:21)
- G'. cluster: “Sennacherib king of Assyria” and issue of what happens to שְׁבִי יְרוּשָׁלַם; ...are well-answered! (see G, v. 10) (32:22)
- F'. Concluding statement, מֵאַחֲרֵיכֶן; “to Hezekiah, king of Judah”; content: foreign nations honor the king in Jerusalem (32:23)
 (32:24)
 (32:25)
 (32:26)
- E'. מִגְּנִים in treasuries; Hezekiah’s building projects in time of rest and prosperity (32:27-28)
- D'. ב-ר occurs twice; abundant resources for Hezekiah in time of peace (32:29)
- C'. Hezekiah סָרַם the spring (32:30)
- B'. Foreign power (Babylon) tests Hezekiah’s faithfulness (32:31)
- A'. Concluding formulae about Hezekiah (32:32-33)

A/A' (31:20-21; 32:32-33): These verses bookend the remainder of chapter 32 in an inclusio of formulae about Hezekiah. These are standard formulae in predictable places. The verses share no distinct vocabulary, and chiastic aspect for these verses is low.

C/C' (32:3, 30): The correspondence relies on the distinctive occurrences of the fairly rare root סָרַם, “to shut, stop.” This root occurs 13-15 times in the OT,¹⁶ three times in Chronicles, all of which appear here in 2 Chron 32. Lowering the chiastic aspect is the fact that there is a third occurrence, in v. 4. Strengthening the chiastic aspect, though, is the particular motif of

¹⁶See discussion in B. Otzen and H.-J. Fabry, “סָרַם,” *TDOT* 10:359-362, esp. 359-361.

the manipulation of springs leading to Jerusalem. The sharing of this motif was observed by Ackroyd, who unfortunately did not discern further literary-structural relevance.¹⁷ Similarly, Otzen noted the shared use of סתם, with both occurrences being in the Qal, and surmised an indirect connection, but to no further discussion.¹⁸ Overall chiastic aspect for this chiastic pair is strong.

D/D' (32:4, 29): The repetition of ג-ב by itself is unexceptional. The combination initial-ג followed by ב occurs 118 times in Chronicles, 68 times in 2 Chronicles, and 8 times in 2 Chron 32. Its occurrences in vv. 4 and 29 have an additional distinctive feature, however, and that is ג-ב's double appearance in each verse.

2 Chron 32:4 ויקבצו עמ־רב ויסתמו את־כל־המעיינות
ואת־הנחל השופר בתוך־הארץ לאמר למה
יבואו מלכי אשור ומצאו מים רבים:

2 Chron 32:29 וערים עשה לו ומקנה־צאן ובקר לרב כי
נתן־לו אלהים רכוש רב מאד:

Still, the frequency of ג-ב in 2 Chron 32 and beyond keeps the chiastic aspect between these verses low.

E/E' (32:5, 27-28): These verses share the word מגנים, “shields,” which occurs 10 times in 2 Chronicles, twice in this chapter. The placement of מגנים in v. 27 has been considered so unusual at times in history that the Greek and Latin interpreters preferred to emend מגנים to the biblically unattested form מגדנים (“choice, excellent things,” cf. 32:23).¹⁹ מגנים is maintained in the MT, however. Bearing in mind the unusual use of מגנים—at least, in antique and modern eyes—the chiastic aspect here is significant.²⁰

F/F' (32:9, 23): Both verses share similar positions marking the beginning or conclusion of a subunit within the plain prose structure of the text by means of temporal markers incorporating אחר. This also occurs in v. 1, which could be understood as reinforcing an echo of the uses in vv. 9 and 23, or, contrarily, may indicate that the correspondence in vv. 9 and 23 is less exceptional. The latter conclusion is supported by the fact that אחר is very common vocabulary. At

¹⁷Peter R. Ackroyd, “The Chronicler as Exegete,” *JSOT* 2 (1977): 11-12.

¹⁸Otzen, “סתם,” 359-360.

¹⁹[מגדן־גד] occurs in the OT in only the feminine plural form and in just three clear instances: Gen 24:53; 2 Chron 21:3; 32:23.

²⁰For modern interpreters questioning the use of מגנים, see *BHS*; *NAB*; *NJB*; Wilhelm Rudolph, *Chronikbücher*, HAT (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1955), 312; Peter R. Ackroyd, *1 and 2 Chronicles, Ezra, Nehemiah*, TBC (London: SCM Press, 1973), 195; and Williamson, 387. See also discussion in Mark A. Throntveit, “The Relationship of Hezekiah to David and Solomon in the Books of Chronicles,” in *The Chronicler as Theologian: Essays in Honor of Ralph W. Klein*, ed. M. Patrick Graham, Steven L. McKenzie, and Gary N. Knoppers (London: T. & T. Clark, 2003), 105-121, esp. 116.

the same time, the epithet **יחזקיהו מלך יהודה** (“Hezekiah king of Judah”) occurs five times in the whole of Chronicles (1 Chron 4:41; 2 Chron 30:24;²¹ 32:8, 9, 23), which is surprisingly seldom, relative to the thirty-eight occurrences of **יחזקיהו** and five occurrences of **חזקיהו** in Chronicles. What should not be taken into account for the chiasmic aspect are the shared occurrences of “to Jerusalem,” a phrase that uses different prepositions in the two verses. Moreover, **ירושלם** occurs 12 times in chapter 32 alone, half those occurrences being preceded by a preposition.

G/G' (32:10, 22): **סנחריב מלך אשור** (“Sennacherib king of Assyria”) occurs fairly frequently in chapter 32, and it seems that the Chronicler is simply following his Kings *Vorlage* in repeating this epithet. The combination **ירושלם + ישב** also occurs frequently in 2 Chronicles with at least thirty-eight instances, and in chapter 32 with four instances.²² The clustering of both these combinations together occurs only in vv. 10 and 22, but that could be coincidental, given the unexceptional nature of both. Chiasmic aspect for this possible correspondence is so low that it is relatively insignificant.

J/J' (32:13, 19): By way of comparison to G/G', this pair also shares frequent vocabulary that is possibly clustered. The cluster of **ארץ** (“land”), derivative root **עשה** (“to do, make”), and **יד** (“hand, power”) may seem unusual, but the combination actually occurs approximately twenty-six times in the OT, three of which are in 2 Chron—twice through this pair and once in 2 Chron 13:9. Still, the combination is distinctive enough to suggest a correspondence between the two verses.

K (32:16): This verse has the central position in the chiasmus and comprises a self-contained chiasmus and consonantal assonance (ל, ד, ר, ב, ע, ט). For these obvious reasons, its chiasmic aspect is very high.

The self-contained chiasmic structure is:

ועוד דברו X (anacrusis)
 עבדיו A

 על- B

 יהוה האלהים C

 ועל B'

 יחזקיהו עבדו A'

The primary effect of this chiasmic structure is to highlight **יהוה האלהים** and his central role in chapter 32. The effect of the assonance is to render the verse aesthetically pleasing and hence attention catching and memorable, as

²¹Minor variant spelling: **חזקיהו**.

²²Accordance search of “**ירושלם**” <WITHIN 3 Words><FOLLOWED BY> “**ישב**.”

well as to reinforce the unity of v. 16's content.²³ Verse 16's structure conveys the message that YHWH is in control: in the midst of the conflict between the עבדֵי־י (‘servants’) of Sennacherib and the עבד (‘servant’) of YHWH,²⁴ and even in the midst of—ironically—Assyria's insults and attacks, YHWH is the determinative factor; he is the hinge on which everything changes and the circumstances make a turn for the better. Further, YHWH is at the center of all the events of chapter 32, as the pivot indicates in its relation to the rest of the verses. Possibly the centrality of YHWH in the structure reflects the Chronicler's concern to uphold throughout his work the centrality of the cultus and exclusive worship of YHWH.²⁵

The epithet יהוה הוֹאֵל הֵיִם is rare in the OT (41x) and unique within chapter 32.²⁶ With the few occurrences we have to consider, it may seem at first glance that ‘the use of ‘YHWH [Ha]Elohim’ is sporadic and does not seem to point to any particular intent or requisite context.’²⁷ However, its use in chapter 32 appears to be more intentional than not, as הוֹאֵל הֵיִם occurs in 31:21; 32:16, 31—at the beginning, middle, and *near* (but not quite *at*) the end of the unit.

Even without recognizing the chiasmic structure, Japhet writes concerning the significance of הוֹאֵל הֵיִם[ה]:

The use of ‘Elohim’ as the proper name for the god of Israel neutralizes any plural connotation the word might have and expresses the abstract idea of ‘godliness.’ The determinate form (‘ha-Elohim’) as a proper name suggests the fuller sentence ‘The LORD [is] God’ (יהוה הוֹאֵל הֵיִם).²⁸ Not only does it express an abstract understanding of the divine essence, it also emphasises *God's qualities of uniqueness and exclusiveness*. The increased use of the determinate form testifies to a *stronger awareness of God's exclusiveness* and may be seen as a theological-linguistic development typical of late biblical literature, including the book of Chronicles.²⁹

²³Appreciation of the multiple effects of literary devices such as paronomasia and other consonantal wordplay was first brought to my attention by Isaac Kalimi, ‘The Contribution of the Literary Study of Chronicles to the Solution of its Textual Problems,’ *BiblInt* 3 (1995): 210-211.

²⁴עבד also occurs in v. 9 inconsequentially to the chiasmus here.

²⁵Consider esp. couplet I/I', vv. 12, 20, which explicitly concerns that issue.

²⁶Japhet, *Ideology of the Book*, 38, observes that the phrase appears twenty times in the story of the Garden of Eden (Gen 2:4–3:24), twelve times in Chronicles; and in the rest of the OT, nine times (mostly in Psalms).

²⁷Japhet, *Ideology of the Book*, 41.

²⁸W. H. Schmidt draws out the exclusiveness implied in this sentence more clearly, translating and scripturally explicating the confession ‘Yahweh is (the true, only) God’ (‘הוֹאֵל הֵיִם,’ *TLOT* 1:115-126, esp. 124).

²⁹*Ibid.*, 30, emphasis supplied.

Japhet's conclusions above concerning the use of [ה]אלהים are reinforced by my observation, based on the chiastic structure of 2 Chron 32, that one of the chapter's dominant, implicit messages is that YHWH alone is God. Further, the Chronicler's combining of ה'אלהים with יהוה in v. 16 to emphasize YHWH's uniqueness, exclusiveness, and determinative power seems to affirm Japhet's proposal that the determinate form (ה'אלהים) suggests "The LORD [is] God."

The chiastic structure of v. 16 also contrasts Sennacherib's servants (עבדיו) with YHWH's servant, Hezekiah (עבדו). In many respects, the battle in chapter 32 is staged between these two representative parties, though the "servants" cannot be separated from their masters in this situation.³⁰ Bearing in mind that the role of Sennacherib's ambassadors and King Hezekiah is likened to that of faithful representatives, to counter the "servant" is to counter the servant's master.

Hezekiah's exceptional status as the only king besides David to be designated in Chronicles as the servant of YHWH by a voice other than his own is no small honor, and the Chronicler's awareness of this is probably reflected in the placement of the servant title in this central verse. The use of עבדו in v. 16 impresses upon the reader the dependence, favored status, and faithful fulfilment of commissioned task(s) by Hezekiah.³¹ Furthermore, the strength of the theology inherent in the use of עבד with YHWH as genitive object (namely, that the "servant" of YHWH acknowledges his/her dependence upon and service to YHWH, and that YHWH assumes a degree of ownership and responsibility for his servant) reinforces the polarization between Hezekiah and Sennacherib's ambassadors.

Overall, I would rate the chiastic aspect of 2 Chron 32 as above average. In addition to the chiastic aspect of several pairs, the impressive maintenance of chiastic symmetry across 34 verses contributes to its strength. Emphases, nuances, contrasts, and reinforcements of literary elements are highlighted by varying degrees throughout the chiasmus. Some of the more salient ways by which recognition of the narrative chiasmus proves informative, if not necessary, to our reading of the text are emphasis of the symbolic centrality of YHWH; identification of the conflict as being between the representatives of YHWH and of the Assyrian king; affirmation of the text (the case of מגנים in vv. 5 and 27 being an eminent example); and delineation of the

³⁰Relatedly, Brevard S. Childs observes by way of comparison with the 2 Kings//Isaiah accounts: "The Chronicler does not allow the enemy for a moment to play Hezekiah off against Yahweh as B² had pictured. Their positions are identical throughout and the issue of faith is clear-cut between God with his servant Hezekiah and the Assyrian threat" (*Isaiah and the Assyrian Crisis*, SBT 3 [London: SCM Press, 1967], 110).

³¹See H. Ringgren, U. Rütterswörden, and H. Simian-Yofre, "עבד," *TDOT* 10:376-405, esp. 395; R. Schultz, "Servant, Slave," *NIDOTTE* 4:1183-1198, esp. 1190-1193; C. Westermann, "עבד," *TLOT* 2:819-832, esp. 826-829; E. Carpenter, "עבד," *NIDOTTE* 3:304-309, esp. 306-307.

narrative unit, which includes vv. 24-33 by way of the structural balance and meaning it contributes to vv. 1-23 through the chiasmus.

The attention evidenced by the Chronicler in arranging chapter 32 as a chiasmus suggests several intents. To structure such a sizable length of text at the end of a kingly account signals more than closure to a section. The chiasmus gives a sense of unity to otherwise disparate parts. As well, chiastic structures contribute an aesthetic quality of balance and craftsmanship, which themselves often serve to highlight the chiastically arranged text. Further, as we have seen, the primary emphases of the chiasmus are indispensably relevant for understanding the pericope and have proven to coincide with known aspects of the Chronicler's ideology (e.g., the centrality and exclusivity of YHWH worship). These emphases of the chiasmus, in turn, may be seen to create thematic connections at least between the chapters concerning Hezekiah, if not the whole of the book.

When its chiastic structure is taken into account, 2 Chron 32 accomplishes too much to be regarded as a mere summary or minimized report of the 2 Kings // Isaiah account. Rather, the passage's chiastic structure may be seen to highlight Hezekiah's handling of the Assyrian attack and its aftermath. Possibly the chiastic structure marks the events as climactic in relation to the other features of Hezekiah's reign. At the very least, this narrative chiasmus distinguishes the situation between Hezekiah and the Assyrians as deserving of attention.

One final note is that the final redactor of Chronicles apparently maintained and/or crafted the chiastic structure as part of his work. The narrative chiasmus of 2 Chron 32 highlights themes that are consistent with the Chronicler's emphases elsewhere, which strongly suggests that the chiastic structure is the Chronicler's own creation.

V. Summary-Conclusion

To review, I will recall here only the most salient points of this paper. In the discussion of methodology, I introduced the concept of *chiastic aspect*, a more nuanced concept than straightforward *chiasmus* in that the former recognizes the possibility of varying degrees of chiastic presence. Butterworth's procedure for discerning chiasmus was also discussed.

Analysis of 2 Chron 28:16-21; 33:1-20; and 31:20-32:33 demonstrated different degrees and ways in which chiastic aspect may function in a text. The parameters of 28:16-21 were confirmed as a unit, and the chiastic structure was evaluated as strong. As well, this narrative chiasmus emphasizes Ahaz's folly in relying on Assyria and his responsibility regarding Judah's afflictions. While chiastic structures have been suggested in the past for 2 Chron 33:1-20, I proposed a fresh, new, and more detailed chiastic structure quite unlike previous attempts. The passage is organized into subunits, which demonstrate various degrees of chiastic aspect within and between themselves. The overall chiastic structure is clear and contributes cogency to the text. It does not appear to significantly influence meaning apart from the pivot's emphasis on the actions of YHWH in bringing about the reversal of Manasseh's heart and

behavior. Second Chronicles 31:20–32:33 is identified for the first time here as a chiasmus. This recognition explains details in the text that have long intrigued scholars—namely, the use of the root **סח** in vv. 3 and 30, and the presence of **מנני** in v. 27. Another exciting discovery found by way of the chiasmus is the location of the pivot in v. 16, itself a chiasmus emphasizing (1) the conflict occurring between Sennacherib’s ambassadors and Hezekiah; and (2) the central role of YHWH in the midst of the conflict and even through the Assyrian rhetorical-psychological onslaught.³²

³²I would like to thank R. P. Gordon, M. J. Lynch, and A. Lynch for their helpful comments on previous drafts of this article. Any errors or inconsistencies are solely mine, of course.