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Women of the Book of Mormon

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Abstract: In the ancient world Hebrew women had more status than in other cultures. Their chastity was imperative under the Mosaic law. Book of Mormon women inherited this culture. Though only three women are named in the book, references to women, mothers, and daughters are numerous.

Guide Lessons.

LESSON I.

Theology and Testimony.

FIRST WEEK IN FEBRUARY.

WOMEN OF THE BOOK OF MORMON.

(Home Reading: II Nephi, Jacob, Omni, Jarom, Words of Mormon.)

“And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free” (John 8:32).

These words of scripture find marvelous verification in the case of the Hebrew woman from whom the woman of the Book of Mormon is in reality descended. From the first word of history, found in the Bible, to the Greek historian Herodotus, down to the great Italian Ferrero, who has written almost the last word on this subject, historians are agreed that the status of the Hebrew woman as to personal liberty was far above that of any other of her sex, at a corresponding period. Even the Egyptian woman, who enjoyed greater privileges than most other women of her time, had no liberty that approached the liberty the Hebrew woman enjoyed.

Contrast the personal liberty of Rebekah, the gallantry of Isaac, the personal liberty of Rachel and Ruth, with the fate of the Greek woman, who was plotted against, and stolen at night by men who wished to possess her; or the Roman woman who had no legal rights, but who might be sold as a slave by her husband.

The Mosaic law made the chastity of women imperative; the Greek custom made chastity an impossibility. The Hebrew woman mingled with men in their gatherings and went before them to war with song and dance, and was sometimes a judge in Israel as was Deborah. The life of the Greek woman was the life of the harem.

Now this superior liberty enjoyed by the Hebrew woman came as an inheritance to the woman of the Book of Mormon, by virtue of her descent from that people.

Only three women are mentioned by name in the Book of Mormon. The words “woman” and “women” occur about forty-seven times in all, and a goodly number of those references are

to the fact that Christ should be born of woman. The words "mother" and "mothers" occur about forty times; the words "daughter" and "daughters" occur about sixty times. The word "wife" occurs at least thirty times; the word "wives" is to be found about fifty times.

Still, any statistics of the sort given are no measure of power and influence; but the fact that the book speaks of mothers rather than mother, of wives rather than wife, of daughters rather than daughter, clearly indicates that we must consider the woman of the Book of Mormon as a group rather than as individuals. To be sure, there are occasional references to women in the Book of Ether, but so few that our discussion must deal with the women of the Nephites and the Lamanites almost entirely.

The three women are, first Sariah, the wife of Lehi, whose name reminds us of nothing so much as the two names borne by the wife of Abraham, whose lot it was to be the mother of all God's chosen people, even as it was the lot of Sariah to be the mother of the branch that ran over the wall.

The second woman called by name is Abish the Lamanitish woman, who lived in the palace of King Lamoni, and was servant maid to the queen, and who long before her had been converted to the gospel.

Isabel, a harlot, is the third woman whose name is perpetuated by the sacred record. Perpetuated, to our great regret, for evil; for it was she who by her personal charm lured Corianton into sin, thereby bringing disgrace upon the Church and his honored father's name.

Now to turn to the women who form the group of the women of the Book of Mormon. What do we know of them?

First, we know that above all else they were wives and mothers, home makers and home keepers. Many passages in the Book of Mormon bring the fact to the fore, while many other passages make prominent the solicitude felt for the wives and mothers; for the men waged war in defense of their wives, their children, and their families.

Second, we know that like the Puritan grandam, and the pioneer mother, she did spin her own cloth, and fashioned and made the garments worn by herself and her family. We are told that the garments worn by the two thousand young men who went forth to battle with Helaman, were made by their mothers. Both Mosiah and Helaman speak of the women spinning. Then, too, these women of the Western world were pioneers of two great continents. So, too, were they the daughters and wives of men who did service in many wars. Very likely they knew something of conservation. At all events they must have known something of the art and science of agriculture and other arts, without the

cultivation of which it is impossible for man to subsist upon the earth.

Yet it was not all pioneering. Neither was it all battle; for these people grew strong in the land and became very prosperous, possessing much riches. Then the women arrayed themselves in silks and fine linen, in gold and silver, and wore many costly jewels. Again and again the servants of the Lord reminded them of their pride in relation to such matters. This passion for color, this love of jewelry, links them to the past, their Asiatic home; for then as now the far East is the land of beautiful silks and gorgeous colors. This trait seems to have persisted with them even in their degeneracy. Mr. Cyrus E. Dallin, one of America's great sculptors, tells us that as a little ragged urchin, standing in the streets of Springville, he marveled much the first time he saw the American Indian in gala attire. He said, "He seemed to me like a being from another world, and as I looked at the rich coloring of his blankets, and the various ornaments with which he adorned himself, I knew that he possessed an art unknown to us."

The lives of the women, as to faith and good works, righteousness and the lack of righteousness, seem to run parallel with the men. The dark skin, generally so loathed by the white-skinned races, the badge of their disobedience, perchance was harder for the women to bear than the men. It is pretty generally agreed that physical charm and grace are more generally possessed by women than by men, just as men more generally possess superior physical strength than women; hence the great misfortune to the woman that she should have brought upon herself such condemnation.

At times the magnificence of the faith of the women, the sublimity of their teachings stands forth in might.

It was about the year 66 B. C. when the Nephite forces had suffered defeat at the hands of the Lamanites. The people of Ammon had taken an oath never more to do battle, but their sons had not taken this oath, consequently two thousand young men went forth under Helaman. When necessity forced action, their leader said that they had no fear of death, "for," said they, "our mothers have taught us, that if we do not doubt, that God will deliver us." They told their gallant leader the things their mothers said, saying, "We do not doubt that they knew." With this faith to sustain them they made mighty warriors. The battle won and the roll called showed not a man lost. It was all victory. The Lamanites had been defeated; the young warriors were all living, and above all else the faith of the mothers, and the faith of the sons who had learned this faith from the mothers, had triumphed.

Would that the above were the only story we have to relate

of the Nephite woman and war. Would that we might conclude by telling you of Christ's visit to this people and how He lifted the burdens of the women and children, and finally how the faith of the women combined with the men made it possible for the establishment of the United Order, the perfect social law, that does away with that friction with which their lives and our lives is so often cursed. But it can not be. We must close with a chapter of war most terrible, for women engaged in deadly combat, of mothers placing weapons in their children's hands with which to fight! But why say more? The story of the capture of their prisoners, the terrible cruelty and barbarity practiced, reminds us of nothing so much as our modern history; only that where they slew tens of thousands we slay millions; and where they fought with the same fierceness and abandonment that we do today, still they had not our engines of war, nor our deadly gases to intensify that fierceness.

Under these dreadful conditions the Nephite nation passed away, leaving the Lamanites, a remnant of whom is found upon the land. Their only hope, our only hope, the gospel of Christ that shall in time bring that peace that passeth all understanding.

QUESTIONS.

1. Compare the status of the Hebrew woman, as to personal liberty, with that of the status of other women living at the same time.
2. Show that the women of the Book of Mormon are descendants of the Hebrew race.
3. Why did the Mosaic law make the chastity of women imperative, and the Greek custom make it impossible?
4. Tell the story of the conversion of Abish.
5. What occupation was common to the women of the Book of Mormon? The Puritan grandam, and the Pioneer mother?
6. For what tendency have women often been reproved by the prophets in all ages?
7. What Indian trait seems to link the American to Jewish ancestry?
8. Why is the story of the two thousand young men who went forth to battle with Helaman of special significance just now?
9. Compare some of the features of our present war with the last great battle waged by the Nephites.
10. How were the women of the Book of Mormon included in the last great battle?