

Crowned in Charity and Power

written by Amber Richardson

The summer I turned 16 my ward traveled to Salt Lake City for our annual youth retreat. The pinnacle of the trip was a few hours spent inside the temple where we performed proxy baptisms together. The font—delicately wrought in white and gold—reminded me of the signature golden doorknobs outside of the temple. There weren't any beehives inside the baptistry though.

The font was elevated above the benches where we sat, and behind it there were two walkways that led into dressing rooms. Stephanie, who sat on the bench beside me, whispered, "She looks like an angel." I looked up. JJ Woolstenhulme, one of our Young Women's leaders, stood in her long white dress on a walkway. Comfortable with herself, she stood with an elongated, straight spine. She was a tall, slender woman, with a mane of rich brown curls.

JJ had always been exceptionally beautiful, but in that moment, there in that holy space, I noticed for the first time the love that was behind her eyes. It seemed to permeate her entire being. There was a royalty in that love, and a new and better kind of beauty.

Ten years later I found myself looking for the queenly maternal love I had seen in JJ Woolstenhulme that day. Until recently my search was fueled by desperation. Desperation because I thought I was looking for something external—the love of a Mother god. In pain I asked, "Where is my Mother? Why can't I feel my Mother's love?" And then one day I opened to Moroni 7:45.

"And charity suffereth long, and is kind, and envieth not, and is not puffed up, seeketh not her own, is not easily provoked, thinketh no evil, and rejoiceth not in iniquity, but rejoiceth in the truth, beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things."

To my still-lasting surprise, I began seeing *her* in the scriptures. I saw Her in charity, in metaphors, in Her son, and particularly in Her daughters. God is Love, and so is She I've learned. I began to believe that She was inside of me, and inside of all of Her daughters; we were created in Her image after all! In this sense we are all queens, or at least queens-in-training.

As I've continued my search I recently began wondering about queens. There are so many in the scriptures. Was there something I could learn from scriptural she-monarchs about the Queen of Heaven?

Esther

“And charity suffereth long, and is kind”

Esther came to mind first when I was putting together my list of scriptural queens, and no surprise. She is not only the most well known queen in holy writ, but arguably one of the most well known women. I thought I knew her story quite well. But right from the get go I discovered something unfamiliar to me; Esther’s given name was Hadassah.

Hadassah was a Jew in exile who lived with her cousin and surrogate father, Mordecai, in Persia during the reign of King Ahasuerus. You probably know the story. The king banished his first wife, and then selected Esther to be his new queen from among the beautiful virgins he added to his harem following the divorce.

Racial tensions must have already been high considering that Mordecai instructed Esther not to “show her people or her kindred” once she entered the palace. It was probably at this time that Esther took her new name. Hadassah was a Jewish name, which means myrtle tree, but Esther was Persian. Esther means star.

Stars, of course, never stop shining through day or night. But to our eyes, they appear to only shine against a blackened sky. In that sense the darker it gets the more visible a star becomes.

There were many long, dark nights in Esther’s story.

She became queen during the 7th year of Ahasuerus’ reign. Five years later Haman approached the King and convinced him to authorize the genocide order against the Jews. We know only a little about what transpired during those five years. But we do know that throughout them Esther continued to conceal her true identity, and was confined to life within the palace.

That must have been incredibly lonely for her. To communicate exclusively with Mordecai in stolen looks and the occasional letter. And to hear in snippets and whispers about the injustices her people faced. How powerless she must have felt.

At the end of the 12th year of Ahasuerus’ reign he signed Haman’s genocide order. Interestingly, it wouldn’t go into effect until 11 months from the day it was signed. The language of the proclamation was deeply disturbing. It commanded “all people” in the kingdom to be “ready against that day” to “kill and to cause to perish all Jews... and to take the spoil of them for a prey.”

While I’ve never awaited an impending doom of the magnitude Esther sat across from, I have anticipated diagnoses, surgery dates, rejections, and other life-altering deadlines. It takes a very specific kind of faith to successfully pass through months and months of anxiety all while inching closer to something devastating.

Fortunately, Esther didn't have to suffer through the entire 11 months. Mordecai wrote to Esther and sent her some of the most inspiring and persuasive words of the Old Testament: "And who knoweth whether thou art come to the kingdom for such a time as this?" In an act of stunning faith Esther responded and asked for all the Jews in Shushan to fast with her for three days. At the end of the fast Esther bravely entered the king's hall, and after two days of feasting Esther revealed her true self and her cause to King Ahasuerus.

After she singled out Haman as the Jews' oppressor Esther swayed the king to reverse his order. Finally, a full three months after he had signed the order, the King issued a new proclamation. In it, he "granted the Jews to gather themselves together, and to stand for their life, to destroy, to slay, and to cause to perish all the power of the people... that would assault them."

On the 13th day of the 12th month, the Jews did defend themselves. By royal decree of Esther the feast of Purim was instituted on that day to forever commemorate the liberation of her people. The scriptures say of this event "the Jews had light, and gladness, and joy, and honour." And so they did thanks to Esther, their queen and star.

There's an interesting tradition among followers of Judaism. They believe that Esther was the foretold subject of Psalms 22, because Psalms 22 is supposed to be sung to a tune entitled "The Star of the Morning." While I subscribe to the Christian interpretation—that Psalms 22 was written about Jesus Christ—I see such beauty in the Jewish tradition.

I like thinking of Esther as the morning star, a celestial body so radiant it shines through the night right up through the first moments of dawn. The morning star signals the coming entrance of the sun, which is something Esther did for her people. Through her glorious kindness and selflessness Esther set the stage for another redeemer who would follow her—the Savior of us all.

Vashti

"and envieth not, and is not puffed up, seeketh not her own"

No mention of queens in the Book of Esther would be complete without reference to Queen Vashti. Like many women in the scriptures, Vashti often gets a bad rap. Vashti was King Ahasuerus' former wife—before he married Esther. Within some religious circles Vashti's decision to disobey her husband has been interpreted as the pride before the fall—the fall being her ultimate banishment. She is often depicted as vain, envious, and only interested in her own welfare. But I think there's room for an alternative interpretation.

“And in those days... the king made a feast unto all the people that were present in Shushan... seven days in the court of the garden of the king’s palace... On the seventh day, when the heart of the king was merry with wine, he commanded... the seven chamberlains... to bring Vashti the queen before the king with her crown royal, to shew the people and the princes her beauty: for she was fair to look on.”

So, quick recap. The king and his princes had been drinking for an entire week. And when the king was “merry with wine” (not a good state of rational thinking for *anyone*) he decided to bring his attractive wife before his drinking partners, so that the whole group could ogle her together.

Is it any wonder that Vashti did not go?

“But the queen Vashti refused to come at the king’s commandment by his chamberlains: therefore was the king very wroth, and his anger burned in him... Then the king said to the wise men, What shall we do unto the queen Vashti according to the law, because she hath not performed the commandment of the King Ahasuerus?”

The king’s wisemen reasoned that Vashti was a threat to the king, as her example—if followed by all the women of the kingdom—would cause an uproar. Imagine if all the women of the kingdom disobeyed their husbands as Vashti did! The words of the wisemen “pleased the king” and so the king did banish his wife, and sent out a proclamation that “every man should bear rule in his own house.”

The Old Testament (at least in the KJV) doesn’t give us more insight into Vashti than that. But as Mormons we do have modern prophets and apostles. Check out these words from Gordon B. Hinckley:

“Our behavior in public must be above reproach. Our behavior in private is even more important. It must clear the standard set by the Lord. We cannot indulge in sin, let alone try to cover our sins. We cannot gratify our pride. We cannot partake of the vanity of unrighteous ambition. We cannot exercise control, or dominion, or compulsion upon our wives or children, or any others in any degree of unrighteousness.”

I like to believe that King Ahasuerus experienced a change of heart down the road, but I also like to believe that in this moment he did the *wrong* thing. It’s okay for characters in the scriptures to be multi-dimensional. Queen Vashti undoubtedly was too! I don’t know much about her weaknesses or failures, but I do know that in her decision not to appear before her husband she set a great example for all queens-in-training who would one day be walking in her footsteps.

She respected herself.

Deborah

“is not easily provoked, thinketh no evil”

In the days of Deborah there were no kings in Israel (Judges 17:6). Instead judges ruled the land. Deborah may not have been a queen, but she was the political equivalent of one. She was a judge, and I should probably mention that her name means “bee.” She is remembered in the scriptures as a prophetess, and for at least two good reasons.

During Deborah’s reign as judge, her people were again oppressed. This time wickedness had landed them under the King of Canaan’s thumb for 20 years. One day Deborah invited Barak, an Israelite military leader, to come visit in her home near Mount Ephraim.

Deborah told Barak, “The Lord God of Israel [has] commanded saying go and draw toward Mount Tabor, and take with thee ten thousand men... And I will draw unto thee... Sisera... and I will deliver him into thine hand.” (Judges 4:6-7)

Sisera was the enemy, the Canaanite military leader, and the scriptures say he had “chariots and a multitude” behind him. This was Deborah’s first prophecy—that Barak and the men who followed him would be successful. But it came with a charge. He had to confront Sisera.

But wait. Deborah was a woman, right? When I got to this point in the story I was convinced that Barak would never believe her. Which made Barak’s response all the more surprising. “If thou wilt go with me, I will go. But if thou wilt not go with me, then I will not go,” he said.

What?

“I will surely go with thee,” Deborah replied. And then came her second prophecy. “[But] the journey that thou takest shall not be for thine honour; for the Lord shall sell Sisera into the hand of a woman.”

Yep, you read that right. Deborah would go into battle with Barak, but not without informing him beforehand that he wouldn’t be the ultimate hero of this story. That honor would go to a woman.

What follows can read as very barbaric by our twenty-first century standards. Barak’s army met Sisera’s multitudes at the edge of the river. Sisera and his army fled at the sight of Barak and his 10,000. They ran to an encampment for safety, and there Sisera spent the night in the tent of Heber the Kenite. Heber’s wife, Jael, played the perfect host until Sisera fell asleep. As he slumbered she drove a stake (one of the huge nails that kept the tent in the ground) through his head.

Many things about this story make my head spin, that last image second to none. Other items on the list include the two Amazonian women who star in the story, the embodiment of male and female equality at its core, and Deborah herself. With just one biblical cameo appearance she has turned my assumptions about what it means to be a righteous woman inside out.

Turns out that you can be righteous and protective. You can be righteous and shrewd. You can be righteous and assertive. You can be righteous and tough. Deborah was all these things and more.

Deborah's powerful character becomes especially interesting when we consider one enigmatic little phrase in Judges chapter 5, Deborah and Barak's shared victory song. Deborah sang, "The inhabitants of the villages ceased, they ceased in Israel, until that I Deborah arose, that I arose a mother in Israel."

The scriptures only reveal Deborah's husband's name to the reader. We don't actually know whether or not she mothered any children, although it's likely that she did. In this context she was referring to a symbolic kind of motherhood.

Her intended meaning clarifies when we remember her name—"bee." Did you know that a queen bee leaves the nest only once, to mate, and for the rest of her life she stays inside the hive, where the other bees work to feed her and protect her from invaders? She is revered—if bees can revere. And why?

The queen bee is also the mother bee. Every member of the hive is her direct descendant. She creates life for her hive. In fact, she is the source of life. And this gift—the gift of life—is what Deborah gave the Israelites too.

Deborah the prophetess couldn't have given herself a more fitting title than Mother in Israel. Except for maybe Queen Bee.

Queen of Sheba

"and rejoiceth not in iniquity but rejoiceth in the truth"

Jesus, of course, epitomized godliness in his treatment of women. I could write pages and pages about his numerous interactions with women and the queens he saw in each one of them. That being said, he only mentioned one queen by name (or better said, by title) during his ministry—the queen of Sheba.

"The queen of the south shall rise up in the judgment with the men of this generation, and condemn them; for she came from the utmost parts of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon and, behold, a greater than Solomon is here." (Luke 11:31)

Modern scholars agree that the queen of Sheba probably ruled a province in what we now call the country of Yemen. But in Jesus' day people believed she was a ruler from Ethiopia—which was the edge of the known world at the time. She would have been a familiar reference for the Pharisees Christ was addressing. Even today, her story is something of a folk tale. She was extremely wealthy, extremely inquisitive, and she traveled over 1,300 miles by caravan to “prove [Solomon] with hard questions.”

Also, as an aside—she was very likely black. Which I mention because I hope as you read about her that you can imagine her as the tall, regal, and proud African queen she probably was.

Her story is recorded in two places in the Old Testament: 2 Chronicles 9 and 1 Kings 10. The account in 1 Kings 10 gives us one clarifying phrase about why the queen of Sheba traversed the desert to see Solomon. “And when the queen of Sheba heard of the fame of Solomon *concerning the name of the Lord*” it says, “she came to prove him with hard questions.” (vs. 1)

This queen was searching for truth.

The scriptures record that “when she had come to Solomon she communed with him of all that was in her heart.” In fact, “there was not any thing hid from the king.” How many of us can say that about ourselves? Christ reminded us in the verse in Luke that a “greater than Solomon” is here. How often do we hide our questions—or other contents of our hearts—from him? Can we honestly say that there is not anything that we are hiding from our King?

I find the queen of Sheba's story to be incredibly validating because it teaches that “all that is in our hearts” includes questions. She also teaches us that it is not only okay to ask those questions, but that if we expect an answer it might be necessary for us, like her, to make great sacrifices in the pursuit of the answers.

While we don't know the exact nature of her questions, we do know that she found what she was looking for. “Solomon told her all her questions” and so she left his house blessing the name of the Lord.

She must have been quite a force of nature, this queen. She spoke her mind with bravery and her heart with humility. A lot of humility, because she was a queen after all. Perhaps the most telling thing about her is actually found in that small verse in the New Testament. She was remembered by Christ for her righteousness, and he prophesied that because of it in some future day she will rise up as a judge in Israel!

What an image. What a woman. What a queen.

Bathsheba

“beareth all things”

Bathsheba’s story is a difficult one to tell—in part because we traditionally hear it from David’s perspective, and in part because it hurts so much. Bathsheba bore many sorrows in her life, all of which make her an important queen to include in this list. Never *because* of the sorrows though. In spite of them.

I believe that Bathsheba’s is an example to look to because so many modern queens-in-training will experience something like she did. At this point you may be asking, “What was that exactly?” If you’re like me, you probably grew up hearing that the moral of this Old Testament episode is something like “don’t bathe on the roof.” But that idea actually reflects a pretty profound misreading of the text.

“And it came to pass in an eveningtide, that David arose from off his bed, and walked upon the roof of the king’s house: and from the roof he saw a woman washing herself...” (2 Samuel 11:2)

What we definitively know from this passage is that David was “upon” the roof, and that “from the roof” he saw Bathsheba. The verse doesn’t mention her whereabouts. This might not immediately seem like an important distinction, but if we return to the scriptures another relevant tidbit emerges from the text.

“And David sent messengers, and took her; and she came in unto him, and he lay with her; for she was purified from her uncleanness: and she returned unto her house.”

Bathsheba was living according to the Law of Moses, which required her to wash herself monthly—seven days after her period—to return to a state of spiritual readiness to create life. What does this mean? It means that Bathsheba was following God’s law. She was righteous! She wasn’t a seductress, and she didn’t strategically position herself on that roof—or anywhere else for that matter—to catch the king’s eye.

Did you notice the word *took* in the passage above? In one syllable *took* communicates volumes about the power dynamic between Bathsheba and David. But of course it does. David was a man, and more importantly he was the king. And Bathsheba was a subject, and more importantly she was a woman. Today, we might call what happened to Bathsheba rape, but in Old Testament times there wasn’t as much nuance surrounding the term as there is today. Still, calling their liaison “adultery” doesn’t quite do the situation justice either. In her book *All the Women of the Bible* (1983), Edith Deen writes:

“According to the laws, Bathsheba could not have resisted had she desired, for woman in these ancient times was completely subject to a king’s will. If he desired her, he could have her. Consequently her part in the story is neither praiseworthy nor blameworthy.”

Bathsheba’s innocence is reflected in the words of Nathan, the prophet who condemned David. In a customized parable, Nathan compared David to a wealthy and oppressive thief. He likened Bathsheba to a “little ewe lamb” that was stolen from her poor master and slaughtered. What evokes more blamelessness than that image?

But the image of a lamb also conjures up another connotation. If Bathsheba was a lamb then—though I mourn to write it—surely she was also a pawn. She conceived David’s child that night he walked his roof. She lost her husband, murdered by David in an attempt to cover his misdeeds. She was married to David, lost the child, and the list goes on and on. She walked a long and painful road paved with David’s consequences.

But over the years, the story did change. Eventually she conceived Solomon, and as Queen Mother she wielded her significant influence alongside the prophet to get her son on the throne. She had won herself a position of power, and a position of trust. And I’d argue that she did it all through righteousness.

Bathsheba was one of four unconventional women listed in Christ’s lineage in the New Testament. The small but significant list includes Bathsheba, Rahab, Tamar and Ruth. All are worthwhile and unusual stories, but Ruth’s is probably most well known. And when we speak of Ruth’s conversion much of the discussion centers on the role she would eventually play as one of Christ’s female ancestors, doesn’t it? Surely, being a doorway through which humanity’s Savior would come to mortality is a great honor indeed. And it was an honor extended to Bathsheba.

As I’ve been writing this I was reminded of something a friend once told me. Did you know that in the game of chess, a pawn—if guided all the way across the board—can become a queen? God wants to be that guide. And all of us, no matter if we feel like the lowliest of pawns, can be guided across that board through our faith and righteousness. That is the lesson here in Bathsheba’s story: you can be victimized, used, and disrespected and still one day arise and become a queen.

Queen Lamoni

“believeth all things”

I so wish we knew this queen’s name. In fact—as silly as it is to admit on a public platform—I have occasionally prayed and asked if maybe God will tell me what it is. I’ve reminded God that he (and she) gave Joseph Smith the Brother of Jared’s name,

so...? It hasn't proven to be an effectual strategy yet, but I think God probably finds my attempts endearing.

Fortunately, for as many times as I've asked I've been reminded that even without her name we can learn from her story. And what a story! No matter how many times I've read it my reaction is always the same: she astonishes me.

Most of all, she astonishes me for the way she believed.

She believed herself when she observed that King Lamoni was not dead, despite those who countered that his body was rotting and odorous; her servants when they told her that Ammon was a prophet; and Ammon when he promised that her husband "sleepeth in God, and on the morrow he [would] rise again."

When one considers that, like her husband, she likely had only a loose understanding of deity prior to meeting Ammon her response to his prophecy becomes especially astounding. "I have had no witness save thy word, and the word of our servants," she replied, "nevertheless I believe that it shall be according as thou hast said."

It's no wonder that Ammon described this lady as having greater faith than anyone among the Nephites. If this was where her story ended it would be dumbfounding, but it continues to an even more dazzling finish.

At the appointed time the following day her husband arose. He stretched out his hand to his wife and uttered what I think are some of the most romantic words in scripture. "Blessed be the name of God," he sang, "and blessed art thou." He followed this expression of dual devotion with a brief but powerful testimony of Christ—which notably the queen *received*.

In the midst of these most unusual and exhilarating circumstances, she believed her husband. She trusted his words to such a degree that she was able to duplicate and share in his theophany.

Both the king and queen were overcome by the power of the Spirit, and both collapsed. They were joined in this exultant unconscious state by Ammon, and ultimately by their entire household. Save one servant, a Lamanite woman named Abish.

A few verses later it was Abish that raised the queen from the ground. The moment her feet touched the floor the queen loudly cried, "O blessed Jesus who has saved me from an awful hell! O blessed God, have mercy on this people!" These two exclamations are important, because they reveal that there was someone else that the queen believed.

She believed Christ.

After her declaration the queen raised her husband from the floor, and then the two of them ministered together in Christ's name to the gathered crowd. Her story closes there, but if you're like me pieces of it might stick with you long past Alma chapter 19.

I was most struck by the queen's rapid-fire growth. It was almost supernaturally fast; she went from having only a vague concept of God to seeing Christ in vision over the course of 24 hours. As I've pondered on how such a thing could be possible, my mind has been drawn to Christ's parable of the sower in the New Testament.

In this parable Christ likens the heart to soil, and specifically he likens the good, honest heart to soil that receives the seed and eventually supports the production of good fruit. As it turns out, having a loose understanding of God might be exactly the right state for a heart to be in to receive the seed of the word of God.

You might call this condition of the heart "being easily entreated." That's the phrase that's rung in my mind as I've thought on this queen, anyways. The earth of her heart was remarkably open, loose, nourished, and ready to receive.

Though she possessed very little in terms of understanding (i.e. the testimony of truth we accumulate through physical experience) she had a lioness' share of wisdom (i.e. an intuitive, internal, and spiritual knowledge). Here in Westerndom we put a high value on the external knowledge we gain through study and accomplishment. This queen reminds us that there is equal—if not greater—value in learning that can't be quantified, commoditized, or printed in books.

She cultivated learning in her heart.

Asenath

"hopeth all things"

Asenath was an Egyptian queen—of sorts. Her husband was second in command, "ruler over all Egypt." Which wouldn't quite make her queen. More like second queen? She was Joseph's wife.

"And Pharaoh called Joseph's name Zaphnath-paaneah; and he gave him to wife Asenath the daughter of Poti-pherah priest of On. And Joseph went out over all the land of Egypt." (Genesis 41:45)

I don't think I've ever attended a Sunday School lesson where Asenath was mentioned, and I know I've never attended a performance of *Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat* where she appears onstage, but the good news is that our

focus is on Asenath here and now. And since that's the case I'd like to draw your attention to this beautiful truth—if you are from the tribe of Ephraim or Manasseh, Asenath is your matriarch.

“And unto Joseph were born two sons before the years of famine came, which Asenath... bore to him.” (Genesis 41:50)

On the surface, the Bible doesn't reveal much about her; by name she appears in only those two verses. But there's a lot we can extrapolate about her story by carefully studying the surrounding verses, and the greater context of the time in which she lived.

I first discovered Asenath on Heather Farrell's blog, [Women in the Scriptures](#), where Heather described Asenath as “the forgotten matriarch.” Heather wrote that part of the reason Asenath may not stick in our memories the way that Sarah, Rebekah, Leah, and Rachel do is because in at least one crucial way Asenath doesn't fit the mold.

“One of the big questions about Asenath is why, after all the painstaking work God went through to ensure that Issac and Jacob married women among their own people that He then allowed Joseph, the birthright son of the Abrahamic covenant, to marry an Egyptian woman. Not just any Egyptian woman, an Egyptian woman who was also the daughter of a pagan priest. Scholars even think that Asenath's name in Egyptian means “she who belongs to Neith (the goddess).” It is likely that she had been taught from her youth to worship and sacrifice to the Egyptian Gods. Not exactly the type of woman you'd think God would entrust his covenant to, and certainly not the type of woman one would imagine to become a matriarch of the house of Abraham.”

But God did entrust his covenant to Asenath.

In chapter 13 the Book of Alma teaches us that men who are called to the holy order of God are called “on account of their exceeding faith and repentance, and their righteousness before God, they choosing to repent and work righteousness rather than to perish” (vs. 10). It stands to reason that women who are called to God's holy order must be ordained by the same qualifications. Repentance seems to be the most defining feature of high priests and priestesses.

Is it strange that I feel so strongly about this? Asenath seems to animate herself from without those biblical pages and testifies to me that she did repent, and that she did believe. I see in her a listener, a follower after goodness, and a compassionate soul. She did a courageous and hope-filled thing in giving up her known sense of the spiritual—her known sense of *life*—for a newer, better one.

I love that Asenath was given to Joseph at the start of the seven years of prophesied abundance in Egypt. It fits doesn't it? Those were years of plenty for Egypt's fields,

and for Joseph and Asenath's little family. Both of their sons, Manasseh and Ephraim, were born to them during this time. Manasseh, who came first, was so named "for God," said Joseph, "hath made me forget all my toil, and all my father's house." And their second son was called Ephraim "for God hath caused [Joseph] to be fruitful in the land of [his] affliction." God truly gave Joseph a new life and a fresh start with Pharaoh's giving of Asenath.

There's a longstanding tradition throughout the world of the woman being given in marriage. But I believe that in at least one sacred sense *both* are given. A man is as precious a stewardship as a woman, and when the two see each other as equals once pretended protections give way to holy vulnerabilities. Asenath was entrusted with the covenant, and she was entrusted with a uniquely pure and noble man, given her to husband.

Joseph was unlike his family. He chose God again and again and again, after being betrayed by his brothers, after being framed by his master's wife, after sitting in a prison for 10 years—still he had hope in the promises God had given him. And after his marriage to Asenath those promises came into being in what has to be the most beautiful expression of forgiveness and reconciliation in all of scripture. I see Asenath there, in Joseph's weeping.

"For intelligence cleaveth unto intelligence; wisdom receiveth wisdom; truth embraceth truth; virtue loveth virtue; light cleaveth unto light..." (D&C 88:40)

There is so much we don't know about Asenath, and yet so much we can know through becoming familiar with her husband's light. Although largely veiled, her story is beautiful to me because it reminds me that any queen-in-training—no matter her background, no matter if she's the daughter of an idolatrous priest even—can rise to heights of belief like Asenath's.

Emma Smith

"endureth all things"

I know, I know. Emma Smith? Including her in this list might seem like a bit of a stretch, and it would be except for that in D&C 25:15 the Lord did promise Emma a crown.

"Keep my commandments continually, and a crown of righteousness thou shalt receive. And except thou do this where I am you cannot come."

Emma, just like all of us, was a queen-in-training during the time she spent in mortality. I've always believed that there is much we can learn from her, but as I was doing research for this essay I discovered a special tidbit that confirmed the idea.

Emma means ‘universal.’ Her very name testifies that her path is something we all can emulate. And so do the scriptures.

“Blessed is the woman that endureth... for when she is tried, she shall receive the crown of life, which the Lord hath promised to them that love him.” (James 1:12)

You’ll have to excuse the liberty I took in re-gendering the pronouns in that verse. It’s much easier for me to liken the scriptures to myself if I can actually see myself in them. I also took another liberty. If you were to open to the Book of James, after that first ellipsis you’d find the word *temptation*. After a quick search through the scriptures I noticed that there are many mortality-bound experiences we must endure if we are to be crowned: grief, afflictions, tribulations, persecutions, temptation, and more.

Emma Smith suffered through all of these, but I suppose the question is... did she endure them?

Some people might argue that she did not. She stayed in Nauvoo, after all, didn’t go West with the Saints, and was instrumental in forming the reorganized church. I adore Lindsay Farr Harper’s response to this line of thinking. Lindsay played Emma in the 2011 film *Joseph Smith: Plates of Gold*. If you don’t have time to watch her seven minute [Splitting the Sky interview](#) here’s one line that feels particularly relevant: “Having a small taste of Emma’s experiences was enough to make me realize that we are not to judge.”

Emma lost her parents to her new faith, and she lost six children to miscarriage or infant death. She suffered poverty and starvation and sickness. She knew devastating heartbreak, and waited on a husband who never came home because he’d been murdered. Joseph and Emma both gave their entire souls for the Gospel, but only Emma had to go on living.

But still I have occasionally wondered... did Emma get her crown?

Emma passed away at age 74 surrounded by most of her surviving children. Thirty-five years had elapsed since her husband had been martyred, and yet her last words were: “Joseph, I’m coming.” Moments after she passed, her nursemaid—a woman named Sister Revel—piped up and shared a dream Emma had had a few nights before with the group gathered around her bed.

“In the dream, Emma said Joseph had come to her. He told her to come with him, so she rose from her bed and put on her bonnet and shawl. Then he took her into a beautiful mansion and showed her through the many apartments. In one of the rooms she saw a babe in a cradle. She recognized her little Don Carlos, who had died when he was just over a year old. Snatching him up, she held him to her bosom and asked Joseph, ‘Where are the rest of my children?’ To this, Joseph had replied, ‘Be patient, Emma, and you shall have all of your children. Emma had concluded by telling her nurse that ‘she saw

a personage of light standing beside Joseph, even the Lord Jesus Christ.” (Emma and Joseph: Their Divine Mission, Gracia Jones, Deseret Book: Salt Lake City, Utah)

According to LDS interpretation and doctrine “receiving your crown” is a metaphor for something much bigger. It symbolizes achieving sanctification, or in other words having your calling and election made sure. The Book of John refers to the blessed event of having Christ personally promise you eternal life as “receiving the second comforter.” And lest you think that having your calling and election made sure is something reserved for the very few, that verse in James clarifies that the crown of life is promised to all those that love the Lord.

Emma certainly loved the Lord. And I think we can safely say that she did receive her crown.

A Queen-in-Training

So, was there something I could learn about the Queen of Heaven though studying these stories? Yes, although not in the way I expected. I haven’t uncovered anything concrete, really. Instead there’s a new richness of feeling inside that stretches upward like a tree, and a discovered trove of tableaux that dances like water.

What I’ve been given feels like wisdom, actually.

I see Her now in Esther’s morning star. She is the compassion and self-sacrifice that make up Esther too. Our Mother is in both of the biblical queens of ancient Persia; She stands within and behind Queen Vashti—protecting, strengthening, confident, and untouchable, for our Mother is love of others and love of self.

I see Her in Deborah’s prophetic insight, warrior heart, and name—the bee. Next time I visit the Salt Lake Temple I know I’ll see Her there on the golden doorknobs. She is the queen bee busy at work somewhere deep within the hive.

There She is in the Queen of Sheba’s uprightness, determination, and sovereignty. She is simultaneously the queen who rises from Bathsheba’s ashes, and the Mother who nurtures her broken daughter until she can stand again.

I see Her tenderness and love for our Father in the partnership of King and Queen Lamoni. I see Her in the sisterhood of Abish and the queen too. Hers is so often the hand that reaches down to lift us off the floor.

I see Her in the wild and fruitful hope of Asenath. I see Her in the exquisite beauty of Emma’s suffering and endurance. And for the first time, I see Her in myself. She appears in one memory, in particular.

A year ago I was in the Madrid temple, with a district of good and passionate Portuguese speakers. That morning I entered the temple with a prayer in my heart. “Where should I be today, God? How can I serve you best?” Somehow I got shuffled into the baptistry, and had a stack of towels piled into my arms.

While wearing my long white dress—the one with the hem that was coming undone—I padded back and forth in soggy temple slippers from the towel cabinet to the font. My hair was somewhere between straight and frizzed, and because I couldn’t understand more than five words in Portuguese, I repeatedly missed my only give-the-wet-person-the-towel cue.

Sitting below me was a boy and a crowd of others I had grown to love but struggled to communicate with. I felt awkward, exposed under their gaze. But there were moments of courage, where in stillness I looked out at the group. When I did I was surprised at what reflected back at me in their eyes. I recognized it from years and years ago. They were looking at me the way I had looked at JJ Woolstenhulme.

Was it true? Was I radiating love the way my former Young Women’s leader had? I left the question there, called back to a different reality by another soaking wet teenager.

I didn’t have time or self love enough to answer the question then. But in the year that’s passed I’ve found more of both. So this time, I think I’ll examine the question through Her eyes.

She sees me in my earnestness, my desire to serve and lift and be useful. There I am in my deep love for people and for Christ. She sees me in my smile and the twist of my spine—sees me through the kind way my eyes crinkle and under the weight I have carried. She sees my strength and my sass, my impudence and my ineptitude, my brokenness and my beauty, my questions and my queenliness. To Her I am mortal and immortal, me and more than me, and somehow always enough.

I was love in that moment. And I can be love in this moment, and every moment forever after. The more I grow in love—love in all its facets and dimensions and faces—the closer She is to me. Perhaps I was standing there in the temple in a puddle of insecurity with frizzy hair and a damaged dress and soggy slippers, but in my standing I stood in for Her. And there is something about the glory of that that I can’t capture with my words.

So I suppose I was right all along. She was inside these powerful and beloved scriptural heroines, and so She is inside of me. She is within all of us! When we reach deep into ourselves we will find Her there. And Her message?

Charity never faileth, she says. And—You are to be women of charity, you are to be women of power, and you are to be women, crowned.

Amber is a writer and storyteller living in Provo, Utah. Her latest endeavor, [Splitting the Sky](#), is a YouTube documentary series that captures the stories of women connecting with God. Follow her production company [@welcometableproductions](#) on Instagram for information regarding other upcoming projects!