



Type: Book Chapter

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## Chapter LVI

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Source: *The Story of the Book of Mormon*

Published: Salt Lake City; Joseph Hyrum Parry, 1888

Pages: 307-312

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**Abstract:** The Women of the Book of Mormon—Their Condition and Position—Abish—Isabel—Marriage—Amulek—Moroni's Title of Liberty—The Mothers of the Ammonites—Two Extremes

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begun to work on them. Thus Nephi, the son of Nephi the disciple, had charge of the records seventy-six years, his son Amos eighty-four years, and Amos, the son of the last named, the wonderful period of one hundred and twelve years; or father, son and grandson, three generations, a total of two hundred and seventy-two years. What a powerful sermon this one fact preaches in favor of entire submission of body and soul to the perfect and perfecting law of God.

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## CHAPTER LVI.

THE WOMEN OF THE BOOK OF MORMON—THEIR CONDITION  
AND POSITION.—ABISH—ISABEL.—MARRIAGE—AMULEK.

IT IS somewhat noticeable how little prominence is given to womankind in the historical narrative of the Book of Mormon, and unfortunately when mention is made of her it too frequently grows out of man's sins and her misfortunes. Of all the descendants of Lehi and Sariah, but two women are mentioned by name; one, Abish, a converted waiting woman to a queen of the Lamanites; the other, Isabel, a harlot of the land of Siron, whose meretricious charms seduced Corianton, the son of Alma, from the work of the ministry among the Zoramites.

Although we have but few individual characters standing out in relief from the historical background, yet from many incidental references as the story of the

Nephites is told, we are led to the conclusion that women among that people enjoyed a much greater degree of liberty, and wielded a more powerful influence than they did among contemporary Gentile nations on the eastern hemisphere—say in Babylon, Persia, or Greece. We deem this mainly attributable to two causes, first, the Israelitish origin of the race; and again, the power and grace with which the principles of the gospel were preached by a long succession of prophets, who almost uninterruptedly ministered to the seed of Nephi. That this latter cause had much to do with woman's pleasing condition among that people is evident, for we find from the historical narrative that whenever they turned from the Lord it was then that tribulation and oppression came upon their wives and daughters, and they suffered from the iniquities of their husbands and the fury of their enemies. With regard to the first named cause it is generally admitted that the Hebrew women of antiquity enjoyed greater liberty and possessed more privileges than did those of the surrounding nations of the same period. Let the Bible and the history of contemporary nations be compared and the difference is apparent.

The Nephites lived in a dispensation varying considerably from that of the latter days. They observed the law of Moses, to which was added the higher code of the gospel. Our readers know how well both these protect the rights of woman, and how sacredly they guard the marriage covenant; infidelity to that sacred bond of union being regarded, whether in the man or in the woman, as a most heinous offense, and worthy of the severest penalties.

At the commencement of the Nephite national life,

when they were few in numbers, they seem for a time to have been tainted with some of the social vices of the degenerate people from whom the Lord had separated them. They committed great immoralities and took wives for utterly unworthy purposes, and without the fear of the Lord before their eyes; and after they had taken them, they frequently abused or neglected them, until their suffering cries came up before the Eternal One, and heaven forbade any man among them taking more than one wife, but adding this proviso: For if I will, saith the Lord of Hosts, raise up seed unto me, I will command my people; otherwise they shall hearken to these things. This injunction, we are of the opinion, was afterwards removed, and the foreshadowed command given, as is evident from the later history of the Nephites, that in a better era of their national life polygamy was sanctioned by the law and practised among them, and that, indeed, by the men most favored of God. As an example, we will cite the prophet Amulek, the devoted friend and zealous fellow laborer of the younger Alma; the only man in all the vast city of Ammonihah to whom an angel was sent, and in whose behalf mighty miracles were wrought. He expressly mentions his women, and as he places them next to himself and before his children, his father and all his other kinsfolk and kindred, and nowhere uses the word wife or wives, it is evident that his wives were meant and not serving women. No one, surely, would argue that he would give to the latter the place of honor in his address to his fellow citizens, before his parents and his children. As another instance, the great number of Chief Judge Pahoran's sons is incidentally mentioned.

It was during the brighter days of the rule of the Judges that woman, more than at any time before the appearance of the Messiah on this continent, seems to have been most highly regarded and esteemed. The Nephites were then living under that excellent code of laws drawn up by the inspired king Mosiah, which bear evidence of having been most admirably adapted to a people worthy of a large amount of liberty. This age was adorned with the presence of such men as Alma, Moroni (the Prophet-General of the Nephite armies), Ammon and the other sons of king Mosiah, Helaman, Amulek and others conspicuous for their devotion to the laws of God and the rights and liberties of the people. General Moroni, than whom a more devoted man to the cause of truth and humanity never lived, is especially conspicuous in his untiring efforts for the safety and happiness of the wives and little ones of his people. On the standard to which he rallied the patriot warriors of the republic, which he named The Title of Liberty, he inscribed, In memory of our God, our religion and freedom, and our peace, our wives and our children. This seems to have been his watchward throughout the long and sanguinary succeeding campaigns, in which he defended the Nephites from the savage onslaughts of their Lamanitish foes. Again and again we find him rallying the hosts of Nephi with this soul stirring cry, and under the ardor it wrought in their hearts carrying triumph to their banners and freedom to their land. One series of events that occurred during this long war sheds a most pleasing light upon the inner life of the faithful among the Nephites; it is found in the story of Helaman and his two thousand striplings, who though very

young, were so full of the spirit of faith implanted in their hearts by the wise counsels of their loving and God-fearing mothers, that in the might of Jehovah they went forth against the enemies of their adopted country (for they were Lamanites by birth), and no power could withstand them. Their mothers' teachings and their mothers' prayers were weapons of destruction to their foes and shields of defence to themselves. They went forth conquering and to conquer, and the All-seeing One only knows how much the teachings of those saintly women effected towards the preservation of the Nephite commonwealth from imminent destruction.

And what shall we say of the condition of woman in that blessed Sabbatic era succeeding the glorious appearing of the Redeemer on this western land, when for two hundred years this continent enjoyed undisturbed and heavenly peace; when all men devoutly worshiped the Lord and dealt justly with their fellows — men or women? It was an age in which no woman was wronged, no deserted children pined in the streets, no abused wives mourned in secret, or lifted their sorrowing hearts in anguish to the Great Father of mankind; no brazen courtesans flaunted on the broad highways, or ruined maidens hid their sorrow and shame wherever seclusion was the most profound. The inspired historian tells us that if ever there were a happy people on this earth, there they were found; and most happy must have been the gentler ones, who bear in the stubborn battle of life so large a share of its sorrows and misfortunes.

But this golden age was soon followed by its opposite, when every virtue seems to have been sup-

planted by a vice, and all good was turned to evil. At almost lightning speed, the people having once taken the downward track, the nation rushed to ruin, until this continent became one vast field of carnage, rapine, and misery, over which devils gloated and hell enlarged itself. Indeed, the whole land seemed peopled with a race of demons who perpetrated cruelties that could alone be conceived in the hearts of the damned. During these lengthened years of untold horror the fair daughters of the land suffered unspeakable barbarities. Life, virtue, everything was the plaything of the victor, be he Nephite or Lamanite, until in the hate of revenge and the fury of despair they joined their national leaders on the battlefield, and with their husbands, sons and brothers, dyed their hands in the blood of the foe. Nor did they arm themselves alone, but with feelings turned to those of monsters, they put weapons into the hands of their children and inflamed their young minds with the savage love of slaughter. The war was not one for supremacy alone; it was for national and individual existence; and, midst a sea of carnage, unparalleled on any land save ours, the Nephite nation was swept out of existence, leaving scarce a trace behind, a most terrible instance of divine mercy scorned and divine laws abused.

