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Did Father Lehi Have Daughters Who Married the Sons of Ishmael?

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Abstract: This article argues that Lehi had at least two “daughters who married the sons of Ishmael.” According to Erastus Snow, the sons of Ishmael “married into Lehi’s family” and 2 Nephi 5:6 indicates that Nephi had sisters.

MOST READERS OF THE BOOK OF MORMON SEEM TO BE UNAWARE—AND NOT WITHOUT REASON—THAT LEHI HAD DAUGHTERS AS WELL AS SONS.

Did Father Lehi Have Daughters Who Married the Sons of Ishmael?

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THE QUESTION asked by the title of this article is one which, in my opinion, should be answered in the affirmative. Most readers of the Book of Mormon seem to be unaware—and not without reason—that Lehi had daughters as well as sons. In the italicized superscription of the First Book of Nephi, Lehi's son Nephi writes:

An account of Lehi and his wife Sariah, and his four sons, being called (beginning at the eldest) Laman, Lemuel, Sam, and Nephi. . . .

This text indicates that perhaps no daughters existed in the family of Lehi. Moreover, when the family began its exodus through the wilderness after leaving Jerusalem, only sons seem to have been born to Lehi and his wife. These were Jacob and Joseph. (I Nephi 18:7.)

When Lehi was in the wilderness near the Red Sea, the Lord counseled him that his sons should obtain wives and raise up seed unto him in the promised land. (*Ibid.*, 7:1.) Nephi and his brethren again were commanded to make the long and difficult journey to Jerusalem (they had previously obtained the brass plates), in order to recruit Ishmael and his family. We know little concerning Ishmael except that his family, in addition to his wife, consisted of two married sons, with their households, and five daughters. (*Ibid.*, 7:6.) The tradition in the Church that Ishmael was an Ephraimite is based on a discourse delivered by Apostle Erastus Snow, in Logan, Utah, May 6, 1882. Elder Snow said:

The Prophet Joseph Smith informed us that the record of Lehi was contained on

the 116 pages that were first translated and subsequently stolen, and of which an abridgment is given us in the First Book of Nephi, which is the record of Nephi individually, he himself being of the lineage of Manasseh; but that *Ishmael was of the lineage of Ephraim, and that his sons married into Lehi's family, and Lehi's sons married Ishmael's daughters, . . . (Journal of Discourses, vol. 23, p. 184; italics author's.)*

This statement not only implies that Ishmael was an Ephraimite, but in connection with Nephi's statements (I Nephi 7:6), strongly points to the fact that Father Lehi had daughters—at least two—who had married the sons of Ishmael. In other words, Lehi was the father-in-law of Ishmael's sons. This fact would clearly account for the casual and taken-for-granted attitude of Nephi (typically Oriental) when he mentions Ishmael and his family:

And it came to pass that the Lord commanded him [Lehi] that I, Nephi, and my brethren, should again return unto the land

of Jerusalem, and bring down Ishmael and his family into the wilderness. (*Ibid.*, 7:2.)

Notice that no explanation is given regarding the identity of Ishmael. The reader might well expect an explanation from Nephi concerning Ishmael's identity, particularly if Ishmael had no close family relationship to Lehi. None is forthcoming, which fact points strongly in favor of Joseph Smith's explanation as delivered by Elder Snow. Some words of Dr. Hugh Nibley are very appropriate on this point:

Lehi, faced with the prospect of a long journey in the wilderness, sent back for Ishmael, who promptly followed into the desert with a large party; this means that he must have been hardly less adept at moving about than Lehi himself. The interesting thing is that Nephi takes Ishmael [unlike Zoram] completely for granted, never explaining who he is or how he fits into the picture—the act of sending for him seems to be the most natural thing in the

(Concluded on page 694)



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(Concluded from page 642)

world, as does the marriage of his daughters with Lehi's sons. Since it has ever been the custom among the desert people for a man to marry the daughter of his paternal uncle [*bint 'ammi*], it is hard to avoid the impression that Lehi and Ishmael were related.¹

The thesis of my article is reinforced and practically secured by a seldom-noticed and almost forgotten statement of Nephi's in describing the final separation of his followers from the dissident elements among the Nephites:

Wherefore, it came to pass that I, Nephi, did take my family, and also Zoram and his family, and Sam, mine elder brother and his family, and Jacob and Joseph my younger brethren, *and also my sisters*, and all those who would go with me. . . . (II Nephi 5:6; italics author's.)

For the first time, Nephi mentions having sisters. To be sure, he does not refer to his sisters as the wives of Ishmael's two sons, but that they were is almost certain in view of the fact that no mention is made of Lehi's having other children following the birth of Jacob and Joseph.² What is remarkable is that these daughters of Lehi were willing to leave their husbands, the sons of Ishmael, if they were still living, and follow Nephi after having rebelled against him during the trip from Jerusalem into the wilderness. (*Ibid.*, 7:6.) Doubtless the details of this story will, in time, be made fully known to us.

¹"Lehi in the Desert," THE IMPROVEMENT ERA, Vol. 53, (February, 1950) p. 156.

²It must be recognized, of course, that there is a remote possibility that the "sisters" mentioned by Nephi were born to Lehi on this continent and were not the wives of Ishmael's sons. That the birth of the girls is not mentioned agrees with good Oriental custom. That Lehi had at least four daughters is a possibility that must be recognized by all students of the Book of Mormon. However, I repeat that it is a remote possibility particularly in the light of II Nephi 3:1 where Joseph is referred to as Lehi's "last-born." But to Orientals "first-born" and "last-born" are applied mostly to sons.

"Where There's a Will..."

(Continued from page 647)

choose to answer. The pressure on the school administration to open the gym was growing, and the students could feel the tension of the situation in their classes. Teachers had been forbidden to go to the youth center.

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