The following article appeared in the May 10, 1999 issue, of a magazine called The Jerusalem Report. It was the cover story in the “Jewish World” section. It’s about “Levi and his genes.” And we were greatly encouraged when we read it, because, it doesn’t talk about “denim pants,” folks. Instead, in many ways it confirms certain Scriptural truths that we have been teaching.

For years now, we have taught that tribal descent is determined “patrilineally,” and that “Israelites are forever Israelites.” This article affirms these important points and more. You will be especially encouraged when you read the account at the end about “Christians” and “Jewish Genealogy.”

(Remember, the following article is from a Jewish magazine, and thus some statements will not be in accord with House of David teachings.)

DECODING THE PRIESTHOOD

New genetic research shows the vast majority of 'kohanim,' the Jewish priestly class, to be descended from a single ancestor — scientific confirmation of an oral tradition passed down through 3,000 years.

Remarkably, the priestly 'gene' has also been found in high incidence among the Lemba, a Black southern African tribe that has long claimed a Jewish heritage.

Peter Hirschberg, with reporting by Jane Logan in the Northern Region, South Africa.

PASSOVER 5759:

Tens of thousands of Jews fill the wide Western Wall plaza. Close to the ancient stones, the crush of worshippers is suffocating. Men carry Torah scrolls aloft. The rasping, pained, voice of an elderly rabbi, leading prayers, echoes through a loudspeaker.

Suddenly, the rows of men closest to the wall lift their prayer shawls over their heads, creating a billowing canopy. These are the kohanim, descendants of the ancient priestly class. They’re here to recite birkat hakohanim — "May the Lord bless you and keep you. May the Lord make His face to shine upon you" — the words that, according to Numbers 6, the priests must use to bless the Jewish people. The benediction, recited by countless kohanim, is a highpoint of holiday worship at the Wall. It’s also one of the last remnants of the multitude of tasks performed in the Temple by men who, according to the chain of tradition, were their fathers' fathers' fathers.

A few minutes later, in a corner of the plaza, about 150 meters from the Wall, that tradition is being put to the test of science. In what looks like an oral hygiene course, a group of men — young and old, Ashkenazi and Sephardi, all Orthodox or ultra-Orthodox — are gathered around a table rubbing the insides of their mouths with long swabs. When they finish, a researcher snaps off the soggy tip and puts it in a small capsule with a transparent solution.
The samples being collected are part of a worldwide project using cutting-edge genetic technology to study the ancient lineage of the Jewish priesthood. If tradition is accurate, all the men reciting the priestly blessing and their counterparts across the Jewish world are direct descendants of Aaron, anointed the first high priest by his brother Moses at least 3,000 years ago.

Now, using the cells these men have scraped from the inside of their cheeks, along with those of kohanim in the U.S. and Britain, scientists are able to peer into their chromosomes. What they are seeing is staggering: At least 70 percent of kohanim, themselves about a twentieth of Jewish men, have a common set of markers on their Y chromosome, the chromosome every male receives almost unchanged from his father — and, in effect, from his father, and father's father before him.

The researchers' conclusion: The tradition of the Jewish priesthood, or kehunah, has a genetic basis that does point to a single ancestor — possibly Aaron. What's more, this priestly genetic marker may also be a signature of the ancient Hebrew population, preserved in the kehunah because it is a closed club: You can convert to Judaism, but you can't convert into the priesthood. The gene trail, in other words, may lead past Aaron to his great-great-grand-father, Jacob, a.k.a. Israel.

The ability to peek into this once shuttered past through the window of DNA research may vastly expand what we know about the communal history of Jacob's children. But that's only half the story. And the second half is potentially even more spectacular.

For scientists have already uncovered one community that's not part of a main-stream Jewish population — a black, southern African tribe called the Lemba — whose members exhibit a high incidence of the kohen chromosome. And as it happens, the Lemba, who have long insisted that they are descendants of Abraham, refer to themselves as "black Jews," and have customs that appear close to aspects of halakhah.

The Lemba revelation will inevitably fire the imagination of those who fantasize about tracking down more lost Jewish tribes: Finally, a scientific tool that can back up claims to a Jewish ancestry.

For their part, the scientists remain cautious when discussing how the kohen chromosome can be used. But they note that, the Lemba apart, no other non-Jewish group has been found with more than a five per-cent incidence of the chromosome. And so, they say, it could provide clues — alongside anthropological and ethno-graphic evidence — as to whether there's any basis to claims by groups that they are descendants of the Hebrews or have some form of Jewish ancestry.

As part of wider research in "genetic anthropology," researchers are now testing the DNA of groups in Africa, India, and the Middle East. In their analysis, they'll be watching to see if the kohen markers pop up among non-Jews.

"It looks like this chromosomal type was a constituent of the ancestral Hebrew population," says David Goldstein, an expert in the field of evolutionary genetics at Oxford University. "If this inference holds up, it means we can test the origins of particular groups that seem to have a potential connection to an ancestral Jewish population."

FINDING THE PRIESTLY GENE

Karl Skorecki was sitting in an Orthodox synagogue in Toronto when the idea popped into his head four years ago. Himself a kohen and a nephrologist by profession, Skorecki watched as a fellow kohen was called to the Torah for the first aliyah, traditionally reserved for kohanim. Did he have anything in common with this man, he wondered? Was there a genetic basis to the tradition that bound them?

He realized he might be able to check: Under religious law, kohen status is obtained through patrilineal inheritance. Since the Y chromosome is passed from father to son...
Skorecki contacted Michael Hammer, a world expert in evolutionary genetics at the University of Arizona, Tucson, and the two decided to collaborate. At a later stage, Skorecki also teamed up with Neil Bradman, chairman of the Center for Genetic Anthropology at University College London, who’d also come up with the idea of tracking kohanim.

So began the collection of DNA from Jewish males — kohanim and members of the other two ancient classes, Levites and Israelites. The work, under the auspices of the researchers’ universities, is part of a much broader project, the Human Diversity Program, being conducted mainly in Britain and the U.S., which analyzes the development of communities.

In the first study, Skorecki, who now lives in Haifa, where he is head of nephrology at Rambam Hospital and is on the staff of the Technion, checked the Y chromosomes of 188 Jewish males, half Ashkenazim and half Sephardim, from the U.S., U.K. and Israel. The sample included 68 kohanim. The findings backed up his brainwave: Over half the kohanim had a common set of genetic markers on their Y chromosome. The marker was also found in between 10 to 14 percent of Israelites and among only a small percentage of Levites.

"At first I was worried that it was a sampling artifact (a chance result of the group chosen) because of the high frequency," says Hammer, by phone from Tucson. "It was incredibly exciting to find something that could be tracing paternally-inherited traits over 40 to 50 generations, three or four thousand years of history. This is the first time ever we have been able to make a correlation with the ethnographic record over this time scale. Some people keep records that go back three, maybe four generations. But 50 generations!"

Since their initial findings, the researchers have identified additional markers on the Y chromosome of kohanim. Further studies with wider samples show that the incidence of these Y chromosome markers in the priesthood class exceeds 70, and perhaps even 80 percent.

For Skorecki, the conclusion is clear: "The oral tradition of the priesthood," he says, "has a DNA or genetic counterpart. The scientific information confirms that the vast majority of contemporary Jewish males who identify themselves as kohanim, are descended from a common male ancestor who founded a patrilineal dynasty consistent with the tradition of the Jewish priesthood. It's almost equivalent to finding a remnant of the garb of the first priest's family, as if you went to the Sinai and found some remnant of Aaron's anointment ceremony."

The results also point to another conclusion — there's been a very high degree of fidelity among kohen wives. Were one to have given birth to a male child as a result of extra-marital relations with someone who was not a kohen, the priesthood's genealogical line would have been interrupted. "It doesn't mean there hasn't been this degree of fidelity among the wives of non-kohanim," says Skorecki reassuringly. "We simply can't test it."

The next question was whether the researchers could pin a date to the origin of the kehunah.

Since the kohen chromosome is to be found among both Sephardi and Ashkenazi kohanim, it appears the origins of the priesthood at the very least predated the splitting of the Jewish community centuries ago. But could they trace it back further, to the time when Aaron was supposed to have been anointed?

**ENTER GOLDSTEIN...**

Enter Oxford Genetic Evolution expert Goldstein. Using a method for genetic dating based on the rate at which certain bits of the Y chromosome mutate, Goldstein came up with an estimation consistent with the oral tradition: 3,000 years. (An American-born 34-year old who identifies himself as a secular Jew, Goldstein notes that he's an Israelite but has the kohen gene.)

While he is careful to point out that the methodology is not foolproof, Goldstein says that, "with a high degree of certainty, we can rule out a recent origin."

The researchers cannot use their method to prove common ancestry for all Jews: Not only have there been conversions throughout the ages, membership in the Jewish people is matrilineal, making it impossible to use the Y chromosome. But existence of the kohen gene among a non-Jewish group is, at first glance, a hint that some of its members are also descended from that single, long-ago priest.
ABRAHAM'S BLACK DESCENDANTS

Snuggled in the foothills of the Soutpansberg mountains in South Africa's Northern Region, surrounded by litchi, mango and guava trees and field upon field of bright green tea plantations, lie the remains of a Lemba village. Rising above the tall grass is an old one-room red-brick school house; nearby is a small graveyard.

John Mbangambanga Mulungwa Haji, the Lemba headman in the region, is the only remaining inhabitant of the village. He refused to move out when the white apartheid government evicted the blacks in 1964, repeatedly returning to the land. "I said I would not be removed from my forefathers' place," he says. "I remained here up to today. My great-grandfathers settled here."

Resisting the authorities so as not to abandon the graves of his ancestors, he waited patiently for his people to return. There was a time when as a young teacher Haji cycled two days to work in Bulawayo, across the border in what was then Rhodesia, and back every week. "I didn't worry about the loneliness," he says, "because I knew that eventually they'd come back. It was just like we were treated long ago in Israel when people were carried away to captivity. Eventually they came back."

With apartheid now dead, the community has applied to have the land restored and plans are underway for a new Lemba village — with a synagogue at its center.

"There will be so many buildings around the synagogue," says 67-year-old Haji. "There'll be a museum, a library, a school, and an initiation school, because we believe in circumcising our boys." The boys undergo the ceremony as adolescents, after teaming tribal secrets in the special school.

According to the Lemba's oral tradition, they are descendants of Abraham, a lost tribe that emigrated to Yemen some 2,500 years ago and then followed a star down the east coast of Africa, finally settling in what is today Zimbabwe and South Africa. Today there are an estimated 50,000-70,000 Lemba in the two countries.

The Lemba, mostly Christians, generally see no contradiction in believing in Jesus while insisting on being Jewish. But they insist that their religious affiliation is not as important as their ancestral history.

Haji, for instance, is a devoted Presbyterian. A brightly colored picture of Jesus and Mary, with the inscription "Jesus is the Light of the Way," hangs on a wall in his living room. "I am a Christian by religion but I am Jewish by birth," he says. "My forefathers were Jewish. And that is what I am." Today, though, a few are adopting more Jewish religious practices — hence the synagogue.

The Lemba's tale isn't unusual. There's no shortage of groups in Africa and around the world like some Kashmiris, or the Chiang-Min on the Chinese-Tibetan border, or the Ibo of Nigeria — who claim a Jewish heritage, or believe they are descendants of the Ten Lost Tribes, who disappeared after Assyria conquered the northern Kingdom of Israel in the 8th century B.C.E. and scattered them among the nations.

MIND-TINGLING EVIDENCE

But now there is a mind-tingling piece of evidence that seems to back up the Lemba's claim to a Jewish ancestry: Lemba males display an unusually high incidence of the kohen chromosome. What's more, the Buba, a senior Lemba clan, display an even higher incidence of the chromosome. Among Lemba males it's 8.8 percent — a similar frequency to the Israelites (Jewish males). Among the Buba, though, it's as high as 53.8 percent.

According to Lemba tradition, the Buba clan is named after someone who led them out of Judea. "Buba means Judah," says Ephraim Selamolela, a rich Buba from the Northern Region who calls himself Sela (Hebrew for rock). "We're the same as the other Lemba," says Sela. "But our noses and skin (color) are different. The Buba also didn't intermarry much. We were marrying with cousins. A sort of royal family."

Tudor Parfitt, the director of the Center for Jewish Studies at the School of Oriental and African Studies at University College London, has long been on the Lemba trail. According to Lemba tradition, the Buba clan is named after someone who led them out of Judea. "Buba means Judah," says Ephraim Selamolela, a rich Buba from the Northern Region who calls himself Sela (Hebrew for rock). "We're the same as the other Lemba," says Sela. "But our noses and skin (color) are different. The Buba also didn't intermarry much. We were marrying with cousins. A sort of royal family."

Tudor Parfitt, the director of the Center for Jewish Studies at the School of Oriental and African Studies at University College London, has long been on the Lemba trail. He was the star of a documentary recently aired on British TV's Channel 4, in which he's seen retracing the migration route of the Lemba's oral history — from South Africa, back to Zimbabwe, Mozambique and then Yemen — in his white Landrover. Along the way, he successfully persuades Lemba chiefs to let him take DNA samples from their people, with the same swab method used at the Western Wall.
“The Lemba who live in mud huts and speak a Bantu language,” says Parfitt, “are of a quite different origin (to their neighbors). They come from the Middle East. They have Semitic origins and, we’ve now learned, carry a haplotype (a set of genetic markers) rarely found in Africa, but found among Jewish priests. At the very least, it sounds intriguing.”

One possible explanation for the presence of the kohen chromosome among the Lemba is that Jewish sailors on a Portuguese trading ship arrived in their area several hundred years ago and had sexual relations with Lemba women. But Parfitt says it’s possible that some of the Lemba’s ancestors were Jews who lived in southern Arabia, probably before the 13th century CE. "We do know that there were Jews where the Lemba’s ancestors are most likely to have come from," says Parfitt.

Says Goldstein: “There is a definite Semitic contribution to the Lemba. It’s suggestive that the haplotype got into the Lemba from a Jewish source... with one caveat: We haven’t yet confirmed that there might not be a non-Jewish Semitic source that could have contributed that chromosomal type.”

One of the few Lembas to have set foot in modern-day Israel is Matshaya Mathivha, president of the Lemba Cultural Association and a former professor of language, literature and culture at the province’s University of the North. He’s visited twice and hopes to be back next year.

While most Lemba don’t express an active desire to move to Israel, their leader Mathivha is different. "A person must have his place of origin," says Mathivha, who has pictures of a tribal elder in a leopard skin along with a tapestry of Jerusalem on a wall in his home, as well as a Hanukkah card, a small menorah and a wood carving with the word "shalom" on his mantelpiece. "That’s what makes a person. And that’s our place of origin. When we get to Palestine we feel much better ... I felt at home there."

Mathivha’s affection for the Holy Land may panic the Israeli authorities, igniting for them the nightmare scenario of hordes of "long-lost Jews," mainly from Third World countries, descending on Ben Gurion Airport.

But, of course, to think that any Lemba would be recognized as Jews and allowed to settle in Israel under the Law of Return requires major leaps of the imagination: first, that the state and religious authorities would accept genetic testing as a basis for determining Jewishness, and second, that they would accept patrilineal descent, since the Y chromosome is paternally inherited.

Bradman says the research team has already received a letter from an adviser to British Chief Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, saying he rejects genetic testing in determining Jewish status. Presumably, Israel’s chief rabbis would give the same answer. The ‘Who is a Jew’ issue, says Bradman, “is a matter for the rabbis. Not for scientists.”

 Adds Skorecki: “There is difficulty in establishing genealogical connections based on matrilineal descent,” he says.

‘And I’m delighted that’s the case. It would open up a Pandora’s box which is very far from what our sages intended. It would be dangerous because people would start to think about some kind of biological test [to determine Jewish-ness]. Sounds awful. And that’s why I think it’s prescient of the Talmud and halakhah to say it has nothing to do with these issues. Being Jewish is a spiritual, metaphysical state. And DNA is a physical characteristic, like nose size. But we wouldn’t dare go around saying we’re going to determine who is Jewish by the length of their nose. Similarly, we’re not going to determine who’s Jewish by the sequence of their DNA.”

Mathivha sounds defiant when it’s suggested to him that the rabbinic authorities of Israel may not recognize the Lemba as Jews. "You can't deny us the history and the origin. When wars go on in Israel, our sympathies are with the Israelis, because those are our brothers and sisters. We are here in Africa, we settled here. Many things were built up here and we have developed as a community here. But we are Jews from Palestine, whether the Jews in Israel like it or not."

Bradman is at present analyzing data on variety of Jewish groups as well. Those include long-isolated communities like the Beta Yisrael (Ethiopian Jews) and India’s Bene Israel, along with Iraqi, Moroccan, Yemenite, and Bukharan Jews.

Overall, says Goldstein, he and his fellow researchers have not found the kohen chromo-
some in high frequency in non-Jewish populations they have tested, such as Palestinians, Britons and Greeks. "If that pattern holds up — that is, we don't see it in populations that have no cultural association with Jewish populations," he says, "then we can use it as a signature of some type of ethnic association with Jewish populations."

WHO IS A KOHEN?

Off one of the tangled streets in the Old City's Jewish Quarter is the small Yeshivat Kohanim, where about 10 members of the priestly caste study the various duties and rituals that were performed by their ancestors in the Temple before it was destroyed, and which they believe they will have to perform when it is rebuilt. Dressed in a dark suit and black yarmulke, American-born Rabbi Ya’akov Kleiman enthuses about how the kohen chromosome revelation is an additional sign that the redemption is nearing. It cannot be coincidence, says Kleiman — himself a kohen and co-director of the Jerusalem-based Center for Kohanim, whose projects include an international data base of the priestly class — that you have so many momentous events happening together: the ingathering of so many Jews, and now the kohen gene.

"This is powerful," he says. "It shows the lineage of the kohanim is true. The end is the redemption and part of it is a functioning Temple. We see now that the exile is ending. We're not messianists and we're not pushing the train, but it's going. This gene shows that God keeps His promises. That we wouldn't remain scattered."

"It also shows that we've kept our promise to Him," chimes in Moshe Tenner, a Manhattan dentist studying at the yeshivah.

"The creator of this tool, of the gene marker, is God. This probably will go back to Shem [according to Genesis, Noah's eldest son and the progenitor of the Semitic peoples]. This is a tool that he's built in for us to unravel. It's no coincidence. What? The idea just suddenly popped into Skorecky's head?"

Kleiman, who has tested positive for the kohen chromosome, is working on the registry of kohanim — "such a register existed in the days of the Sanhedrin," he says — along with his kohen colleagues in the U.S. and France. But he insists that, when it comes to determining priestly status, tradition, not genetics, is the key. Asked how he felt when he got his test results, he flashes a relieved smile: "It gave me a strong feeling of reinforcement," he says. But he repeats: "Tradition determines, not the test."

Apparently, not all kohanim see it this way. Both Skorecky and Hammer have received telephone calls from kohanim who want to be tested. The requests have come mainly from members of the caste who wish to marry divorcees or converts — both forbidden for kohanim — and want to know whether they actually possess the kohen chromosome. (Skorecky has also been approached by a leading rabbinical authority in the ultra-Orthodox world who wants to hear more about his findings.)

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**The Magic of Y**

To chase the past, genetic researchers depend on markers on human chromosomes. The markers are stretches of DNA that don't issue any instructions to the body — don't affect how we look or function — but do vary from one person to another. But following the markers poses a problem: During reproduction, genes from the mother and father are shuffled, or recombined, like cards from two decks. So a marker on one of your chromosomes could come from any of your four grandparents, from any of your 16 grandparents.

With one exception: the Y chromosome. Genes are arranged in 23 pairs of chromosomes; one of these pairs determines sex. A female gets an X chromosome from each parent; a male gets a Y chromosome from his father, an X from his mother. Most of the material on the Y chromosome doesn't recombine, because there's no matching to be shuffled with. In principle, a man's Y chromosome should be identical with his father's, and father's father.

But over the generations, every gene does change slightly, or mutate. One result is that, in fact, differences do accumulate over time in the DNA sequence of men's Y chromosomes. In some locations on the Y chromosome genome, a "stable change" may occur, creating a fixed marker. In other places, mutations occur at a set, relatively rapid frequency that scientists can determine.

Find a set of markers of unique changes — a haplotype — on the Y chromosome, and you know that every man who shares it, shares a paternal ancestor. Then check the spots where repeating mutations occur. The more differences between those men, the further back in time their shared ancestor lived.

Looking at kohanim, researchers found a number of unique haplotypes. Conclusion: they share an ancestor.

When they checked the repeating mutations and did the math, the answer was intriguing: the father of all kohanim apparently lived about 3,000 years ago, just when Jewish history places Aaron the high priest.
ANXIOUS SCIENTISTS

But the scientists, too, are anxious to point out that DNA testing cannot substitute for the oral tradition in determining whether someone is a kohen or not. That's because there are kohanim who do not exhibit the priestly chromosome, as well as Jewish males who are not kohanim who do have it. "We will probably never reach 100 percent," says Hammer, with regard to testing. "It's probably a blessing."

Infidelity among kohen wives or more than one origin of the priesthood might explain why not all kohanim possess the unique gene markers. There's also the possibility that at some time in Jewish history, a man claimed kohen status for some reason, and his sons carried on the tradition.

Likewise, the presence of the priestly gene among Israelites could be the result of chromosome flow from kohanim to Israelites. That could be the result of infidelity by kohanim, or of kohanim marrying women forbidden to them, resulting in children who are not considered members of the priestly class. But it could also be that the genes originally marked the ancient Hebrews, and that the markers' frequency was reduced over the centuries among all but the kohanim as a result of conversion and other contact with non-Jews.

The kohen chromosome has also been found in low frequency among some non-Jewish groups, like the Greeks. That doesn't surprise the scientists. "It could be the result of shared lineages predating Abraham," Hammer says. "The genetic heritage of Jewish men today predates the advent of the Jewish religion, and some of these lineages exist in groups that lived near where the Jews' ancestors originated."

Considering the bitter and highly divisive struggles over the "Who is a Jew?" issue, it is probably fortuitous that the kohen genetic signature can only be used to make a positive identification and cannot be employed as a tool to determine that a specific group is not Jewish. After all, if a group does not exhibit a high frequency of the kohen chromosome, it does not mean it has no claim to being Jewish, since the vast majority of Jewish males don't possess it.

And, what's more, kohanim are only one small section of the Jewish people. It's entirely possible, for instance, that the ancestors of a particular isolated Jewish community didn't include kohanim — or that they were all converts.

Wary of the possible racial overtones that some might want to attribute to his findings, Skorecki is anxious to point out that the kohen chromosome is nothing more than a biological trait. In no way, he says, does it confer any special character traits on the members of the priesthood.

"When I speak to groups of religious Jews," says Skorecki, himself an observant Jew, "I always try to emphasize this. I quote from the Talmud — that the great attribute of Aaron is that he was a man of peace, who tried to reconcile differences. And it's interesting that in the Talmud there is a

FROM AARON ONWARD

THE FIRST KOHEN, OR PRIEST, according to the Bible, was Aaron, the brother of Moses of the tribe of Levi, who lived some 3,300 years ago. The 12 tribes of Israel are the descendants of the 12 sons of Jacob. Levi was Jacob's third son; Aaron was Levi's great-grandson. Aaron's descendants became the priestly caste; the rest of the Levites gained a secondary role in Temple rites; all other Jews form the third and largest class, the Israelites.

Kohen status is passed from father to son. Kohanim often have last names indicating their status, such as Cohen, Kahn, Kapian, Rapaport, Katz, Azoulay and Haarnof. But such a name is not necessarily proof that someone is a kohen. Today, since there is no Temple, the privileges of the kohen are limited. He no longer receives trumah - a share of produce raised in the Land of Israel - and since sacrificial service can no longer be performed, he doesn't get a share of the offerings. Remaining privileges include being the first called for an aliyah to the Torah in synagogue services; being given the option to led the birkat hamazon blessing after meals; performing pidyon haben, the redemption of the firstborn son. Another remaining function is the birkat kohanim, in which the descendants of the priestly class bless the people. When the Temple was still standing, the blessing was performed at the conclusion of the morning service.; Today, in most parts of Israel, the blessing is recited at services every morning.

Outside Israel, Sephardi communities generally perform the ritual daily, while Ashkenazi kohanim recite the blessing only during the musaf service of the major holidays.

Kohanim may not marry divorcees or converts, and must have no physical contact with the dead. If a kohen marries a convert or divorces his children, halalim, lose the privileges and duties afforded them by their kohen status.

saying by Hillel: 'Be a student of Aaron. Love peace and pursue peace.' It doesn't say be a descendant of Aaron. To me, that means that these attributes are acquired, not inherited that anyone can develop the attributes of Aaron. There is no genetic monopoly on them."

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An evolving doctrine in Christian Zionism and Messianic Judaism, based on a new interpretation of scripture, holds that most true Christians are descendants of the Lost Tribes of Israel.

Hallelujah!
Abba's Family is being restored!

Letters:
First, Blessings be to YHVH for your book...Who is Israel? You expressed a few things that YHVH had revealed to me, and opened my eyes to so much more. It's so wonderful to see this all done from scripture. Thanks for the chapter that shoots holes in all the theology and doctrine which attempts to make the truth about Ephraim vanish with the wave of the hand!
Put me on the mailing list.
Andrew

Shalom...
There is a new stirring in the assemblies that was not there before.

Isa 25:7: And he will destroy in this mountain the face of the covering cast over all people, and the vail that is spread over all nations (KJV).
Rev 10:7: But in the days of the voice of the seventh angel, when he shall begin to sound, the mystery of God should be finished, as he hath declared to his servants the prophets. (KJV)

I believe this mystery and vail is the identity message spoken of throughout the Bible. Just as the children of Israel born in the wilderness...lost the sign of their identity (circumcision)...those that are of the seed of Israel scattered throughout the world (wilderness) have lost...their true identity...Now it is...the right of Yahweh to claim those that are the seed of his friend Avraham... Those that deny us...are fighting against the Holy One of Israel... barukh HaShem for revealing this truth to the children of God.

David

Compiled by Tibor Krausz

IN & AROUND REPORT CARD
Jewish Genealogy?
Shinlung: A group of tribes in northeastern India, Burma, Thailand and Bangladesh boast 1.5 million members and trace their ancestry to the biblical tribe of Menashe. They call their deity Y'wa, have their own Exodus story and feast days corresponding to Jewish holidays, and many say they want to immigrate to Israel, in the footsteps of the few dozen who already have.

Iddao Ishaak: This small tribe, which claims to be of Jewish origin, lives in Nigeria's Asakrei Valley.

Ikaifeng: Distant descendants of the Chinese Jews of Kalfaing, they still mark “Jew” as their ethnic identity in the government census. Some believe their ancestors were descendants of a lost tribe of Israel that settled between Tibet and Szechuan.

Native Americans: Mormons believe Native Americans are a lost tribe of Israel whose ancestors were Hebrews and sailed to the Americas before the fall of Jerusalem in 586 BCE.

Iddao Ishaak: This small tribe, which claims to be of Jewish origin, lives in Nigeria's Asakrei Valley.

Telugu: Some 30 families of the Indian village of Kottareddipalem, who have converted to Judaism, believe that their ancestors belonged to the lost tribe of Ephraim.

Compiled by Tibor Krausz
Dear Batya and Angus,

Well, our small congregation, Beth Ephraim, returned today from the Fair Israel conference in Helena, Montana. Your “Who is Israel” book was featured among the many Messianic books I am relieved to say. I use the word relieved because your book was the only source of information available concerning The Two Houses... which is precisely why I am writing... Here we were among hundreds of what I thought was to be, Believers of like mind. I was personally so excited to be a part of all this. Day one was to be intensive deep study on the book of Hebrews: 8:00 to 3:30 by Rabbi ----.

Fifteen minutes into the study he began to use the word Gentile when referring to those Believers not of Jewish decent. (I hate being referred to as Gentile) That word makes my skin crawl, as does Polock or Spick. I raised my hand and asked ---- ------- why he keeps referring to Believers as “Gentiles.”

He replied, “There are two, and only two types of people on this earth: Jew and Gentile. “You have been grafted in, but, you are still a Gentile.”

I pushed the matter no further when I saw the crowd of “Unaware Ephraimites” nod their heads in agreement, being perfectly satisfied and comfortable with the term.

He used no scripture to back up his claim, being he is Jewish, and a Rabbi no less.

Well, as things progressed, I began to really see and understand this Messianic movement. And even though I gleaned priceless knowledge, still, I was saddened to see dedicated, on-fire, Torah keeping individuals settle for being, “Wanna be’s.”

As derogatory as it sounds, I cannot come up with a better term. How can all the beautiful dance, and praise in the Hebrew language, the feast and festival keeping, have any deep meaning, if one does not see their selves as being part of “Israel”?

Grafted in? Yes. Wild? Yes. But still, “an olive branch.” Nonetheless, they all see themselves as a crab apple branch or something. And they are grafted in apologetically.

If I sound bitter, truly I am not. The conference speakers, every one of them, had beautiful insights. Many of the non-Jewish Messianic Believers love the Torah, and practice (many better than I), a Torah lifestyle. But without knowing that they are part of “Israel.” and also, “Chosen,” it just seems sad.

I am blessed to finally feel truly heartbroken over the situation. What can I do to help you both? I called Rabbi ------ when I came home and asked him to return my call. I said basically that I had a couple of questions about his “grafted in Gentile theory.” It remains to be seen if he will return my call. (Hope I am not in over my head on that one.)

Anyway, if I can do anything to better further the “Two Houses” message, or House of David, please let me help. In the meantime I have decided to get into some pretty serious prayer.

May God bless you both, because through your countless efforts and faithfulness, I have surely been blessed.

Tricia (and Brad)

15 years ago Yahveh began to show me in the Word and in my heart that I was not a spiritual Israelite, but a physical one. In this long journey I was taken through the Tanakh and the (Re)new(ed) Covenant, and also to Eretz Israel. Through it all, I was made to know that spirit, soul and body I was “Ephraim.”

Everywhere I traveled in ministry people were led by Ruach HaKodesh to give me books on the history of the “Celts”. Then, on the hills of Samaria I wept for the sins of my forefathers which had carried them into exile, and for the Grace of Messiah which had brought me back. I finally understood why my heart loved Judah.

As a Political Science major I was moved many times to fight in discussions for the Jews and the Land. At last I knew that it was because the Jews were my “brothers” and Israel also was “my homeland.” Like Paul I bowed my knee to the Elohim and Abba of our Messiah for the awesome mystery of His plan. “This thing is of Me”, He told Rehoboam. And, He said He would scatter the sperma of Abraham throughout the nations. Then, in the last days, as a melo of goyim, He would have them “remember” Him, and to return to Torah, to the covenants and to Judah.

In our time as blindness to Messiah is departing from Judah in record numbers, so is blindness departing from Ephraim, and he is coming to know Judah as his brother. The day of the “Two Sticks” being made “one” is at hand. Even as promised, “Great will be the Day of Jezreel.”

...Yair Davidy filled in the blanks concerning the physical path my forefathers took and the Biblical research of Batya and Angus Wootten filled in the blanks on the spiritual promises. ...Baruch HaShem Adonai... Out of the numbers of the sand of the seashore and the stars of heaven a remnant is returning to the faith of our Father Abraham. For the Word of Yahveh cannot be broken, the vexing and jealousy will depart, and when the two houses are fully rejoined, the Torah shall roar from Zion and the Word of the Lord from Jerusalem.

Yes, I now know that I am part of an Israel that is now being fully restored...
Chapter 11 of the Book of Leviticus lays the foundation for what is commonly called the ‘dietary laws’ of the Torah. In this chapter, Yahveh gives an extensive list to Moshe of what is permissible to eat and what is not. But, does this list pertain to us, the believing Body of Israel today? For those who follow the Messiah of Israel, has this list been done away with?

Without answering the first question we will attempt to answer the second question, which in turn will help us with the first.

What was the purpose of these laws? For, a correct understanding of the purpose of these teachings will shed a whole new light on the subject.

We start by reading Leviticus 11.

In a day and age where many people are quite health conscious and concerned about the nutritional value of what they eat, one might be drawn to conclude that in this chapter, Yahveh is giving His own health plan. But, is this what the text is saying? Read it for yourself again and pay special attention to verse 45.

The reason given by Yahveh is, “You shall be *holy* for I am *holy*.”

Can we stretch His command to be “*holy*” to mean, “You shall be *healthy* for I am *healthy*”? Surely, there are health benefits to following His ways, but this doesn’t appear to be the essence of the commands. Perhaps if Yahveh had this in mind He would have pronounced chocolate cake unclean as well.

What does, “Be *holy* for I am *holy,“ really mean?

First of all, in Hebrew the word holy (kadosh) means “set apart.” In other words, it means to be “different from the average Joe around us.”

Through following these dietary laws can we be trained at becoming “set apart”? If so, how?

To answer, let’s now take a look at desire and control as it relates to food in the scripture.

Many feel that, in scripture, major problems often center around food. And it’s true!

Read Genesis 2:16-17 and 3:1-6. The first command ever given is a dietary one, and the lust of man’s flesh causes him to eat and transgress that command. Jumping forward we see food as a problem in the life of Jacob and Esau. Read Genesis 25:27-34. Esau is controlled by his hunger. Also we see in Genesis 27 that Jacob’s deception of his father is centered around food.

Certainly we can think of instances in our own lives where hunger has controlled us, in fact some people’s whole day is planned around eating. We must realize that eating food is one of the strongest desires of man.

Surely we all understand that we need to eat, and that in fact food does taste good, but nonetheless, let us not miss the point being made here. And that point is:

What if we could somehow temper this desire and learn to control it?

Is self-control the lesson behind the Father’s food commands?

Even though Leviticus 11 appears to give us that answer, still, we must realize that control of the appetite is not the end in itself. For, we also need to see that Yahveh’s dietary laws paint a physical picture of a spiritual reality. In other words, if we can be picky about what we eat, perhaps we can carry this discipline into other areas of our lives as well. For example: What we look at, is it clean and not unclean? What we talk about, would it be considered clean or unclean?

To begin to think this way will not bring about some great mystical transformation in our lives. Instead, it will prove to be an exercise of discipline through the Spirit of Yahveh and His Torah. It is not that we don’t find unclean things pleasurable, but that we learn to say, “No!” When we temper and control our appetite for food it can help lead us to also clean up other areas of our lives.

We need to see that, even from the beginning, these commands were intended to get to the
“heart” of the matter. For, as Rabbi Yeshua says, “It’s not what goes into a man that makes him unclean but what comes out” (Matt. 15:11). Restated, Israel’s dietary laws are not an end to themselves, but rather they serve to teach us about our personal actions: i.e., if we eat only those things declared clean, but still, on the inside we ourselves are unclean, meaning full of malice, greed, lust, and hate, then obedience to the dietary laws means nothing. However, if on the other hand we use these commands as a foundation upon which we build our “spiritual houses,” letting the spirit of the commands permeate every area of our lives, then we will build lives that are based on the “wisdom” of Torah (Deu. 4:6), and then, we will begin to worship Yahveh in “spirit and truth.”

Here, let me give a personal example. A few years ago while I was at Bible college I began to follow the dietary teachings of the Torah. But prior to this, I frequently attended movies of all sorts. Although movies are not necessarily a problem in themselves, I would go see just about anything that was out. Then Yahveh began to make me think, “If I eat only what is clean then I should view only what is clean.” So I prayed and asked Yahveh for help, and as I began to see fewer movies, then, this same process began to carry over into my thought life. I started to concentrate my thinking on what was clean. Even today I am still daily using this principle to become all that I can in the Messiah Yeshua.

In addition to the principle that cleaning up one area of our lives helps lead us to clean up other areas of our lives, we also can glean wisdom through a “picture” of the characteristics of clean and unclean animals. To begin, a basic definition of unclean is, “without life.” And in Matthew 13:47-48 Rabbi Yeshua gives us a clue as to this meaning. For here, he compares people in His Kingdom to clean and unclean fish. This comparison speaks volumes when we look at the traits of the clean animals as compared to unclean.

Most of the unclean birds are birds of prey, whereas the clean birds are vegetarians. The picture us, unclean birds eat dead things while clean birds eat living things! Likewise, unclean fish are often bottom feeders, and so we ask, what falls to the floor of the sea? Refuse! In the same way, the pig will eat anything you put in front of it. Garbage!

Read through the list again. Can you think of any more distinctive characteristics of clean or unclean animals? What spiritual principles can we extract from their good or bad traits? What scriptures in the Renewed (New) Covenant talk about these traits?

As we stated in the beginning, Yahveh commanded us to “be holy,” because He too is “holy.” Yeshua paraphrases this, “Be perfect for your father in heaven is perfect” (Matt. 5:48). Yahveh wants us to imitate him and to be separate from the world around us, because—we are created in His image—and He wants people to see His image in and through us!

After we are saved through Yeshua’s sacrifice we want to live like we are His bride. And yet, we have a hard time doing this because of the lust of our flesh. So to help us, our Heavenly Father has given us both His Torah and His empowering Spirit. Through the truths of Torah we can learn practical ways that can help us to walk our spiritual walk. We do this because our Heavenly Father desires to be made manifest in all areas of our life—both physical and spiritual. He makes it possible for us to overcome our evil nature—in and through His Messiah. By doing it His way, in simple obedience to His Word, we can be empowered to overcome.

Should New Covenant Believers abide by the Biblically kosher food laws? (Note: We feel there is a difference between “Biblically” kosher and “Rabbinically” kosher.)

Pray, and ask Yahveh for guidance, then you decide on your own. As you pray, reflect on what Peter writes in his first Book, in verses 15-16:

“On the contrary, following the Holy One who called you, become holy (set apart) yourselves in your entire way of life; since the scripture says, ‘Be holy for I am holy.’”

Note: The reason I chose to use the title of Rabbi Yeshua to describe the Messiah is because I wanted to emphasize His teaching aspect here. Other times when I wish to express His redemption aspect I will use the title of Messiah Yeshua.

Edited by Batya Wootten

Toby and his wife, Shannon Janiki, live in Estes Park, CO. There, Toby leads a weekly Torah study group in the Messianic Bookstore, High Places. This unique “Judah and Ephraim” bookstore is owned by both Toby’s mother, Elizabeth Janiki and Susan Miller. It is a wonderful place to visit. We suggest you go there often. We guarantee you will meet lots of really nice people!
Messianic Israel represents a remnant of people whose heart’s desire is to fully reunite the olive tree of Israel—both branches—Ephraim and Judah—into one redeemed nation of Israel—through Messiah Yeshua. They seek to arouse Ephraim from obscurity, to awaken Judah to the Messiah, and thus to promote and be on the alert for, both His return to Earth and His full restoration of the Kingdom to Israel (Mat 6:10; 12:25; 21:43; 24:43; Mark 13:34 Luke 22:29-30; 1:33; 2 Chr 11:4; Eze 37:15-28; Jer 11:10,16; 2:18,21; Rom 11:17,24; Eph 2:11-22; Acts 1:6).

Messianic Israel believes the Jewish people have been the identifiable representatives and offspring of Judah and “the children of Israel, his companions,” and that non-Jewish followers of the Messiah from all nations have been, up to now, the unidentifiable representatives and offspring of Ephraim and “all the house of Israel, his companions” (Gen 48:19; Hosea 1-2; 5:3; Eze 37:16; Jer 31:6-9; Gen 15:2-5; 26:3; 28:4; Heb 11:9; Isa 56:3,6-8).

Messianic Israel believes Yeshua Ha’Natseret (Jesus of Nazareth) was and is the true Messiah, the Lion of Judah, the Branch that will fully reunite all the dead; that He died and rose from the dead and lives at the right hand of the Almighty Father; and according to the ancient Holy Scriptures, Yeshua is Yahveh Elohim appearing in the flesh, as Messiah Yeshua demonstrated in Himself (Deu 18:18-19; John 8:58; 10:33; Mat 12:6-8; 9:35; 15:31; Isa 11:53; Micah 5:2-4; Luke 24:46; Isa 8:14; John 2:22; Acts 3:15-17; Heb 13:20; 1 John 4:2; 2 John 1:7; Rev 5:5).

Messianic Israel affirms that the Jewish people have been kept identifiable as a remnant of the patriarch Jacob, Yahveh’s covenant people, to preserve His Holy Torah (Law), Feasts, and Shabbat (Sabbath); that the salvation of the Jewish people through their acceptance of Messiah Yeshua, will be the crowning act of man-kind’s redemption, and is necessary for the restoration of the Kingdom to Israel. Further, the Father plans that Ephraim, they being the “wild olive branch,” stimulate Judah to want what they have; they are called to walk in a way that will make Judah jealous of their relationship with the God of Israel (Gen 48:19; Isa 11:13; 37:31,32; Zec 2:12; Eze 37:15-28; Hosea 1:7; Rom 10:19; 11:11,14; Mat 23:39).

Messianic Israel believes the non-Jewish followers of Yeshua are Ephraim, those who were once among the Gentiles as “LoAmmi,” “Not a people,” but have now been restored to the commonwealth of Israel through covenant with Israel’s Messiah; that they are no more Gentiles, but fulfill the promised restoration of uprooted Ephraim, and Jacob’s prophecy that Ephraim would become “melo hagoyim,” the “fulness of the Gentiles.” As Ephraim, they have been kept in mystery until recently, being used to preserve the testimony of Yeshua, the Messiah of all Israel. Their awakening, recognition, and performance as Ephraim, and their union with Judah, is a necessity for salvation of “all” Israel, and the restoration of the Kingdom to Israel (Gen 48:19; Hosea 1:9-10; 5:3; 8:8; Amos 9:9; Jer 31:18-19; Zec 10:7; Rom 9:24-26; 11:26; Eph 2:11-22).

Messianic Israel declares that Believers in Yeshua were not meant to replace Judah as Israel, but as Ephraim, they are the called out ones (ekklesia), and in these latter-days, the Father is leading them to, whenever Scripturally possible, join with Judah; that Judah (faithful Jewish ones who will receive Messiah) and Ephraim (faithful non-Jewish Messiah followers) ultimately will fulfill the destiny of the two houses of Israel: that together they might fulfill the prophesies about the one, unified, victorious people of Israel (Exo 19:4-6; 1 Pet 1:1; 2:9; Jer 3:18; 23:6; Zec 8:13; 12:1-5; Mat 25:31-40; Exo 12:48-49; Num 15:15-16; Isa 56:3,6-8).

Messianic Israel maintains that up to this general time “blindness in part” has happened to all (both houses) of Israel, and as the blinders are lifted, non-Jewish followers in Yeshua will gain insight into their role as Ephraim, they will become defenders of Biblical Torah and of Judah, and due to this character change, many Jewish people will accept Yeshua as Messiah. This process has already begun and is indicated through the Messianic Jewish movement (Judah), the Christian Zionism movement (Ephraim), and the Messianic Israel movement (union of Judah and Ephraim) (Isa 8:14; 11:13; Rom 11:25,26; Jer 33:14-16; 31:18-19; Ezek 37:15-28).

The reunion and full restoration of the two houses,
This is the hope that lives in the hearts of those of Messianic Israel...