

There is Work to Do First

1. Introduction

I and many Mormons ache to apologize for our 130-year practice of excluding people of Black African ancestry from temple and priesthood participation. We long to apologize for our community's attempts during and afterwards to justify the exclusion by repeating claims other American Christians had used to justify slavery, or by inventing teachings that were starkly inconsistent with scripture—or worse, that were based in our own new scripture.

But a small number of current teachings are a looming obstacle to a sincere, full apology. It is the case that there are important recent bridge-building actions from the Church, along with promising statements from Church leaders such as First Presidency member Dallin H. Oaks (encouraging members to “root out racism”) and Church President Russell M. Nelson (calling members to abandon “attitudes and actions of prejudice”).¹ But as a Church we continue to preach two key elements of our past lore of divinely favored or cursed lineages. This occurs in teachings from those same two leaders, and in the use of those teachings in our youth curriculum. In those texts President Oaks claims God commanded the Church to ban Blacks from the temple and priesthood, and President Nelson teaches a person's blood lineage is an important determiner of how likely the person is to listen to and follow the teachings of Christ.

That these leaders and our Church curriculum continue to spread these teachings today, and that there is not a swell of objections from other leaders and from Church membership generally, demonstrates an ongoing structural problem. Despite our lip service as a Church to concepts of continuing revelation and learning line upon line, we haven't matured to the point where we are an effective open learning system.

Due in part to our Church's rigid hierarchical structure and emphasis on members' obedience to leaders, and in part to widespread assumptions among many that the leadership rarely, if ever, errs in guiding the Church, we find ourselves in a position where too many members and leaders are effectively discouraged from exercising their own ethical judgments. We seem to have placed outside our grasp the personal and organizational tools—two of which are humility and an appetite for seeking new truth—necessary to fully make course corrections when we act in a manner that violates our own precepts.

So, we need to apologize, but there is work to do first.

2. The move away from lineage teachings

In his 2001 *Dialogue* article “Mormonism's Worldwide Aspirations and its Changing Conceptions of Race and Lineage,” sociologist Armand Mauss explored use of lineage teachings within the Church since its inception. Though the first Mormons trumpeted a universal Christianity, led by dozens of scriptures, old and new, preaching that Christ's gospel and its blessings were available to all, Mauss observed that, “a conception of Mormons as literal Israelites developed soon after the organization of the church and endured as a central idea in official discourse for about a century after the settlement of Utah....As this movement gained

¹ See “Prophet Joins NAACP Leaders in Call for Racial Harmony in America,” Church of Jesus Christ Newsroom, 8 June 2020, newsroom.churchofjesuschrist.org/article/prophet-naacp-leaders-racial-harmony-america-op-ed; Russell M. Nelson, “Let God Prevail,” *Ensign*, November 2020; Dallin H. Oaks, “Love Your Enemies,” *Conference Report*, October 2020. For a discussion of recent positive actions taken by the Church, see Paul Reeve, *Let's Talk about Race and Priesthood* (Deseret Book Co., 2023) (Chapter 21, “Jesus Christ is Mighty to Save”); See also Matthew L. Harris, *Second-Class Saints: Black Mormons and the Struggle for Racial Equality* (Oxford University Press, forthcoming 2024) (especially chapter 10: Hard Doctrine, 2000—2013, Epilogue: Black (Mormon) Lives Matter, 2013—2023).

greater currency in official discourse, white Mormons came to understand themselves as literal descendants of the tribe of Ephraim, although occasionally other Israelite ancestry was recognized as well.” Then after detailing a “preoccupation” with lineage by the Church in the 19th and early-to-mid 20th centuries, he described the subsequent change from a church that “appeared at first as an exclusive, particularistic sect... seeking its converts primarily from certain lineages...” to one that “gradually transformed into a universal religion in which lineage of all kinds became essentially irrelevant.”

When Mauss’s article was published the 20th century had just closed and the temple ban was more than 20 years in the past. Mauss recounted what seemed to him the conclusion of the Mormon story regarding lineage teachings: “The final stage in this universalization process has been the disappearance from the discourse of church leaders of virtually all references to the significance of lineage, whether cursed or favored.... In symbolic terms, one might say that the blood of Christ has finally replaced the blood of Israel as the more important theological idea.”²

However, today current lineage teachings of President Oaks and President Nelson are the principal counter-examples to Mauss’ conclusion. These teachings might be—as Mauss thought had already occurred twenty years ago—the last gasps of a former lineage preoccupation. But given the position of these two men in the Church’s leadership hierarchy, and the use of their teachings in Church curricula, their words may instead portend a continuation of lineage-based thinking within Mormonism for additional years or decades.

3. President Oaks and a continued claim that God commanded the ban

In a chapter of his 2011 memoir President Oaks recounted how he learned the “life lesson” that “Mortals should not attempt to provide reasons for divine commandments or revelations.” He wrote that the temple ban was a practice “I and most other faithful Latter-day Saints accepted as a revelation to a succession of prophets.” He described struggling to find a rationale for the ban and concluding he should “support prophetic revelation without relying on the reasons mortals gave for it.” He wrote “It’s not the pattern of the Lord to give reasons. We can put reason to revelation. We can put reason to commandments. When we do we’re on our own. ...I decided a long time ago that I had faith in the command [the temple ban]. ...”³

Elder Oaks’ words are repeated in a 2015 *Foundations of the Restoration* lesson manual that continues in current use by Church institute and BYU religion classes. In this manner one of our most negative historical lineage teachings is newly distributed to large numbers of young Church members each year.⁴ In their 2018 book *Faith is Not Blind*, former member of the Church’s First Quorum of the Seventy Bruce Hafen and his wife, Marie Kartchner Hafen, show how President Oaks’s teaching can influence Church members’ judgement on this matter, and they expressly state an underlying motivation for concluding that God was the source of that ban. After quoting

² Armand L. Mauss, “In Search of Ephraim: Traditional Mormon Conceptions of Lineage and Race,” *Journal of Mormon History*, 25, no. 1 (Spring 1999): 131-73.

³ Dallin H. Oaks, *Life’s Lessons Learned: Personal Reflections* (Deseret Book Co., 2011), p.68-69 (chapter “Assigning Reasons to Revelation”).

⁴ *Foundations of the Restoration Teacher Manual: Religion 225*, 2019, Lesson 27, “The Revelation on the Priesthood,” www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/manual/foundations-of-the-restoration-teacher-manual/lesson-26-the-revelation-on-the-priesthood?lang=eng. The lesson instructs the teacher to ask a student to read an excerpt from Elder Oak’s memoir that includes the following words, including the bracketed “race and the priesthood” phrase that ensures students understand the temple ban is intended by the reference to revelation or commandment:

“We [mortals] can put reasons to revelation. We can put reasons to commandments. When we do, we’re on our own. Some people put reasons to the one we’re talking about here [race and the priesthood], and they turned out to be spectacularly wrong....”

the text cited above from Oaks' memoir, they write that "This issue [of whether or not God was the source of the ban] matters. Concluding that the priesthood restriction itself was wrong makes it more likely that we would hold back from giving the Lord and His prophets the benefit of the doubt about other important questions." After setting that context, they describe how in an effort to determine whether the source of the ban was divine or due to human error, "[W]e once made the effort to review the plausible historical evidence supporting each view.... But then we paused, sensing that where we place the benefit of the doubt in resolving such complexities finally turns on larger questions than just how plausible the evidence is."⁵

In two recent talks President Oaks has also taught the ban was commanded by God. He delivered the first at the Church's 2018 "Be One" celebration of the 40th anniversary of the lifting of the ban. He called the ban one of the "commandments and directions He [the Lord] gives to His servants." An excerpt from this talk that contains this claim is included in the student manual for the *Foundations of the Restoration* religion course.⁶ He also stated that after the Church ended the ban in 1978, "The reasons that had been given to try to explain the prior restrictions on members of African ancestry — even those previously voiced by revered Church leaders — were promptly and publicly disavowed." This may sound comforting, but is incorrect. In fact, the Church continued to promote the bulk—and the worst—of the reasons Mormons had offered for the ban for over 30 years. This occurred mostly through continued print runs and sales by Deseret Book until 2010 of Bruce R. McConkie's book *Mormon Doctrine*, supplemented by a renewed distribution of Joseph Fielding Smith's *The Way to Perfection* that ended in May, 2018.⁷ Not until 2013 did the Church disavow most reasons for the ban when it published a "Race and the Priesthood" Gospel Topics essay.⁸

⁵ Bruce C. Hafen and Marie Kartchner Hafen, *Faith is not Blind*, (Deseret Book Co., 2018), p.98-100; also reprinted by Deseret Book in a journal edition in 2021, pages 118-119.

⁶ Dallin H. Oaks, Speech at "Be One" Celebration, June 2, 2018, <https://www.thechurchnews.com/2018/6/2/23221509/president-oaks-full-remarks-from-the-lds-churchs-be-one-celebration>. The speech included this text (italics added) "As part of my prayerful study, I learned that, in general, the Lord rarely gives reasons for *the commandments and directions He gives to His servants*. I determined to be loyal to our prophetic leaders and to pray—as promised from the beginning of these restrictions—that the day would come when all would enjoy the blessings of priesthood and temple."

Foundations of the Restoration Class Preparation Material: Religion 225, 2019, Lesson 27, "The Revelation on the Priesthood,"

<https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/manual/foundations-of-the-restoration-class-preparation-material-2019/lesson-27-class-preparation-material-the-revelation-on-the-priesthood?lang=eng>.

⁷ Bruce R. McConkie, *Mormon Doctrine* (Deseret Book Co., second edition, 1966 (revised in 1979). In more than a dozen of the books entries in the 1979 edition he continued to teach as Church doctrine negative lineage-based teachings. These included claims that Blacks (and other people of color) had experienced "racial degeneration" and were cursed by God (see the "Races of Man," "Cain," and "Ham" entries), that caste systems and racial segregation originate in the gospel ("Caste System"), and that miscegenation was not proper ("Negros").

Joseph Fielding Smith, *The Way to Perfection*, (Deseret Book Co., 1984, originally published in 1931). Smith's book contained, and was a major source for, most of the negative teachings about Blacks found in McConkie's *Mormon Doctrine*. Some of these are further discussed below in footnotes 18 and 19 and the associated text. The Church continued to reprint and distribute *The Way* until at least 1984. In 2017 Deseret Book started selling it in electronic form, and pulled it from Amazon's ebook platform in May, 2018.

⁸ "Race and Priesthood" essay, December 2013,

<https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/manual/gospel-topics-essays/race-and-the-priesthood?lang=eng>. In claiming the Church had made a prompt disavowal, Elder Oaks may have been thinking of an August 1978 statement by apostle Bruce R. McConkie of "Forget everything that I have said... a new flood of intelligence and light... erases all the darkness and all the views and all the thoughts of the past." However, that was given to a limited audience of Church employees. McConkie, "All Are Alike unto God, CES Religious Educator's

Then, in a “Racism and Other Challenges” sermon delivered at BYU in October, 2020, President Oaks taught:

Some have rejected some element of God’s plan as unreasonable according to cultural norms they could understand or accept. Others who have accepted God’s plan have mistakenly relied on cultural norms to provide reasons God has not revealed. Those who cannot accept the prophetic decisions and practices of the past should consider Winston Churchill’s wise counsel quoted earlier: “If we open a quarrel between the past and the present, we shall find that we have lost the future.”

A footnote to the published version of the talk clarifies for readers that the reference to “God’s plan” includes the temple ban. In the talk he also stated that in the Old Testament, “only members of the tribe of Levi were acceptable for service in the temple,” and listed other lineage-based practices of the Israelites prior to Christ’s death. He acknowledged that Christ and the early apostles eliminated lineage restrictions, but reminded listeners that the former lineage-based practices still “remain in scriptural history.”⁹

This line of argument appeared to be a plea for listeners to accept that because some lineage-based practices existed among pre-Christian Israelites, it is reasonable to think that God was the source of the Church’s modern lineage-based ban. However, beyond directly conflicting with central events and teachings of the New Testament, such as Peter’s lesson that “God is no respecter of persons,”¹⁰ this ignores key differences between the temple ban and Hebrew biblical practices. As one example, Mormons regarded completion of temple rituals (for men and women) and priesthood ordination (for men) as necessary for a person to achieve the highest level of heaven.¹¹ But no Mormons interpreted the ancient Hebrew practice of assigning priestly duties to a subset of members of the tribe of Levi to mean that people from other tribes, or Levites who were assigned non-priestly roles, were restricted from blessings in heaven.¹²

Symposium, BYU, August 18, 1978. And in several post-1978 publications McConkie continued to offer as Church doctrine most of his pre-1978 reasons, especially in the revised version of *Mormon Doctrine* released in 1979.

⁹ Dallin H. Oaks. “Racism and Other Challenges.” BYU Devotional, October 27, 2020.

<https://speeches.byu.edu/talks/dallin-h-oaks/racism-other-challenges/>. The footnote to the sentence referring to “God’s Plan” tells the reader “This is discussed in Dallin H. Oaks, “President Oaks’ Full Remarks from the LDS Church’s ‘Be One’ Celebration.” The entire focus of the Be One talk is the ban and its removal.

¹⁰ Acts 10, KJV

¹¹ As one of the voluminous examples of this teaching, see Joseph Fielding Smith, “Pearl of Great Price,” Utah Genealogical and Historical Magazine, Vol 21:3 (July 1930), 97-104 (preaching that temple rituals are required to achieve status as a “member of the Church of the First Born...to become one of the inner circle....This is what we can get in the Temple, so that we become *members of the family, sons and daughters of God, not servants.*” (emphasis in original, 100-101)).

¹² See Numbers 3:25-37 for one example of divisions of labor among Levites. See “Levite,” Encyclopedia Britannica, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Levite>. (“...Levites were musicians, gate keepers, guardians, Temple officials, judges, and craftsmen.”).

As another example of how ancient Hebrew practices do not provide a justification for the Mormon ban, the Hebrews determined lineage in a patrilineal manner (a child’s lineage was based on the lineage of the father). The Mormons did too, with the salient exception that when assessing whether someone was “Black” and therefore excluded from the temple and priesthood. For determining lineage in that circumstance we used the very different principle of “hypodescent,” where a child of mixed lineage is assigned the lineage of the socially subordinate parent (or in the extreme version practiced in America, of the socially subordinate grand-parent, great-grand-parent, etc.). This practice developed early in the American slave states, where a mixed-lineage child often had a mother who was enslaved and a father who was a slave master or overseer. Establishing the practice of hypodescent was economically advantageous to the dominant slave-owning class because a child defined as Black became valuable property of the slave mother’s owner. Also, hypodescent helped excuse a white father from responsibility and social stigma from a child by socially classifying the child without relation to the father.

4. President Nelson and “Believing Blood”

In 2018 President Nelson and his wife, Wendy Watson Nelson, delivered a joint “Hope of Israel” talk in a worldwide youth devotional. Sister Nelson told of a meeting in Russia with 100 female Church members in which she said, “I’d like to get to know you by lineage. Please stand as the tribe of Israel that represents the lineage declared in your patriarchal blessing is spoken.” The women in the room stood to report belonging to 11 of the 12 tribes. Immediately following her remarks, President Nelson taught:

Those whose lineage is from the various tribes of Israel are those whose hearts will most likely be turned to the Lord. He said, “My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me.”¹³ Those who are of the house of Israel will most easily recognize the Lord Jesus Christ as their Savior and will desire to be gathered into His fold.¹³

This is a restatement of a 19th-century Mormon concept that persons with genetic heritage from Israel had “believing blood” and so were more likely to be spiritually superior and seek and accept Christ.¹⁴ In the student manual for the *Foundations of the Restoration* course, the “Gathering of Israel” lesson teaches students the Lord’s “chosen people” are literal descendants from Israel, and quotes from the Nelsons’ “Hope of Israel” talk to invite students to join “the greatest work on earth today,” that of gathering Israel.¹⁵

Earlier discourses by President Nelson that contain teachings that contemporary Church members are literal descendants of Ephraim, and that this is relevant to members’ reception of divine blessings, include his 2006 General Conference talk, “The Gathering of Scattered Israel,” and his 1995 General Conference talk, “Children of the Covenant.”¹⁶ Another was his 1988 BYU Devotional address, in which he taught:

“Are you Hebrew? Yes... You are related to Abraham... most of us are of the lineage of Joseph through Ephraim or Manasseh.”

“What does this ancient history have to do with you and your identity? It has everything to do with your identity. It also relates to the direction your lives may take, your choices, and your challenges. It should even influence your selection of your partner in marriage.”¹⁷

In his recent book *Let’s Talk about Race and Priesthood* (Deseret Book Co., 2023), Paul Reeve counters some of the additional logical and historical fallacies that underlie contemporary attempts within the Church to justify the ban (e.g., chapter 8, “Old Testament Curses and the Book of Abraham,” chapter 18, “Post-Revelation Justifications”).

¹³ Russell M. Nelson and Wendy W. Nelson, “Hope of Israel,” Worldwide Youth Devotional, June 3, 2018, <https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/broadcasts/worldwide-devotional-for-young-adults/2018/06/hope-of-israel?lang=eng>.

¹⁴ See Armand L. Mauss, “In Search of Ephraim: Traditional Mormon Conceptions of Lineage and Race,” *Journal of Mormon History* 25, no. 1 (Spring 1999): 147-148.

¹⁵ *Foundations of the Restoration Class Preparation Material: Religion 225*, 2019, Lesson 11, “The Gathering of Israel,” www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/manual/foundations-of-the-restoration-class-preparation-material-2019/lesson-11-class-preparation-material-the-gathering-of-israel?lang=eng.

¹⁶ Russell M. Nelson, “The Gathering of Scattered Israel,” LDS General Conference, October, 2006, <https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/general-conference/2006/10/the-gathering-of-scattered-israel?lang=eng> (“In the temple we receive our ultimate blessings, as the seed of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.”); “Children of the Covenant,” LDS General Conference, April, 1995, <https://www.lds.org/general-conference/1995/04/children-of-the-covenant.p35?lang=eng>. (“Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob are our ancestors. We are of Israel. We have the right to receive the gospel, blessings of the priesthood, and eternal life.”)

¹⁷ Russell M. Nelson, “Thanks for the Covenant,” November 22, 1988, BYU Devotional, <https://speeches.byu.edu/talks/russell-m-nelson/thanks-covenant/>.

Is a teaching that persons with certain lineage are more likely to seek Christ actually a problem? Yes. It contradicts plentiful “all are alike unto God” teachings in our scriptures, and it lacks support in the events recounted in the New Testament or Book of Mormon. Moreover, during the period of the Church’s ban, teachings of a favored Ephraimite lineage —thought mainly to be possessed by light-skinned members hailing principally from the United Kingdom and the Nordic countries) supported the idea that there was an opposite—a cursed dark-skinned lineage.¹⁸

A text that demonstrates this connection is the 1931 Church lesson manual *The Way to Perfection* authored by apostle Joseph Fielding Smith. Mauss identified that book as particularly influential to Mormon lineage concepts through Smith’s “general rationalization and codification” of “disparate Mormon racist teachings that had accumulated up to his time.” Mauss described Smith as having integrated “uniquely Mormon ideas of premortal decisions about lineage with imported British Israelism and Anglo-Saxon triumphalism,” and “in effect postulated a divine rank-ordering of lineages with the descendants of ancient Ephraim (son of Joseph) at the top (including the Mormons); the “seed of Cain” (Africans) at the bottom; and various other lineages in between.”¹⁹ Smith’s arguments are laid out in detail over 13 chapters that preached biological lineage was a central characteristic defining one’s relationship to God and key to one’s prospects for enjoying God’s fullest blessings. He detailed claims of lineage-based spiritual and intellectual superiority and inferiority, and preached that those with black skin were subject to multiple curses by God. A short excerpt displays how setting an Israelite lineage on a pedestal facilitated denigrating those with a different lineage:

¹⁸ The Church’s familysearch.org genealogy service shows that one of President Nelson’s grandparents was born in Denmark and six of his eight great-grandparents were born in either Denmark, Sweden, or Norway. His other two great-grandparents were born in England. Because of when he was born (1924) and his Northern European heritage, of current Church leaders he seems to be the person most likely to have been influenced in his own thinking about lineage and divine blessings (or their absence) by the dozens of lessons produced by the Church’s genealogy society in the 1930s and ‘40s that taught the importance of members’ literal descendancy from Israel. Two examples from his teenage years were a year-long Sunday school class and a junior genealogy course, each containing multiple lessons that claimed to demonstrate in detail how the peoples of Denmark, Sweden, and Norway are descended from the (apparently not so) mythical god of war Woden/Odin, who, students learned, was an Israelite. *Children of the Covenant: A Lesson Book for Second Year Junior Genealogical Classes*, The Genealogical Society of Utah, 1937, Lessons 24,25, “The Teutonic Tribes,” and “The Scandinavian Sagas,” pp 83-88; *Birthright Blessings: Genealogical Training Class*, Deseret Sunday School Union Board, 1942, Lessons 25, 26, “The Mound Builders of Europe,” and “The Sagas and Civilizations of Scandinavia,” pp 71-81.

A Genealogy Society lesson first published in 1931 came to be used by some Church members with Nordic heritage to complete their own family trees. It showed detailed pedigree charts of how Joseph Smith, Brigham Young, and a dozen contemporary Church and Salt Lake City community leaders (and various kings and queens of European nations) were thought to have descended from Odin, and based on them concluded “Thus from pedigrees, prophecy, history, archaeology, and tradition evidence has been found to substantiate our teachings that we are ‘the servants of the Lord, even the Children of Ephraim’... To us has descended the precious birthright of the chosen seed and covenant race.” Archibald Bennet, “Children of Ephraim,” in *Utah Genealogical and Historical Magazine*, Vol 21:2 (April 1930) 67-85 (quote from 80-81).

For a fuller discussion of lineage teachings in this era, see Stirling Adams, “Video: Race, Lineage, and the 1920s-1940s Genealogical Society of Utah,”

<https://www.dialoguejournal.com/dialogue/race-lineage-and-the-1920s-1940s-genealogical-society-of-utah/>.

¹⁹ Armand L. Mauss. *All Abraham’s Children: Changing Mormon Conceptions of Race and Lineage* (University of Illinois Press, 2003), 29, 217; Joseph Fielding Smith. *The Way to Perfection* (Deseret Book Co., 1984). The book played a significant role in educating Mormons of President Nelson’s and Elder Oaks’ generation. As the book was used by the Church as the text for new lesson cycles it was reprinted at least 16 times in English (including in 1935, ’40, ’43, ’49, ’51, ’53, ’56, ’58, ’60, ’63, ’66, ’72, ’78, and ’84). Translations were published in at least Danish, Dutch, French, German, Portuguese, and Japanese.

But what a contrast! ...The sons of Abraham made rightful heirs to all the blessings of the fathers! And ‘the sons of Cain, denied the Priesthood; not ‘privileged to receive the covenants of glory in the kingdom of God! What could be more sad than this? Yet, can we say that the Judge of all the earth has not been just?’²⁰

5. Conclusion and Next Steps

We find ourselves now well into the 21st century, still preaching that the temple and priesthood ban was of divine origin, and still spreading lineage-based teachings. Until we stop the theological and organizational chicanery that buttressed the exclusionary practice for 130 years in the first place, that allowed most of its supporting teachings to endure at least another 30 years, we have not reached a waypoint from which we can make a full apology. Instead, we have a list of tasks to responsibly pursue. As a first step, we as a Church community need to complete the organizational work necessary to develop the humility and ingest the learning that will allow us to publicly recognize: 1) that the temple ban violated some of our most clearly stated and deepest principles; 2) that its cause was our tragic human error of allowing America’s racist legal and economic context to lead us to codify analogous racist religious practices; and 3) that its duration is explained in part because we wrongly put the mythic resources of our own scriptures and religious culture to work in defending those practices.

Then, when it comes to past and present teachings that God cares most for a chosen people defined by lineage, it may be best to eliminate them to move one step closer to believing that “[all] are privileged the one like unto the other” and “all are alike unto God.”²¹ For those anxious to find some way to account for God’s blessing to Abraham recounted in Genesis 17, that “I will make thee exceeding fruitful, and I will make nations of thee, and kings shall come out of thee,” perhaps the near-exponential mathematics of genealogy offers a resolution. If Abraham, Israel’s grandfather, was a historical person, he would likely have lived prior to the 17th century BC, when the Hyksos ruled Egypt. The work of a group of statisticians modelling human mating and migration patterns suggests the earliest date at which the “most common recent ancestor” of all present humans lived was likely between 1,415 BC and AD 55. The older date is based on conservative assumptions about the rate of migrations within and out of regions; the latter is the authors’ attempt to most accurately model migration rates. If this model is even roughly correct, Abraham, along with at least thousands of other people widely scattered across the earth at that time, could very well be the ancestor of everyone living now. As the authors of that article put it:

“[N]o matter the languages we speak or the colour of our skin, we share ancestors who planted rice on the banks of the Yangtze, who first domesticated horses on the steppes of the Ukraine, who hunted giant sloths in the forests of North and South America, and who laboured to build the Great Pyramid of Khufu.”²²

²⁰ Smith, *The Way to Perfection*, 102. Examples of negative lineage teaching are claims that “choice spirits” were placed by God in a favored lineage and such people had light skin and higher intelligence (48), that people of black African ancestry had received multiple divine curses, that black skin is a curse from God, and that people with black skin are inferior to whites (101-111).

²¹ 2 Nephi 26:28, 33.

²² Douglas L. T. Rohde, Steve Olson, Joseph T. Chang. “Modelling the Recent Common Ancestry of All Living Humans.” *Nature*, 431 (2004): 562-566, 565. In a separate paper Chang developed a model that suggests that not too much earlier than the date at which the most recent common ancestors of all today’s humans lived, there was a time when near 80% of the individuals then living were likely to be ancestors of everybody alive at some point in the distant future. Joseph T. Chang. “Recent Common Ancestors of All Present-Day Individuals.” *Advanced Applied Probability* 31 (July 1, 1999): 1002–26, 1024.

With concepts like the shared relationships of all humans in the forefront, we could recognize that everybody is special—or that no one is. We could simply put aside any talk of tying divine blessings to lineage. We could explore what it would mean to take seriously the many universal scriptures we've long underappreciated, such as Paul's reminder that Christ has "broken down the middle wall of partition between us" so that we are "no longer strangers and foreigners, but fellowcitizens with the saints, and of the household of God."²³

This Rohde *et al.* research confirms math and a general conclusion that many genealogists reached over a century ago. As one of several examples published within Mormonism, a 1931 Church genealogy lesson manual summarized ancestral math models and quoted a 1888 book in concluding:

"As all mankind at no immense distance in the past were our fathers and mothers, and all the people who will be living throughout the world at no immense distance in the future will be our sons and daughters, so the entire population of the globe at the present time are our new relations. With very little exaggeration we may call them brothers and sisters."

From "Lesson 32, Tables of Relationship," *Utah Genealogical and Historical Magazine*, Vol 22:2 (April 1931), 77-80, 78, quoting from Henry Kendall, *The Kinship of Men: An Argument from Pedigrees, Or, Genealogy Viewed as a Science*, Cupples and Hurd, Boston, 1888, p 57.

²³ Ephesians 2:14, 19, KJV.