

GENEALOGY
Nehemiah 7:65
By Raymond White

Written genealogies seemed to be as much a part of scripture as anything else. Whenever historians decided to write, they seemed to have had access to family lines in large quantities, and they incorporated whatever they wished from them into the Bible.

[1] JEWISH GENEALOGY

Nehemiah 7:5 And my God put into mine heart to gather together the nobles, and the rulers, and the people, that they might be reckoned by genealogy. And I found a register of the genealogy of them which came up at the first [first wave of returning Jewish immigrants], and found written therein.

How convenient for Nehemiah that such a record existed at all, because such information, if it were once lost, could never be recovered.

The Jews seems to be rabid family line buffs. They kept it all. I marvel, for example, that the Book of Ruth exists. You might say, well, of course it exists, she was the great-grandmother of David, so of course her story would be preserved. But that's my point: she didn't know that she was *going* to be the great-grandmother of the great king David, yet her story, one of millions, survived four generations anyway for post-Davidic scholars to find and use.

And why Ruth? Who was she? A nobody until her great-grandson became king. *Then* she was somebody. So, why did her story survive? Because the Holy Spirit had a special interest in her and made sure her story survived long enough for David and Solomon to find it? Perhaps. But that's too pat. A better answer is that lots of Jewish families, maybe all Jewish families, recorded their family lines.

It's a good thing they did. Because if the bible genealogies did not exist, then the bible would not exist.

[2] MORMON GENEALOGY

This is no different than Mormons keeping genealogy today. And although it would appear to be differently motivated (Jews to establish land and priesthood rights, and Mormons to seal families) it is not so differently motivated at all. Ancient Jews and modern Mormons were and are interested in their ancestors because, as Malachi says,

Malachi 4:6 And he shall turn the heart of the fathers to the children, and the heart of the children to their fathers, lest I come and smite the earth with a curse.

This is, what I call, God's lights out verse — the last thing God had to say to mankind before the long age of prophetic darkness. This is the last critically important thing that God had on his mind before turning off the lights and going home.

Genealogy is important. That's an understatement. And more than important, it is vital. Jews sought to define their families, and Mormons seek to cement their families.

Those motives seem different, but they are not. It's all about family, and about our need to understand ourselves and where we belong. For that, we need to know our family.

[3] PAUL'S OBJECTION

One criticism that's frequently thrown at Mormons comes from these verses.

1 Timothy 1:4 Neither give heed to fables and endless genealogies...

Titus 3:9 But avoid foolish questions, and genealogies...

The charge is clear enough. If Paul said don't bother with genealogy then why do Mormons do it?

One simple answer, which would create more problems than it solves, is to agree with those scholars who believe that Paul did not write the Titus and Timothy epistles. They have good reason to believe this: the writing style of those pastoral epistles are different enough from the undisputed Pauline epistles that it does seem that Titus and the Timothy epistles were not authored by Paul but by someone else. If that's true, then there is no charge to defend against — it wasn't Paul who wrote don't bother with genealogy.

But aside from that extreme defense (which may be the correct defense), we don't know why those Christians were doing genealogy, so we can't say why Paul objected to it, if he did. Maybe they were just trying to one-up each other with pedigree. Maybe Paul was simply saying, for now you have more important things to do, like preaching Christ and getting the church started, so leave the genealogy stuff for other generations.

Finally, if Paul did indeed instruct them to not bother with genealogy, there's no sound reason to believe that instruction should reach across 2000 years to our current generation and be binding on us. Paul probably had his reason to not bother with it. Mormons have their reason to bother a great deal with it.

One thing is certain, the Jews needed their genealogies. Without their genealogies, their religion, their nation, and their biblical records simple would not exist. For instance, would Paul object to the genealogies found in Matthew or Luke? I think not.

[4] JEWISH GENEALOGY CONTINUED

More about Jewish genealogy.

Ezra 2:62 These sought their register among those that were reckoned by genealogy, but they were not found: therefore were they, as polluted, put from the priesthood.

Nehemiah 7:61 But they could not shew their father's house, nor their seed, whether they were of Israel.

Nehemiah 7:64 These sought their register among those that were reckoned by genealogy, but it was not found: therefore were they, as polluted, put from the priesthood. :65 And the Tirshatha said unto them, that they should not eat of the most holy things, till there stood up a priest with Urim and Thummim.

[5] MORMON GENEALOGY CONTINUED

Mormons teach a doctrine that others might think strange. Well, Mormons teach many things that others think strange, but I'm directing us now to one specific peculiar Mormon notion and that is this: Mormons believe that in the Millennium, there will be direct contact with heavenly beings and deceased ancestors (open visions, angelic visits, etc.) so that family lines will be revealed to them so that lost records will no longer be an impediment to completing temple work.

Mormon genealogical researchers can only glean so much from tombstones and census records. But when the heavens are open, if you want to know the name of your great-great-great-great-great-great grandmother, you just ask her son who is sitting in your living room for a visit, fill in the missing name, and do the work. All genealogical lines will be completely known back to Adam and Eve, and temple work for the whole human race will be completed.

Far-fetched? Not at all.

***Nehemiah 7:61** ...they could not show their father's house, nor their seed, whether they were of Israel. **:65** And the Tirshatha said unto them, that they should not eat of the most holy things, till there stood up a priest with Urim and Thummim.*

In other words, these priests could not function as priests without their genealogy to prove that they were of the priestly line. But if their genealogy didn't exist, what then? Well, then they could hope for revelation from a Urim and Thummin to provide that necessary but missing information.

So how is that Israelite expectation any different from Mormon expectation? It is not different at all.

In the meantime, with eight billion people on the earth and growing, it's unlikely that Mormons will run out of temple work to do any time soon.

[6] EPILOG

I used to fret that our Mormon notion of eternal marriage is so enticing that sooner or later some other well-meaning church would imitate us and thus rob us of our uniqueness. I no longer worry about that because it dawned on me that to imitate our eternal marriage, a copy-cat church would have to also imitate eternal families, and also genealogical work and basically all of it, the whole nine-yards. Any copy-cat church that endeavored to plagiarize the beginning would have to see it through and plagiarize the end as well. And that, no church would be ambitious enough to do.

Here is what Mormons are trying to do, and you tell me if this isn't insanely ambitious: Mormons are trying to baptize every human being that ever lived, and to seal together every family that ever existed. Now, is that insane or not? Of course it is. And that is why no copy-cat church would ever dare copy eternal marriage, because doing so would commit them to the impossible task of baptizing and sealing everybody.

Who would be brave enough and foolish enough to commit to that? I'll tell you who. The only people who would be foolish enough to try to baptize *everyone* is a people to whom God has said, "You *must* do this thing. I command it." That's the Mormons.

Here are a few other people who attempted the insanely impossible.

Genesis 6:14 *Make thee an ark [Noah] of gopher wood ... :19* *And of every living thing of all flesh, two of every sort shalt thou bring into the ark ...*

Exodus 4:20 *And Moses his wife and his sons ... returned to the land of Egypt.*
[For the single purpose of freeing an entire nation of slaves.]

1 Corinthians 1:8 *For the preaching of the cross is unto them that perish foolishness; but unto us which are saved it is the power of God.*

It is foolish to build an ark. It is foolish to walk into Pharaoh's court and demand that he let the Israelite slaves go. It is foolish to think that a man dying on a cross could be the instrument of saving the world. But the ark saved Noah and the world, Pharaoh did finally free Israel at God's instance, and Jesus' death and resurrection are the only hope that mankind has.

So we Mormons who do such a foolish thing as genealogy and temple work are in pretty good company after all.