

June 1-7, 2020

Alma 5–7

“HAVE YE EXPERIENCED THIS MIGHTY CHANGE IN YOUR HEARTS?”

Summary: *To gain salvation, men must repent and keep the commandments, be born again, cleanse their garments through the blood of Christ, be humble and strip themselves from pride and envy, and do the works of righteousness—The Good Shepherd calleth his people—Those who do evil works are children of the devil—Alma testifies of the truth of his doctrine and commands men to repent—Names of the righteous shall be written in the book of life. [About 83 B.C.]*

The Church in Zarahemla is cleansed and set in order—Alma goes to Gideon to preach. [About 83 B.C.]

Christ shall be born of Mary—He shall loose the bands of death and bear the sins of his people—Those who repent, are baptized, and keep the commandments shall have eternal life—Filthiness cannot inherit the kingdom of God—Humility, faith, hope, and charity are required. [About 83 B.C.]

Supplemental Jewish and Holy Land Insights

What does believing have to do with a mighty change?

The mighty change that Alma speaks of comes from being chosen of God because of a person's goodness, repentance, and willingness to serve Him. That change is a result of individual effort as well as the “believing blood” that flows through generations. “What then is believing blood? It is the blood that flows in the veins of those who are the literal seed of Abraham -- not that the blood itself believes, but that those born in that lineage have both the right and a special spiritual capacity to recognize, receive, and believe the truth. The term is simply a beautiful, a poetic, and a symbolic way of referring to the seed of Abraham to whom the promises were made. It identifies those who developed in pre-existence the talent to recognize the truth and to desire righteousness.” (Bruce R. McConkie, *A New Witness for the Articles of Faith*, p.38 - p.39)

What nation holds the responsibility of being chosen?

“Israel the chosen seed; Israel the Lord's people; Israel the only nation since Abraham that had worshiped Jehovah; Israel the children of the prophets; Israel who had been cursed and scattered for her sins; Israel in whose veins believing blood flows -- the Israel of God shall be gathered, and fed, and nurtured, and saved, in the last days! Let there be no misunderstanding about this; salvation is of the Jews, and if there are believing Gentiles, they will be adopted into the believing family and inherit with the chosen seed. ‘And so all Israel shall be saved: as it is written, There shall come out of Zion the Deliverer, and shall turn away ungodliness from Jacob: For this is my covenant unto them, when I shall take away their sins.’ (Rom. 11:26-27.) But sadly: ‘They are not all Israel, which are of Israel’ (Rom. 9:6), and only those who turn to their God and accept him as the Promised Messiah shall inherit with the chosen seed either in time or in eternity.” (Bruce R. McConkie, *The Mortal Messiah*, Vol.4, p.332)

What physical attribute would a mighty change have on a person?

That might have been explained by the discovery that certain men among Jewish families have a genetic imprint that identifies them not only as part of the original people of Israel, but specifically those who once carried priesthood responsibilities. The following article appeared in the Jerusalem Post as well as the New York Times. "In an unusual marriage of science and religion, researchers have found biological evidence in support of an ancient belief: certain Jewish men, thought to be descendants of the first high priest, Aaron, the older brother of Moses, share distinctive genetic traits, suggesting that they indeed members of a single lineage that has endured for thousands of years."

How can one identify a Jewish Priest?

"The men are known as Jewish priests, a designation that since the time of Aaron 3,300 years ago has been passed down through the generations, exclusively from fathers to sons. The only way to become a priest is to be born the son of one. They differ from rabbis, though a priest may choose to become a rabbi. Historically, certain blessings and rituals could be performed only by priests, and some congregations today still follow that tradition. Many priests have the surname Cohen or Kohen, which in Hebrew means priest, or related names like Kahn or Kahane. Those with other surnames generally have the words 'ha'kohen,' for 'the priest' inscribed on their gravestones, sometimes with an image of hands raised in a characteristic gesture of blessing. Even in families where priests no longer perform the traditional religious duties, knowledge of the heritage is often preserved."

How does the Father-to-Son lineage work?

"It was the patrilineal nature of Jewish priesthood that piqued the curiosity of a research team from Israel, England, Canada and the United States. Knowing that another bit of a man's identity is also passed strictly from father to son -- namely, the Y chromosome, which carries the gene for maleness -- they set out to determine whether that chromosome might carry special features that would link the priests to each other and set them apart from other men, confirming the priests' unique paternal lineage. 'I think anybody who knows the biblical story about Aaron and this tradition of the priesthood going from father to son, and is aware that the Y chromosome is inherited in the same way, would think of this question,' said Dr. Michael Hammer, a geneticist at the University of Arizona in Tucson, and an author of a report about the priests in the current issue of the journal Nature. A unique aspect of the Y chromosome that lends itself to this sort of research is that the Y does not swap stretches of DNA with other chromosomes. Changes that occur in the Y tend to persist in a lineage over time, and, Dr. Hammer said, 'We can use that to interpret historical events.' In a study published in 1995, he and his colleagues used segments of the chromosome to suggest that all men living today can be traced back to a common ancestor 188,000 years ago."

What type of priests can be identified?

"The subjects of the current study were 188 Jewish men from Israel, North America and England. The researchers did not rely on surnames to identify priests, but instead asked the men if they

had been told they were priests. Sixty-eight had, and the rest identified themselves as 'Israelites,' a term used to describe laymen. (Men who said they were Levites, members of a different priesthood, were omitted from the study.) The researchers obtained Y chromosomes by extracting them from cell samples scraped from the men's mouths. They studied two sites, or markers -- known variable regions of DNA -- to find out whether the priests and Israelites differed. They did. Only 1.5 percent of the priests, as opposed to 18.4 percent of the laymen, had the first marker. The other marker, which could appear in five different forms, tended to occur most often in one version in the priests. Fifty-four percent of the priests had this version and 33 percent of the others had it. 'The simplest, most straightforward explanation is that these men have the Y chromosome of Aaron,' said Dr. Karl Skorecki, a coauthor of the report who conducts genetic research at the Technion-Israel Institute of Technology, in Haifa. 'The study suggests that a 3,000-year-old oral tradition was correct, or had a biological counterpart.'" There are at least 350,000 priests around the world today with that same chromosome, he and his colleagues estimate, about 5 percent of the Jewish male population. They are all related, Dr. Hammer said, and could be considered distant cousins on their fathers' side. 'It's a beautiful example of how father-to-son transmission of two things, one genetic and one cultural, gives you the same picture,' Dr. Hammer said."

How ancient does the priestly marker identify?

The study also supports the idea that the priesthood was established before the world Jewish population split into two major groups 1,000 years ago, as a result

of migrations. The marker findings in the priests were similar in Ashkenazi and Sephardic Jews, indicating that the priesthood antedated the division. Asked to comment on the study, Dr. James Lupski, a medical geneticist at the Baylor College of Medicine in Houston, said: 'It's amazing to think how you can use these technologies to investigate history and evolution. They took a very interesting approach that will certainly be useful for studying the Y chromosome. And a report like this is going to stimulate interest, stimulate other groups around the world to confirm it in a different way.'"

So, what if you were a Jew with the priestly lineage?

Dr. Hammer said he did not know whether the chromosome testing used in the study would be of interest to anyone other than scientists. But, he said, 'I do know someone named Cohen who said he'd be interested, in having the test, just to find out if he was really a priest.' At this point, the test could suggest that a man was a priest, but not prove it. It could, however, rule out the possibility with a high degree of certainty. 'It could say your DNA is not consistent with patrilineal descent from a common ancestor, Aaron,' Dr. Skorecki said. 'Whether the religious community would accept that as grounds for exclusion is not an issue I'd want to get into. It's for the rabbis to debate.' Rabbi Aaron Panken, of the Hebrew Union College Jewish Institute of Religion in Manhattan, said: 'There's a lot of danger in this for religious fanatics to go off in different directions. It could become a tool for fundamentalists to try to weed out who is not a Cohen, and that would be troublesome.' In addition, Rabbi Panken said, because priests were traditionally banned from marrying divorced women, he could imagine fundamentalist groups demanding DNA testing before permitting

any man to marry a divorced woman, to make sure the man was not a priest. 'It would also concern me if we began to look backwards,' he said, 'romanticizing the hereditary model of priestly leadership. Do we want a hereditary leadership pattern in the Jewish community? We haven't had that in 2,000 years.'" (Denise Grady, *New York Times*, Tuesday, January 7, 1997) (<https://www.discovermagazine.com/planet-earth/priestly-genes>) (<https://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2009/09/090924093355.htm>) (<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC2771134/>) (<https://www.nature.com/articles/s41598-017-14761-7>)

What people on earth today claim lineage as well as priesthood?

Now, combine the ability to make a genetic identification with the mighty spiritual change that Alma speaks of and wonder how powerful it is. How does it change you? Was there a mighty change, completely, health-giving? How enlivening it would be for the same genetic study to be made on Latter-day Saints who have been given the restored priesthood? Members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints claim a blood descendancy from, or adoption into the biblical tribes of Israel and literally, function in restored priestly Temple rites. "We are the chosen people, the elect of God, those in whose veins flows believing blood. Abraham is our father. We are the

children of the prophets and have been born in the house of Israel. Isaac and Jacob are our forebears. We are the children of the covenant God made with Abraham, that Abraham's seed should have the right to the gospel and the priesthood and eternal life. There is no blessing ever offered to the ancients that is not ours to obtain. 'If God be for us who can be against us! Who shall lay anything to the charge of God's elect?' (Romans 8:31, 33)." (Bruce R. McConkie, *A New Witness for the Articles of Faith*, p.40) The latter-day Temples hold the sacred secrets of what was, what is and what will be. Could part of the secret of the mighty change be seen in LDS genetics, in that our blood would be changed - cleansed? "Our work is to . . . to build more temples; to free ourselves from the blood and sins of this generation; to keep the commandments; to stand in holy places; to remain on the highway the Lord has cast up whereon gathered Israel may march to their Millennial Zion. Our work is to prepare a people for the Second Coming. Temples must be built in Old Jerusalem and in the New Jerusalem. And when all things are accomplished, the Great Jehovah will say the work is done. Until then we have no choice but to use our means, talents, and time in the building up of the Lord's work on earth and the establishment of Zion." (Bruce R. McConkie, *A New Witness for the Articles of Faith*, p.577)