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## Domestic Life Among the Nephites

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**Abstract:** Nephite women were descendants of Hebrew women, who had to adapt to a semi-tropical climate. The architecture of their homes was perhaps related to the Hebrew custom of hollow squares, flat roofs, and a courtyard in the center. While home life was simple and pleasant, the women were industrious.

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# Guide Lessons.

## LESSON I.

### Theology and Testimony.

FIRST WEEK IN MARCH.

#### DOMESTIC LIFE AMONG THE NEPHITES.

Knowing that the Nephites were originally Hebrews we would expect to find their domestic habits and customs resembling those of their Israelitish forefathers, modified necessarily by changed environment and the lapse of time. The semi-tropical lands from which they came were found in climate at least through the upper part of South America and in Mexico, yet many strange and new animals, with unknown and unusual vegetable productions, necessitated adaptation by this isolated people.

That master writer, Prescott, who was himself skeptical to the last degree, in his history of the conquest of Peru and Mexico, takes pains to sneer at the reports made by the Catholic priests who accompanied Cortez when he conquered Mexico. These priests were astounded at the likeness of religious and domestic customs to the Israelitish traditions and habits. They found the ceremony of baptism administered to children, a belief in Christ, traditions of the Flood, many of the hygienic laws of Moses, sacrifice, etc., etc. (See Vol. 3, pages 317-328, Prescott's *Conquest of Mexico*. If possible, these extracts should be read in this lesson.)

The Hebrew custom of building houses in the form of a hollow square with a court in the center was followed by the Aztecs and earlier races of the Toltecs. The flat roofs upon which the family spent their evenings and mornings were also used by the Nephites. The chambers were on one side of the house, the official apartments on another, and often the domestic animals were housed on another side of the court. Within the court were trees, flowers and fountains. The women were industrious. The prophets in the Book of Mormon inculcated industry, thrift and moderation in dress. Like the Hebrew women they engaged in spinning and weaving the cloth which clothed their families. We know they had fine silk, fine twined or twisted linen, and cloth of many varieties.

Like all oriental women, and indeed like all women, they loved ornaments. We read of golden ear-rings and bracelets, of ornaments of gold, or silver and of precious things—no doubt

these were gems made into bracelets and worn in their ringlets.

The garments of the men and women, like those of their Hebrew fathers, did not differ so much in shape and material for the two sexes. The women's dress was longer, and both were marked by a tunic or inner garment with a mantle or outer garment worn over it. The outer garments were worn sometimes for several generations and handed down from mother to daughter, so excellent was the material and so lasting was its quality. Beautiful embroidery and fine needlework distinguished the clothing of the wealthier classes. Embroidered vests, wide flowing mantles, girdles and veils were sometimes worn by those who could afford them.

Nor were the women alone in their love of ornament and bright colors. Gorgeous indeed was the apparel of the wealthy Nephites, and great was their love of luxury and display.

Wonderful palaces were constructed, which were elegant and spacious, adorned with fine wood-carving and containing ornaments of gold, silver, brass, copper and ziff.

The food of the people resembled that of other tropical lands, wheat, corn and barley being the staples, with many fruit trees and grape vines. While the Nephites did not use as much meat as did the Lamanites, still they were provided luxuriously from the flesh of their flocks and herds.

Very little mention is made of chariots in the Book of Mormon. The means of locomotion was unquestionably the horse, the jackass, the llama and the alpaca. Locomotion was slow and yet the people often undertook great journeys and migrated comparatively swiftly from place to place.

The domestic life was simple, cheerful and informal. We hear little of music among them, but we know they had many and good schools. They were exceedingly virtuous as have been all of their Lamanite descendants, even up to the present day. We have quoted in this number the following extracts from Prescott's *Conquest of Mexico*:

"The women, as in other parts of the country, seemed to go about as freely as the men. They wore several skirts or petticoats of different lengths, with highly ornamented borders, and sometimes over them loose, flowing robes, which reached to the ankles. These, also, were made of cotton, for the wealthier classes, of a fine texture, prettily embroidered. No veils were worn here, as in some other parts of Anahuac, where they were made of the aloe thread, or of the light weave of hair, above noticed. The Aztec women had their faces exposed; and their dark, raven tresses floated luxuriantly over their shoulders, revealing features, which, although of a dusky or rather cinnamon hue, were not un-

frequently pleasing, while touched with the serious, even sad, expression characteristic of the national physiognomy."

In connection with this extract concerning the serious cast of countenance, note this from the Book of Mormon;

"We being a lonesome and a solemn people, wanderers, cast out from Jerusalem" (Jacob 7:26). How true this is, even of the Lamanites to this day!

Readings: Chap. 54, Reynold's *Story of the Book of Mormon*; Prescott's *Conquest of Mexico and Peru*.

#### QUESTIONS.

What evidence have we that the Nephites were originally Hebrews?

How did the Hebrews build their homes?

What costumes did the Hebrews wear?

What costumes did the Nephites wear?

What ornaments were used?

Why do women love adornment?

Why is excessive adornment denounced by sacred writers?

What foods supplied the Nephites?

Who were the Aztecs? (See encyclopedia or history.)

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#### ADVICE OF AN AZTEC MOTHER TO HER DAUGHTER.

Translated from Sahagun's "*Historia de Nueva Espana*," Lib. VI., Cap. XIX.

"The first thing that I earnestly charge upon you is that you observe and do not forget what your father has now told you, since it is all very precious; and persons of his condition rarely publish such things; for they are the words which belong to the noble and wise,—valuable as rich jewels. See, then, that you take them and lay them up in your heart, and write them in your bowels. If God gives you life, with these same words will you teach your sons and daughters, if God shall give you them? The second thing that I desire to say to you is, that I love you much, that you are my dear daughter. Remember that nine months I bore you in my womb, that you were born and brought up in my arms. I placed you in your cradle, and in my lap, and with my milk I nursed you. This I tell you, in order that you may know that I and your father are the source of your being; it is we who now instruct you. See that you receive our words, and treasure them in your breast. Take care that your garments are such as are decent and proper; and observe that you do not adorn yourself with much finery, since this is a mark of vanity and of folly. As little becoming is it, that your dress should be very mean, dirty, or ragged; since rags are a mark of the low, and of those who are held in contempt. Let your clothes be becoming and neat, that you may neither appear fantastic nor mean. When you speak, do not hurry your words from uneasiness, but speak deliberately and calmly. Do not raise your voice very high, nor speak very low, but in a moderate tone. Neither mince, when you speak, nor when you salute, nor speak through your nose; but let your



words be proper, of a good sound, and your voice gentle. Do not be over nice in the choice of your words. In walking, my daughter, see that you behave becomingly, neither going with haste, nor too slowly; since it is an evidence of being puffed up, to walk too slowly, and walking hastily causes a vicious habit of restlessness and instability. Therefore neither walk very fast, nor very slow; yet, when it shall be necessary to go with haste, do so; in this use your discretion. And when you may be obliged to jump over a pool of water, do it with decency, that you may neither appear clumsy nor light. When you are in the street, do not carry your head much inclined, or your body bent; nor as little go with your head very much raised; since it is a mark of ill breeding; walk erect, and with your head slightly inclined. Do not have your mouth covered, or your face, from shame, nor go looking like a near-sighted person, nor, on your way, make fantastic movements with your feet. Walk through the street quietly, and with propriety. Another thing that you must attend to, my daughter, is that, when you are in the street, you do not go looking hither and thither, nor turning your head to look at this and that; walk neither looking at the skies, nor on the ground. Do not look upon those whom you meet with the eyes of an offended person, nor have the appearance of being uneasy; but of one who looks upon all with a serene countenance; doing this, you will give no one occasion of being offended with you. Show a becoming countenance; that you may neither appear morose, nor, on the other hand, too complaisant. See, my daughter, that you give yourself no concern about the words you may hear, in going through the street, nor pay any regard to them. Let those who come and go say what they will. Take care that you neither answer nor speak, but act as if you neither heard nor understood them; since, doing in this manner, no one will be able to say with truth that you have said anything amiss. See, likewise, my daughter, that you never paint your face, or stain it on your lips with colors, in order to appear well; since this is a mark of vile and unchaste women. Paints and coloring are things which bad women use—the immodest, who have lost all shame, and even sense, who are like fools and drunkards, and are called *rameras* (prostitutes). But, that your husband may not dislike you, adorn yourself, wash yourself, and cleanse your clothes, and let this be done with moderation; since, if every day you wash yourself and your clothes, it will be said of you, that you are over-nice, too delicate; they will call you *tapepetzon tinemaxoch*.—My daughter, this is the course you are to take; since in this manner the ancestors from whom you spring brought us up. Those noble and venerable dames, your grandmothers, told us not so many things as I have told you; they said but few words and spoke thus: "Listen, my daughters; in this world, it is necessary to live with much prudence and circumspection. Hear this allegory, which I shall now tell you, and preserve it, and take from it a warning and example for living aright. Here, in this world, we travel a very narrow, steep, and dangerous road, which is as a lofty mountain ridge, on whose top passes a narrow path; on either side is a great gulf without bottom, and, if you deviate from the path, you will fall into it. There is need, therefore, of much discretion in pursuing the road." My tenderly loved daughter, my little dove, keep this illustration in your heart, and see that you do not forget it; it will be to you as a lamp and a beacon, so long as you shall live in this world. Only one thing remains to be said, and I have done. If God shall give you life, if you shall continue some years upon the earth, see that you guard yourself carefully, that no stain come upon you; should you forfeit your chastity, and afterwards be asked in marriage and should marry any one, you will never be fortunate, nor have true love; he will

always remember that you were not a virgin, and this will be the cause of great affliction and distress; you will never be at peace, for your husband will always be suspicious of you. O, my dearly beloved daughter, if you shall live upon the earth, see that not more than one man approaches you; and observe what I now shall tell you, as a strict command. When it shall please God that you receive a husband, and you are placed under his authority, be free from arrogance, see that you do not neglect him, nor allow your heart to be in opposition to him. Be not disrespectful to him. Beware, that, in no time or place, you commit the treason against him, called adultery. See that you give no favor to another; since this, my dear and much beloved daughter, is to fall into a pit without bottom, from which there will be no escape. According to the custom of the world, if it shall be known, for this crime they will kill you, they will throw you into the street, for an example to all the people, where your head will be crushed and dragged upon the ground. Of these says a proverb: "You will be stoned and dragged upon the earth, and others will take warning at your death." From this will arise a stain and dishonor upon our ancestors, the nobles and senators from whom we are descended. You will tarnish their illustrious fame, and their glory, by the filthiness and impurity of your sin. You will, likewise, lose your reputation, your nobility, and honor of birth; your name will be forgotten and abhorred. Of you it will be said, that you were buried in the dust of your sins. And remember, my daughter, that, though no man shall see you, nor your husband ever know what happens, God, who is in every place, sees you, will be angry with you, and will also excite the indignation of the people against you, and will be avenged upon you as he shall see fit. By his command, you shall either be maimed, or struck blind, or your body will wither, or you will come to extreme poverty, for daring to injure your husband. Or, perhaps, he will give you to death, and put you under his feet, sending you to the place of torment. Our Lord is compassionate; but, if you commit treason against your husband, God, who is in every place, shall take vengeance on your sin, and will permit you to have neither contentment, nor repose, nor a peaceful life; and he will excite your husband to be always unkind towards you, and always to speak to you with anger. My dear daughter, whom I tenderly love, see that you live in the world of peace, tranquility, and contentment, all the days that you shall live. See that you disgrace not yourself, that you stain not your honor, nor pollute the luster and fame of your ancestors. See that you honor me and your father, and reflect glory on us by your good life. May God prosper you, my first-born, and may you come to God, who is in every place.—*Vol. III Prescott's "Conquest of Mexico and Peru."*

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#### HOUSEKEEPERS' CONFERENCE.

- Beginning January 21-29 there will be held in the Agricultural College at Logan a conference of housekeepers and home workers. The chairmen of our branch, of the Home Science Departments will find an especial course on Home Management and Bacteriology, planned to meet our general and particular needs. All subjects treated in our Correspondence Course will be given. You are all invited to attend.