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Wordplay on the Name 'Enos'

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In his analysis of Mosiah 1:2–6 and 1 Nephi 1:1–4, John A. Tvedtnes notes that in many instances "Nephite writers relied on earlier records as they recorded their history."[1] He makes a convincing argument that the description of King Benjamin teaching his sons "in all the language of his fathers" (Mosiah 1:2) is modeled on Nephi's account.

An analysis of the writings of those who kept the small plates of Nephi indicates that Nephite writers consciously imitated the literary conventions of their predecessors.[2] Perhaps the earliest and best example of this practice is Enos's autobiographical introduction, which closely follows Nephi's introduction at the beginning of the small plates. It appears that this imitation is so scrupulous that Enos even adapts Nephi's wordplay in explaining his naming and upbringing.[3]

The name *Enos* derives from a poetic Hebrew word for "man, mankind."[4] This raises the possibility of subtle wordplay in the opening phrase of Enos's introduction: "Behold, it came to pass that I, *Enos*, knowing my father that he was a just *man*." When we compare the introductory phrases of Enos and Nephi, the wordplay becomes more evident. The language and structure of the phrases are too similar to be happenstance, and require little elucidation:

> I, **Nephi,**
> having been born of **goodly** *parents*
> therefore I was *taught* somewhat
> in all the *learning of my father*

> I, **Enos,**
> knowing my *father* that he was a *just* **man**
> for he *taught* me
> in *his language*

The name *Nephi* apparently derived from a Middle Egyptian word, *nfr*, meaning "good, fine, goodly."[5] Where Nephi interplayed his name with an adjective that Joseph Smith translated as "goodly," Enos interplayed his own name with a repetition of "man." Thus Enos adopted and then adapted Nephi's rhetorical device, cleverly switching the wordplay from the adjective to noun. The parallelism of *goodly-just*, *parents-father*,[6] *taught-taught*, and *language-learning*[7] reveals the intricacy of Enos's imitation.

This careful use of Nephi's words as a literary model suggests the reverence that Enos and Mormon had for their common forefather and his words. Enos's introduction, with its clever adaptation of Nephi's wordplay, is a striking example of the subtleties of the Book of Mormon text and is additional evidence of its antiquity.

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Notes

1. John A. Tvedtnes, "A Note on Benjamin and Lehi," *Insights* 22/11 (2002): 3.

2. An excellent example of this imitation on the small plates is the convention of closing one's writings with "I make an end." This was done first by Nephi, "And now I, Nephi, make an end" (see, for example, 1 Nephi 22:29), and was later adopted by Chemish, Abinadom, and Amaleki (compare Omni 1:9, 11, 30).

3. See Matthew L. Bowen, "Internal Textual Evidence for the Egyptian Origin of Nephi's Name," *Insights* 22/11 (2002): 2.

4. Francis Brown, S. R. Driver, and Charles Briggs, *A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1951), 60.

5. See Raymond O. Faulkner, *A Concise Dictionary of Middle Egyptian* (Oxford: Griffith Institute, 1999), s.v. "nfr."

6. As John Tvednes notes, Hebrew uses one word for "father/parents" (*Ab/Aboth*). See "A Note on Benjamin and Lehi," 3. See also Brown, Driver, and Briggs, *Hebrew and English Lexicon*, 3.

7. Compare 1 Nephi 1:2: "Yea, I make a record in the language of my father, which consists of the learning of the Jews and the language of the Egyptians."