

Nephi's Sisters

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. And all those who would go with me were those who believed in the warnings and the revelations of God; wherefore, they did hearken unto my words.

2 Nephi 5:6

Nephi mentions his sisters only once, which is strange considering that they must have made the trek through the wilderness and the voyage across the sea with him. They are mentioned not long after the arrival in the promised land, when Nephi found it necessary to physically separate himself, his family, and all those who believed in God from his older brothers Laman and Lemuel. The Lord warned him that his life was in danger and commanded Nephi that he should flee into the wilderness with all those who would follow him. In the list of those who chose to leave with him, Nephi mentioned his immediate family, Zoram and his family, Sam and his family, his younger brothers Jacob and Joseph, and his sisters.

There are several different explanations about who these sisters might have been. The first is that Sariah could have given birth to daughters in the wilderness, but seeing as the births of Jacob and Joseph were mentioned and no other births were, this scenario seems less likely. Another option is that Nephi was referring to his sisters-in-law and not biological sisters. Though it seems strange that Laman and Lemuel's wives would come with him, and since Nephi had already mentioned that Sam and his family were accompanying him, it might be a bit redundant. It is also possible that Nephi was using the term "sister" to refer to a believer of Christ, like we refer to one another as "brother" or "sister" today in the Church.

Another possibility is that they *were* his biological sisters, who were married to Ishmael's older sons. In a discourse given in 1882, Apostle Erastus Snow stated that "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."⁵¹

The possibility that Lehi and Sariah had other children, daughters who married Ishmael's sons *before* Lehi received the commandment to leave Jerusalem, might explain why Nephi and his brothers seemed so casual about going back to Jerusalem to get Ishmael and his family. They were going back to get their sisters! It also helps us understand why Ishmael and his household may have agreed to leave and follow Lehi into the desert. These were families that were already intimately connected by marriage.

It is also interesting that if Ishmael's son's wives were in fact Nephi's sisters, that they—along with their husbands—rebelled against him on their first foray into the wilderness (see 1 Ne. 7:6). They would also have been among the group that, while on the voyage across the ocean, made “themselves merry” and sang and danced with “much rudeness . . . yea, they were lifted up unto exceeding rudeness” (1 Ne. 18:9). It appears that the wives of Ishmael's sons often sided with Laman and Lemuel more than they did with Nephi.

Their previous association with the dissenting group makes the fact that Nephi mentions them as being among those who separated from Laman and Lemuel and went with him into the wilderness surprising. Did they have a change of heart after they landed in the promised land? Did their attitudes soften toward Nephi so that they no longer identified with Laman and Lemuel? Did their husbands feel similarly, or did they leave their husbands behind

when they fled with Nephi into the wilderness? Any of those scenarios is possible.

Yet the one thing we do know is that Nephi's sisters, whoever they were, were among the group that chose to “keep the judgments, and the statutes, and the commandments of the Lord in all things” (2 Ne. 5:10). They worked with Nephi and his family to build a righteous community, which was industrious and prosperous. They had the sacred records from which to learn and even built a temple (vs. 16). Nephi's sisters were pioneers, paving righteous foundations for the Nephite nation that would blossom upon their promised land. Regardless of the poor choices they may have made, these sisters chose to keep God's commandments and, as Nephi wrote, they “lived after the manner of happiness” (vs. 27).

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*“They lived
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• Lehi's Group at a Glance •

One of the most beautiful aspects of Nephi's account in the Book of Mormon is that it is told completely in a first person narrative. This is a rare thing in the scriptures! Most of the scriptural stories we have are abridgements of records, retellings of stories from others who have read, heard, or written about them. Yet we get stories and gospel teaching told directly from Nephi—in his own words and voice. This personal narrative draws us deeply into the drama of Nephi's family as they leave Jerusalem, travel in the wilderness, sail across the sea, and build a home in the promised land. We come to know the women who traveled with him intimately. Here is a quick rundown of who was in the group.

• Men •	• Women •
Lehi	Sariah
Ishmael	Ishmael's wife
Laman	Ishmael's daughter who married Laman
Lemuel	Ishmael's daughter who married Lemuel
Sam	Ishmael's daughter who married Sam
Nephi	Ishmael's daughter who married Nephi
Zoram	Ishmael's daughter who married Zoram
Ishmael's sons (at least two)	Wives of Ishmael's sons (possibly Nephi's sisters, see page 45)
Jacob (born in wilderness)	
Joseph (born in wilderness)	



Daughters of Laman and Lemuel

And it came to pass that after my father had made an end of speaking to the sons and daughters of Laman, he caused the sons and daughters of Lemuel to be brought before him. And he spake unto them, saying: Behold, my sons and my daughters, who are the sons and the daughters of my second son; behold I leave unto you the same blessing which I left unto the sons and daughters of Laman; wherefore, thou shalt not utterly be destroyed; but in the end thy seed shall be blessed.

(2 Nephi 4:3–4, 8–9)

Before he died, Lehi, following the example of Old Testament patriarchs like Isaac and Jacob, called his family together and blessed each of his sons and their families. He began with his son Jacob, then Joseph, Laman, and Lemuel⁵² and their families, followed by Ishmael's sons,⁵³ and ending with Sam. It is clear from Lehi's word choice that he intended these blessings to be for *all* of his posterity—his daughters and granddaughters as well as his sons and grandsons. His blessing to Laman began, “Behold, my sons, and my *daughters*, who are the sons and the *daughters* of my firstborn, I would that ye should give ear unto my words” (2 Ne. 4:3, emphasis added).

The obvious inclusion of women in Lehi's patriarchal blessings is important. The Old Testament has several examples of patriarchs blessing their families before their deaths (see Genesis 27 and 49). Yet, as far as we know, the recipients of those blessings were only sons. The fact that Lehi included his daughters and granddaughters in his final blessing indicates that perhaps anciently it was normal to give patriarchal blessings to women as well as men, which helps expand our view of women in the Old Testament and in the Book of Mormon.

We might not think of the blessings that Lehi gave his family as patriarchal blessings because he did not declare the lineage of his children like our modern Church patriarchs do today.⁵⁴ Yet, the word *patriarch* means “father,” so technically any blessing given by a father to his children is a *patriarchal* blessing. Elder John A. Widtsoe stated, “Every father, having children born to him under the covenant, is to them a patriarch, and he has the right to bless his posterity in the authority of the priesthood which he holds.”⁵⁵ Eliza R. Snow, the second president of the Relief Society, also taught, “With the restoration of the fullness of the gospel came also the ancient order of patriarchal blessings. Each father, holding the priesthood, stands as a patriarch, at the head of his family, with invested right and power to bless his household, and

to predict concerning the future, on the heads of his children, as did Jacob of old.”⁵⁶

Nephi wrote that Lehi blessed his family “according to the feelings of his heart and the Spirit of the Lord” (2 Ne. 4:12). I think that is such a wonderful description of a father’s blessing; the desires and pleadings of a father’s heart mixed with revelation and the will of the Lord. Lehi’s blessings certainly reflected this divine combination. He poured out his heart to his children, giving them powerful promises, warnings, and inspired teachings.⁵⁷

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Lehi told Laman and Lemuel’s children that he could not go down to his grave without leaving them a blessing because he knew that “if ye are brought up in the way ye should go ye will not depart from it” (vs. 4). It is interesting to note that Lehi did not give a blessing to Laman and Lemuel; he simply warned them

to listen to Nephi and instead directed his blessing at his grandchildren.⁵⁸ Perhaps, after having spent most of his life dealing with Laman and Lemuel’s disbelief and bad behavior, Lehi had decided to focus on the next generation.

Lehi seems to have recognized that his grandchildren’s hearts were good, but he knew that because of their parents, they would not be taught truth or to follow God’s commandments. His response to this heartbreaking situation was to promise his grandchildren, “If ye are cursed,” through disobedience to God’s commandments, “that the cursing may be taken from you and be answered upon the heads of your parents” (vs. 6). What a remarkable thing to promise!

He then told them that “because of my blessing the Lord God will not suffer ye shall perish” and that the Lord would be “merciful unto you and unto your seed forever” (vs. 7). Lehi’s promise was almost like a counter-curse in a fairy story, providing an escape for his grandchildren who would be “cursed” by their parent’s disobedience to God’s law, giving them the opportunity to repent and become a righteous people.

Lehi’s promise was honored by the Lord. There are numerous times throughout the Book of Mormon when God’s mercy is extended toward the Lamanites. Miracles among the Lamanites, like the conversion of the people of Anti-Nephi-Lehi by Ammon and his brothers,⁵⁹ occur several times in the Book of Mormon. There are even times when the Lamanites become the righteous people, and the Nephites become wicked (see Helaman 6:35–38). However, the culmination of Lehi’s blessing can be seen at the

end of the Book of Mormon when, due to their wickedness, the Nephites are completely destroyed. It is the Lamanites, the posterity of Laman and Lemuel, who survived and inherited the land of promise. More than a thousand years after they had been promised that “because of my blessing the Lord God will not suffer ye shall perish” (vs. 7), Laman and Lemuel’s posterity were still being blessed by the power of Lehi’s patriarchal blessing.

The magnitude of Lehi’s blessings reminds us of the power a father’s blessing can have in a woman’s life. One of the most powerful stories I’ve heard about a father’s blessing is told by Agnes Erdos Palm in the book *Surviving Hitler* by O. Hakan Palm. Agnes, who would eventually marry a German soldier and join The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, was taken with her mother and father to a concentration camp during World War II. On their journey to the camp, Agnes was given a blessing by her father. She remembered,

Numb, we fell asleep but were awakened by the train’s monotonous motion and hard thumps. It must have been on the morning of July 6 when in a low voice my father said to me, “Sit up, my girl. Following Israel’s old example and the traditions of our ancestors, I want to give you a patriarchal blessing.” I was not surprised, even though we had been faithful Catholics for many years. All around us, older men were laying their hands on the heads of their family members, murmuring blessings in Hebrew. I did not understand anything that they said.

My father laid his hands upon my head and in the Hungarian language put into words his patriarchal blessing. In the blessing, he said that Mother’s life and his days of torment would soon be over.

They would be killed and be with God; however, they would not suffer. Father continued his blessing and told me that in spite of much suffering, I would survive. I was young and of a pure heart. Father’s spirit would protect me so that I would eventually find “the truth.” He assured me that in the future we would be reunited with God and His Son Jesus Christ. For me it felt very natural that Father, who was a Catholic, should give me a Jewish blessing. I never wondered about the strangeness of this. My father said many other things, but I do not remember everything. I felt strongly that what he stated was right and would come true. Despite the almost unbearable conditions in the freight car, I had my internal calm.⁶⁰

Sadly, Agnes’s parents were killed in a gas chamber immediately upon their arrival at Auschwitz. However, as her father’s blessing promised, Agnes was spared. Her father’s blessing also helped her survive the concentration camp. She wrote that once, after having been served rotten food at the concentration camp, she

heard my father’s voice and words inside of me. I remembered his blessing. Strengthened by that memory, I decide to fight to stay alive. So, I took a deep breath and forced myself to eat all the food. . . . I became determined to do whatever I could to survive and make Father’s blessing come true.⁶¹

Agnes’s father, though unpracticed in giving blessings, was able to prophesy of her future and to bless her with the strength she would need to survive. In his role as the patriarch of his family, he gave her his final blessing. Later in her life, when she was baptized a member of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, she remembered how her father had blessed her that she would find “the truth.” She felt that it was her father’s blessing

which had led her and her husband to find the Church. Like the blessing Lehi gave Laman and Lemuel's daughters, the blessing Agnes received blessed not only her but also future generations.

Recently, President Russell M. Nelson stated that as a church we are not fully accessing the privileges available to us, including the power available to us through priesthood blessings. He stated,

I fear that too many of our brothers and sisters do not grasp the privileges that could be theirs. Some of our brethren, for example, act like they do not understand what the priesthood is and what it enables them to do. . . . Not long ago, I attended a sacrament meeting in which a new baby was to be given a name and a father's blessing. The young father held his precious infant in his arms, gave her a name, and then offered a beautiful prayer. But he did not give that child a blessing. That sweet baby girl got a name but no blessing! That dear elder did not know the difference between a prayer and a priesthood blessing. With his priesthood authority and power, he could have blessed his infant, but he did not. I thought, "What a missed opportunity!"

. . . We know of brethren who set sisters apart as Primary, Young Women, or Relief Society leaders and teachers but fail to bless them—to bless them with the power to fulfill their callings. They give only admonitions and instructions. We see a worthy father who fails to give his wife and his children priesthood blessings when that is exactly what they need. Priesthood power has been restored to this earth, and yet far too many brothers and sisters go through terrible trials in life without ever receiving a true priesthood blessing. What a tragedy! That's a tragedy that we can eliminate.

Brethren, we hold the holy priesthood of God! We have His authority to bless His people. Just think of the remarkable assurance the Lord gave us when He said, "Whomsoever you bless I will bless." It is our privilege to act in the name of Jesus Christ to bless God's children according to His will for them.⁶²

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Just as the men in the Church may not be grasping the privilege given to them to bless and prophesy concerning their families, women in the Church may not be grasping the privilege available to them to ask for and receive blessings, especially father's blessings. In his role as a patriarch, a father mirrors the role of our Heavenly Father. A father, in blessing his children, becomes the mouthpiece for God. Consequently such blessings become a joint effort between our mortal father and our Heavenly Father, combining and delivering the promises and messages they *both* would have us receive. Asking for blessings may be hard for some women, but remembering that priesthood blessings do not just come from mortal men but also directly from our Heavenly

Father may change our feelings about asking for and receiving blessings.

Significantly, Lehi's granddaughters showed up to receive their blessing from him even when there were hard feelings between the families of Laman and Lemuel and the rest of Lehi's family. Those daughters must have felt like they were on the margins of the family, separate and different in many ways. Yet despite their differences and their hard past with their grandfather, these daughters received their blessing. It may not have been easy, and they may not have wanted to be there or even believed in what Lehi told them—but they came. Their willingness to receive

their blessing changed the future, not only for them but also for generations after them.

The story of the daughters of Laman and Lemuel and the magnitude of the promise they received from their grandfather Lehi is a reminder of the power available to all of us through priesthood blessings. It is the privilege of every father to prophesy and promise his posterity blessings, and it is the privilege of every daughter to *receive* those blessings—blessings that don't come just from our mortal fathers, but also from our Heavenly Father. My challenge for you is to honor that privilege and to ask your father for his blessing; you never know who it will bless.