

Greetings in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ! In this edition I'll be looking at the importance of genealogies in the scriptures. Fair warning (or fair joy of reading?): this is approximately 12 pages long in standard letter format.

I'm extending an invitation for submissions to be published in The Gospel Notes Newsletter. The primary criteria for inclusion are these:

1. It should be oriented towards the Gospel of Jesus Christ.
2. It should use the scriptures as a source of information.
3. It should include the references for any quoted 3rd party sources.
4. It should not be political.

In addition, if you have a testimony to share, please send that to me as well and let me know if you would like it to be included in a future edition of the newsletter. Please keep in mind the four criteria listed above where applicable.

Also, if you have particular subjects that you would like me to cover in the Newsletter, please let me know.

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If at any time you do not wish to receive this newsletter, please let me know. Your responses to me are confidential unless you request otherwise.

Ether 1

5 But behold, I give not the full account; but a part of the account I give, from the tower down until they were destroyed. And on this wise do I give the account:

6 He that wrote this record was Ether, and he was a descendant of Coriantor; and Coriantor was the son of Moron; and Moron was the son of Ethem; and Ethem was the son of Ahah; and Ahah was the son of Seth; and Seth was the son of Shiblon; and Shiblon was the son of Com; and Com was the son of Coriantum; and Coriantum was the son of Amnigaddah; and Amnigaddah was the son of Aaron; and Aaron was a descendant of Heth, who was the son of Hearthom; and Hearthom was the son of Lib; and Lib was the son of Kish; and Kish was the son of Corum; and Corum was the son of Levi; and Levi was the son of Kim; and Kim was the son of Morianton; and Morianton was a descendant of Riplakish; and Riplakish was the son of Shez; and Shez was the son of Heth; and Heth was the son of Com; and Com was the son of Coriantum; and Coriantum was the son of Emer; and Emer was the son of Omer; and Omer was the son of Shule; and Shule was the son of Kib; and Kib was the son of Orihah, who was the son of Jared--

7 Which Jared came forth with his brother and their families, with some others and their families, from the great tower at the time the Lord confounded the language of the people and swore in his wrath that they should be scattered upon all the face of the earth; and according to the word of the Lord, the people were scattered.

As exciting as genealogies may be for most people, (which is to say, it is not,) we have been given them for reasons that matter. The leading scriptures that I quoted above provide a genealogical family tree of sorts that may be considered to be boring by some people, and yet we know that in the bible the listings of someone's heritage was vitally important.

Think of the book of Numbers, or 1st and 2nd Kings, or 1st and 2nd Chronicles, or Matthew, or Luke. It should not be surprising that we also find genealogies in the Book of Mormon. Reading through the larger part of the book you will find numerous references to how the writer was a descendant of Lehi, or Nephi, or someone else, for example.

1 Nephi 1:168 And **Laban also was a descendant of Joseph**; wherefore, he and his fathers had kept the records.

1 Nephi 2:2 For it sufficeth me to say that **we are a descendant of Joseph**.

2 Nephi 2:5 For behold, thou art the fruit of my loins; and **I am a descendant of Joseph, who was carried captive into Egypt**.

Mosiah 5:4 And it came to pass that on the morrow they started to go up, having with them one Ammon, he being a strong and mighty man and **a descendant of Zarahemla**; and he was also their leader.

Mosiah 9:2 But there was one among them whose name was Alma, he also being **a descendant of Nephi**.

Alma 8

1 Now these are the words which Amulek preached unto the people who were in the land of Ammonihah, saying: **I am Amulek**; I am the son of Giddonah, who was the son of Ishmael, who was a descendant of Aminadi;

2 And it was that same Aminadi who interpreted the writing which was upon the wall of the temple, which was written by the finger of God.

3 And Aminadi was a descendant of Nephi, who was the son of Lehi, who came out of the land of Jerusalem, **who was a descendant of Manasseh, who was the son of Joseph**, who was sold into Egypt by the hands of his brethren.

Alma 12:32 And thus Ammon was carried before the king who was over the land of Ishmael; and his name was Lamoni; and **he was a descendant of Ishmael**.

Alma 14:57 Now among those who joined the people of the Lord, there were none who were Amalekites, or Amulonites, or who were of the order of Nehor; but **they were actual descendants of Laman and Lemuel.**

Alma 25:25 I am Ammoron and **a descendant of Zoram**, whom your fathers pressed and brought out of Jerusalem. And behold, now, I am a bold Lamanite.

Helaman 1:16 And they were led by a man whose name was Coriantumr; and **he was a descendant of Zarahemla**; and he was a dissenter from among the Nephites; and he was a large and a mighty man;

Mormon 1:6 And I, Mormon, being **a descendant of Nephi** (and my father's name was Mormon), I remembered the things which Ammoron commanded me.

3 Nephi 2:102 And now, I make an end of my saying which is of myself and proceed to give my account of the things which have been before me. I am Mormon and **a pure descendant of Lehi.**

One thing I've learned over the years is that when something "seems" boring – that is when you need to pay particular attention.

In the bible we see that there are many times promises that have been given to individuals **and to their descendants** and this is often on account of their faith. For an example, we find this promise to Abram:

Genesis 17

1 And when Abram was ninety and nine years old, the Lord appeared to Abram and said unto him, I, the Almighty God, give unto thee a commandment that thou shalt walk uprightly before me and be perfect.

2 And I will make my covenant between me and thee, and I will multiply thee exceedingly.

...

8 But as for thee, behold, **I will make my covenant with thee, and thou shalt be a father of many nations.**

9 And this covenant I make that thy children may be known among all nations. Neither shall thy name any more be called Abram, but thy name shall be called Abraham; for a father of many nations have I made thee.

10 **And I will make thee exceedingly fruitful, and I will make nations of thee, and kings shall come of thee and of thy seed.**

11 And I will establish a covenant of circumcision with thee, and it shall be my covenant between me and thee and thy seed after thee in their generations, that thou mayest know forever that children are not accountable before me until they are eight years old.

12 And thou shalt observe to keep all my covenants wherein I covenanted with thy fathers; and thou shalt keep the commandments which I have given thee with mine own mouth, and I will be a God unto thee and thy seed after thee.

13 And I will give unto thee and thy seed after thee a land wherein thou art a stranger, all the land of Canaan, for an everlasting possession; and I will be their God.

14 And God said unto Abraham, **Therefore, thou shalt keep my covenant, thou and thy seed after thee in their generations.**

15 And this shall be my covenant which ye shall keep between me and thee and thy seed after thee: Every man-child among you shall be circumcised.

This is but one example, but it is a good one. How many times have covenants like this been made by God with someone on account of their faith? We may not know for a long, long time, but we do know that it has been done to various individuals.

Ether 1

18 And there will I meet thee, and I will go before thee into a land which is choice above all the land of the earth.

19 And **there will I bless thee and thy seed and raise up unto me of thy seed, and of the seed of thy brother, and they who shall go with thee, a great nation.**

20 **And there shall be none greater than the nation** which I will raise up unto me of thy seed upon all the face of the earth.

21 And this I will do unto thee because this long time ye have cried unto me.

This was likewise a very great promise, but there were conditions associated with it.

Before we get carried away with the importance of genealogies, it is needful that we should moderate our understanding of that importance with some additional insight. The apostle Paul, for one, did not think too highly of genealogies, though he did understand their importance very well.

1 Timothy 1

3 As I besought thee to abide still at Ephesus, when I went into Macedonia, that thou mightest charge some that they teach no other doctrine,

4 **Neither give heed to fables and endless genealogies,** which minister questions rather than godly edifying which is in faith; so do.

5 Now the end of the commandment is charity out of a pure heart, and of a good conscience, and of faith unfeigned,

The reason Paul sidestepped the question of genealogies is this: God is no respecter of persons. Indeed, this was a question that each of the apostles likely had to deal with. Peter said this:

Acts 10

34 Then Peter opened his mouth and said, Of a truth, **I perceive that God is no respecter of persons;**

35 **But in every nation he that feareth him and worketh righteousness is accepted with him.**

So while genealogies indeed have their importance, it is a rather **conditional** importance. We see this in things as significant as priesthood. The tribe of Levi, for example, was tasked with carrying out the priestly duties in the tabernacle while Israel was wandering in the wilderness those 40 years, and later when the temple was constructed they were the tribe responsible for the priestly duties there.

Numbers 3:6 **Bring the tribe of Levi near and present them before Aaron, the priest, that they may minister unto him.**

Numbers 3:32 And Eleazar, the son of Aaron, the priest, shall be chief over the chief of the Levites **and have the oversight of them that keep the charge of the sanctuary.**

Joshua 18:7 But **the Levites have no part among you, for the priesthood of the Lord is their inheritance**; and Gad, and Reuben, and half the tribe of Manasseh have received their inheritance beyond Jordan on the east, which Moses, the servant of the Lord, gave them.

While it seems pretty cut-and-dried that the Levites were **the** priests, that is not quite entirely accurate. Yes, they were assigned to be priests, but they were not the **only ones** who held priesthood office.

Hebrews 7

4 Now consider how great this man was, unto whom even the patriarch Abraham gave the tenth of the spoils.

5 And verily, **they that are of the sons of Levi, who receive the office of the priesthood**, have a commandment to take tithes of the people according to the law, that is, of their brethren, though they come out of the loins of Abraham;

6 **But he whose descent is not counted from them received tithes of Abraham and blessed him** that had the promises.

7 And without all contradiction the less is blessed of the better.

8 And here men that die receive tithes; but there he receiveth them, of whom it is witnessed that he liveth.

9 And as I may so say, Levi also, who receiveth tithes, paid tithes in Abraham.

10 For he was yet in the loins of his father, when Melchizedek met him.

11 If, therefore, perfection were by the Levitical priesthood (for under it the people received the law), **what further need was there that another priest should rise after the order of Melchizedek and not be called after the order of Aaron?**

We can equally find the importance of understanding that priesthood was not limited to the Levites in the Book of Mormon. Biblically, the Levites had charge concerning the sanctuary, and they were the primary group associated with priesthood, but we know that there were priesthood members that were not Levites even during the time of Israel's wandering in the wilderness.

Jethro was Moses' father-in-law, and was a high priest over the land of Midian. Melchizedek (spelled Melchisedec in the New Testament) was a high priest in the days of Abraham, about 500+ years earlier.

Exodus 18 (Inspired Version)

1 When Jethro, **the high priest of Midian, Moses' father-in-law**, heard of all that God had done for Moses and for Israel, his people, and that the Lord had brought Israel out of Egypt,
2 Then Jethro, Moses' father-in-law, took Zipporah, Moses' wife, after he had sent her back,
3 And her two sons--of which the name of the one was Gershom, for he said, I have been an alien in a strange land;
4 And the name of the other was Eliezer, For the God of my father, said he, was mine help, and delivered me from the sword of Pharaoh.

It is quite apparent that Jethro was not a descendant of Levi, but was in fact a Kenite living in Midian. (The Kenites were a group of people who were used to describe the boundaries and inhabitants of the land of Canaan – a.k.a., the land of Israel – along with 9 other groups of people as described in Genesis 15:21-22, which Abram was promised for an inheritance.) The Kenites were a separate people from Abram, and as they existed generations before the existence of Israel as a people they also therefore predated Levi.

Judges 1:16 And the children of **the Kenite, Moses' father-in-law**, went up out of the city of palm trees with the children of Judah into the wilderness of Judah, which lieth in the south of Arad; and they went and dwelt among the people.

Genesis 15

21 And in that same day the Lord made a covenant with Abram, saying, **Unto thy seed have I given this land**, from the river of Egypt unto the great river Euphrates--
22 The **Kenites**, and the Kenazites, and the Kadmonites, and Hittites, and the Perizzites, and the Rephaims, and the Amorites, and the Canaanites, and the Girgashites, and the Jebusites.

In the Book of Mormon, we find that they also had high priests, and they were not of Levi but Manasseh, which the law also said nothing concerning priesthood.

2 Nephi 4:42 And it came to pass that I, Nephi, did consecrate Jacob and Joseph, that they should be **priests and teachers** over the land of my people.

Mosiah 11:113 And it came to pass that they were brought before the **priests** and delivered up unto the priests by the **teachers**; and the priests brought them before Alma, who was the **high priest**.

Mosiah 11:97 And it came to pass that King Mosiah granted unto Alma that he might establish churches throughout all the land of Zarahemla and gave him **power to ordain priests and teachers** over every church.

Alma 2:11 Now this was the cause of much affliction to Alma, yea, and to many of the people whom Alma **had consecrated to be teachers, and priests, and elders** over the church;

Alma 21:73 And **Helaman and the high priests** did also maintain order in the church; yea, even for the space of four years did they have much peace and rejoicing in the church.

Moroni 3

1 The manner which the disciples, who were called **the elders of the church, ordained priests and teachers:**

2 After they had prayed unto the Father in the name of Christ, they laid their hands upon them and said, In the name of Jesus Christ **I ordain you to be a priest (or if he be a teacher, I ordain you to be a teacher)** to preach repentance and remission of sins through Jesus Christ, by the endurance of faith on his name to the end. Amen.

3 And after this manner **did they ordain priests and teachers**, according to the gifts and callings of God unto men; and they ordained them by the power of the Holy Ghost which was in them.

And lest we should forget, Jesus himself ordained the disciples among the Nephites to the priesthood:

3 Nephi 8

70 And it came to pass that when Jesus had made an end of these sayings, **he touched with his hand the disciples whom he had chosen, one by one--even until he had touched them all--and spake unto them as he touched them;**

71 And the multitude heard not the words which he spake, therefore, they did not bear record; but **the disciples bare record that he gave them power to give the Holy Ghost.**

The point of showing these things regarding priesthood is not as much to illustrate the nature of how priesthood is given, but to show that while there is some specific importance given to one's heritage – who their ancestors were – but to show that the operation of faith is important in all of the dealings of God with his people, regardless of their particular family history. This is illustrated perhaps as well as any by the frequent use of the term “adoption” in the scriptures (most notably in Paul's letters to the Romans, who were Jews living in Rome).

Romans 8:15 For ye have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear; but **ye have received the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father.**

Romans 8:23 And not only they, but ourselves also, which have the firstfruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting for the adoption, to wit, the redemption of our body.

Romans 9:4 Who are Israelites; **of whom are the adoption**, and the glory, and the covenants, and the giving of the law, and the service of God,

Galatians 4:5 To redeem them that were under the law, **that we might receive the adoption of sons**.

Ephesians 1:5 Having predestinated us **unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself**, according to the good pleasure of his will,

The parable of the Olive Tree in the Book of Mormon uses the term “grafting in” instead of the term “adoption” but it is the same essential meaning. Before the parable is even given in Jacob chapter 3, it is referenced by Nephi, who understood its meaning quite well.

1 Nephi 3:19 Or, in fine, after the Gentiles had received the fullness of the gospel, the natural branches of the olive tree, or the remnants of the house of Israel, **should be grafted in**, or come to the knowledge of the true Messiah, their Lord and their Redeemer.

After having reviewed all of these, what is the importance of the intervening chapters of the book of Ether, in the which are detailed the lengthy history of the Jaredites, with their long set of 42 or more generations?

The answer I would think is that it is the same issue faced by Israel. Why do we have lengthy genealogies of the Israelite people when all we need to understand is the grafting-in process – the adoption – of those who are faithful regardless of their particular heritage?

On the one hand, we see that God is faithful to his own word. Was Abram, for example, any more or less special than anyone else on account of his heritage? If Abram was the king of a large nation, would it have made any difference to God? Or, why were other kings not given the same covenant that Abram was given? The answer is: because of his faith. The promises of God are and always have been dependent upon that singular word. We don't know much about the life of Abram before he received the covenant of God, but we know enough to see that he was not like other men of his time.

Abram had a love for his family, and he honored the name of God. He valiantly liberated his nephew Lot and his family from captivity. After defeating those who had kidnapped them, Abram took the spoils of that and gave it to Melchizedek as tithes.

Genesis 14

17 And Melchizedek, king of Salem, brought forth bread and wine; and he brake bread and blessed it; and he blessed the wine, he being the priest of the most high God.

18 And he gave to Abram, and he blessed him, and said, **Blessed Abram, thou art a man of the most high God**, possessor of heaven and of earth;

19 And blessed is the name of **the most high God, which hath delivered thine enemies into thine hand.**

To build on this, how many times in the Book of Mormon were those that were faithful blessed by the Lord? Or, conversely, how many times were they unfaithful and the blessings were withdrawn?

Ether 3:64 And **because the people did repent** of their iniquities and idolatries, **the Lord did spare them; and they began to prosper again** in the land.

Ether 4

17 And it came to pass that Emer did reign in his stead and did fill the steps of his father.

18 **And the Lord began again to take the curse from off the land**, and the house of Emer did prosper exceedingly under the reign of Emer;

19 And in the space of sixty and two years, they had become exceeding strong, insomuch that they became exceeding rich, having all manner of fruit and of grain, and of silks and of fine linen, and of gold and of silver, and of precious things,

20 And also all manner of cattle, of oxen and cows, and of sheep, and of swine, and of goats, and also many other kinds of animals which were useful for the food of man;

21 And they also had horses and asses; and there were elephants, and cureloms, and cumoms, all of which were useful unto man, and more especially the elephants, and cureloms, and cumoms.

22 **And thus the Lord did pour out his blessings upon this land, which was choice above all other lands; and he commanded that whoso should possess the land should possess it unto the Lord, or they should be destroyed when they were ripened in iniquity; for upon such, saith the Lord, I will pour out the fullness of my wrath.**

23 **And Emer did execute judgment in righteousness** all his days, and he begat many sons and daughters; and he begat Coriantum, and he anointed Coriantum to reign in his stead.

Ether 4

33 **But the people believed not the words of the prophets, but they cast them out; and some of them they cast into pits and left them to perish.**

34 And it came to pass that they did all these things according to the commandment of the king Heth.

35 **And it came to pass that there began to be a great dearth upon the land; and the inhabitants began to be destroyed exceeding fast because of the dearth**, for there was no rain upon the face of the earth; and there came forth poisonous serpents also upon the face of the land and did poison many people.

36 And it came to pass that their flocks began to flee before the poisonous serpents towards the land southward, which was called by the Nephites, Zarahemla.

37 And it came to pass that there were many of them which did perish by the way; nevertheless, there were some which fled into the land southward.

38 And it came to pass that the Lord did cause the serpents that they should pursue them no more, but that they should hedge up the way, that the people could not pass, that whoso should attempt to pass might fall by the poisonous serpents.

39 And it came to pass that the people did follow the course of the beasts and did devour the carcasses of them which fell by the way, until they had devoured them all.

40 Now when the people saw that they must perish, **they began to repent of their iniquities and cry unto the Lord.**

41 And it came to pass that **when they had humbled themselves sufficiently before the Lord, he did send rain upon the face of the earth; and the people began to revive again,** and there began to be fruit in the north countries and in all the countries round about.

42 **And the Lord did show forth his power unto them in preserving them** from famine.

Ether 4:58 And it came to pass that Kim **did not reign in righteousness; wherefore, he was not favored of the Lord.**

There are many instances like this, but we note here that the Jaredites were not descended from anyone that really mattered in the history of Abram or his descendants. We should not be surprised by this.

From the beginning it was always ***faith*** that was the determining factor in whether the Lord blessed or cursed someone. Cain, the first murderer, was cursed, and because they continued to do the same, his descendants were likewise cursed. There is a reason the scriptures show us this basic premise:

Exodus 20

5 Thou shalt not bow down thyself to them, nor serve them; for I, the Lord, thy God, am a jealous God, **visiting the iniquity** of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation **of them that hate me,**

6 And **showing mercy unto thousands of them that love me and keep my commandments.**

Exodus 34

6 And the Lord passed by before him and proclaimed, The Lord, the Lord God, merciful and gracious, long-suffering, and abundant in goodness and truth--

7 **Keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity, and transgression, and sin,** and that will **by no means clear the rebellious--visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children and upon the children's children unto the third and to the fourth generation.**

Mosiah 7:114 And again, Thou shalt not bow down thyself unto them, nor serve them; for I, the Lord, thy God, am a jealous God, **visiting the iniquities** of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generations **of them that hate me,** and **showing mercy** unto thousands **of them that love me and keep my commandments.**

Israel may have been “God’s chosen” but he also punished them – a lot! Their rebellions did not go unnoticed, and in this they had a greater condemnation placed upon them because they knew better than those around them what God required.

Yet because of this knowledge, when they repented they were the more exceedingly blessed. That returns us to this very basic statement:

Luke 12:57 But **he who knew not** his Lord's will and did commit things worthy of stripes **shall be beaten with few**. For **unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall much be required**; and to whom the Lord has committed much, of him will men ask the more.

And with this we see the importance of understanding what condemnation boils down to:

John 3

19 And **this is the condemnation: that light is come into the world, and men love darkness rather than light because their deeds are evil**.

20 For everyone who doeth evil hateth the light, neither cometh to the light, lest his deeds should be reproved.

21 But he who loveth truth cometh to the light, that his deeds may be made manifest.

22 And **he who obeyeth the truth, the works which he doeth, they are of God**.

To summarize how important genealogy is in the scriptures, we need to understand that with obedience there are promises, but without obedience, the promises cannot be continued. But through obedience you can inherit a spiritual genealogy that is of greater value than any blood-heritage might provide. The promises to Israel may be vast, but the promises to the faithful are greater because not all those who are of Israel by their lineage are Israel as the spiritual children of Christ. The promises to his family are spiritual and can only be discerned spiritually in this life, but they will be fulfilled in measures above our understanding in the life to come.

Mosiah 8

39 Behold, I say unto you that **when his soul has been made an offering for sin, he shall see his seed**.

40 And now, what say ye? And **who shall be his seed?**

41 Behold, I say unto you that whosoever has heard the words of the prophets, yea, all the holy prophets who have prophesied concerning the coming of the Lord,

42 **I say unto you that all those who have hearkened unto their words, and believed that the Lord would redeem his people, and have looked forward to that day for a remission of their sins,**

43 **I say unto you that these are his seed, or they are heirs of the kingdom of God;**

44 For these are they whose sins he has borne; these are they for whom he has died, to redeem them from their transgressions.

45 **And now, are they not his seed?**

Isaiah 64:4 For since the beginning of the world, men have not heard, nor perceived by the ear, neither hath the eye seen, O God, besides thee, **what he hath prepared for him that waiteth for him.**