

Naming Lineage in the Patriarchal Blessing

A Few Words of Caution

THE GIVING OF BLESSINGS, though important, is not the most important function of the patriarch—who is also an evangelist. The blessing is not mandatory to each person, as is baptism. It is permissive. It should be sought out of an urgent, personal desire and not because of any mass appeal to go and get a blessing or undue pressure from any other person. It is a very personal matter.

Nor is the naming of lineage the chief function of the blessing. That is optional with the patriarch, according to the spiritual direction that he may have. The law says that the patriarch *may* "if so led, point out the lineage of the one who is blessed."—Doctrine and Covenants 125: 3.

No one should be urged to go to the patriarch merely to be told his or her lineage. No one should be unduly disturbed if the lineage is not named in the blessing given. There may be one of several good reasons. The chief functions of the blessing are not to delve into the past or to reveal in detail the future; they are to comfort, counsel, if necessary admonish, sometimes rebuke, encourage, bless, and—above all—help the person in all ways to conform his or her life to the teachings and Spirit of Christ.

The primary question is not, "Who was my ancestor long, long ago?" More important and searching is the question, "Am I now, today, bearing well the name of Christ and keeping his commandments that I may grow to be worthy of any inheritance that may come to me now or in the great beyond?"

Concerning Pride of Ancestry

There is a certain justification for pride in one's family or tribal ancestry, if it is honorable—and an in-

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centive, also. At its best, ancestral pride may bring satisfaction and incentive. At its worst, it becomes arrogance and snobbishness. The Jews had a bigoted pride in tribe and, even while plotting to kill Christ, boasted to him that they were of the seed of Abraham. They were rebuked by him (John 8: 33-42).

Paul had cherished a great pride that he was "of the stock of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, an Hebrew of the Hebrews; as touching the law a Pharisee."—Philippians 3: 5. As such, he persecuted the Christians. Converted to Christ, by comparison, he counted all those things of lesser value. His joy and glory were first of all in Christ. He came to see that for those "baptized into Christ," who had "put on Christ," there "is neither Jew nor Greek," but all are "one in Christ" (Galatians 3: 27, 28). Let us not fall into the error of overestimating the matter of naming lineage.

Some years ago I met a very intelligent and fine-appearing representative of the Utah Mormon faith. Learning that I was a descendant of Joseph Smith, founder of the church, he seemed much impressed and shaking my hand said, "One thing is sure, Joseph Smith will take care of his own family throughout the eternal ages." I replied, "I do not know about that, but I am sure that Christ will take care of his own."

Are you of Christ? That is the question, first, last, and all the time. With these qualifying thoughts in mind, let us inquire concerning the background of this custom of sometimes naming the lineage of the person receiving a patriarchal blessing.

BY ELBERT A. SMITH

Concerning the Twelve Tribes of Israel

This takes us back to the twelve tribes of Israel, which is a broad subject. The Jews are of Israel, but not all Israel were or are Jews. The tribe of Judah was one of twelve tribes. The naming of lineage in the blessing does not, as a rule, go back of or outside of those twelve tribes.

One of our church girls who married a fine man of Japanese extraction said to me that she had noticed that blessings given to Orientals never name lineage. That, I suppose, is due to the fact that, in all probability, Oriental races go back farther in history than the dispersal of the twelve tribes. I consoled her husband with this statement: "I am not so much concerned with where you came from as I am concerned with the direction in which you are going—and I think you are going in the right direction."

God made covenant with Abraham and gave him certain wonderful promises. His descendants were to be as the sands of the sea in number (not limited to Jews alone). In him and his seed should "all the nations of the earth be blessed." Many of the promises and prophesies made concerning Abraham and his posterity have been fulfilled. Others are in process of being fulfilled.

The nations of the earth have been blessed through the seed of Abraham. From them came the law and the commandments, the prophets and the apostles, Christ and his church, and the Scriptures—including

ing the Bible, the Book of Mormon, and the Doctrine and Covenants.

In due time, Jacob, the grandson of Abraham, became the father and progenitor of twelve tribal families. Before his death, Jacob gave a patriarchal blessing to his sons. Most outstanding were the blessings given to Judah and Joseph. And those two became the leading tribes.

We are all very well acquainted with the character of the blessing given to Joseph. It figures prominently in our church belief. It was stated of him, "The blessings of thy father hath prevailed above the blessings of my progenitors, unto the utmost bound of the everlasting hills; they shall be on the head of Joseph." The blessing given to the progenitors of Jacob, so far as landed estates were concerned, was limited to the Holy Land—a rather small but historically important bit of territory. The children of Judah, the Jews, are still fighting for possession of that inheritance. The children of Joseph were to have an inheritance much greater, reaching to the "uttermost bounds of the everlasting hills."

We learn through the Book of Mormon that children of Joseph inherited ancient America, a vast territory far beyond that given to Jacob's progenitor, Abraham. Lehi, a descendant of Joseph through Manasseh, with his family, founded an ancient civilization in the Americas.

In Deuteronomy, chapter 33, we find that Moses also blessed the twelve tribes and particularly dwelt upon the glories which were to be the inheritance of the children of Joseph and the richness of the land they should inherit; he declared they should be the "ten thousands of Ephraim and the thousands of Manasseh."

In Genesis 48: 13-19, the record is given as to how Jacob blessed his grandsons, Ephraim and Manasseh, (Joseph's sons). Ephraim was the younger but received the greater blessing. Of Manasseh he said,

"He shall become a people, and he shall be great." But of Ephraim he said, "His seed shall become a multitude of nations." Many, when they speak about the Hebrew peoples or Israelites, think of the Jews. They were only a part of the tribes of Israel. The children of Joseph, Ephraim and Manasseh, were to become nations, particularly so in the case of Ephraim.

The "Ten Lost Tribes"

Following the exodus from Egypt, the twelve tribes of Israel were given their inheritances in the Holy Land. The Jews are there yet—or again. After the death of King Solomon, the tribes became divided and the ten tribes were known as the "Kingdom of Israel" in the north of Palestine, while the Jews (Judah) and at least a part of the tribe of Benjamin were known as the "Kingdom of Judah" in the south. There seems to be some confusion about the course taken by the tribe of Benjamin as a whole. The tribe may have been divided. In the First Book of Kings, chapter 12, verse 20, it is stated: "There was *none* that followed the house of David, but the tribe of Judah *only*." In the same chapter, verse 23, Judah and Benjamin are classed together, historically they are so treated: "Benjamin remained with Judah" (*Jewish Encyclopedia*, Volume 16, page 664). And: "Judah and Benjamin formed the southern kingdom under the name of Judah" (*The Enduring Word*, by Christiana Salyards, page 243).

About 719 B. C., Shalmaneser overthrew the Kingdom of Israel and carried the ten tribes captive into Assyria. The *Encyclopedia Americana* says of them, "to be lost forever." However, we and many other believers in Bible prophecy hold that they were not lost forever. We believe they have figured and will continue to figure in human history under divine direction.

Where are the lost tribes? In our own history in years gone by, some few of our people speculated that

they were at the North Pole in the so-called "North Country." They had the idea that up around the North Pole there was a mysteriously warmed region where those tribes found sanctuary and some day they would be discovered; but the north polar region has been crossed and recrossed by airplanes, and that idea has been found to be without any foundation in fact. There was an even more fantastic theory held by some that there is a hole in the earth at the North Pole and that the twelve tribes were within the interior of the earth, mysteriously lighted and sheltered while they waited the time of their return. That strange notion is no longer advocated.

The theory seems much more reasonable that those tribes are lost only to the vision of the historian, and their posterity may be found in some of the countries of Europe, in the British Isles, and in America. Those countries of Europe and the British Isles might be spoken of as "north countries" as compared to Palestine. Certain Scriptures indicate that those tribes of Israel had gone into the "North Country" and would return from the "North Country" (as in Jeremiah 31: 8-10; and Doctrine and Covenants 108: 6).

The Books of Esdras were not accepted by compilers of the Bible as "canonical," but they did often appear in older editions of the King James version as among the so-called "Apocryphal" books. In the second Book of Esdras, there is a purported historical statement about the ten tribes that is of considerable interest:

Those are the ten tribes, which were carried away prisoners out of their own land in the time of Osea the king, whom Salmanasar the king of Assyria led away captive, and he carried them over the waters, and so came they into another land. But they took this counsel among themselves, that they would leave the multitude of the heathen, and go forth into a further country, where never mankind dwelt, that they might there keep their statutes, which they never kept in their own land. And they entered into Euphrates by the narrow passages of the river. For the Most High then shewed

signs for them, and held still the flood, till they were passed over. For through that country there was a great way to go, namely, of a year and a half: and the same region is called Arsareth.

Then dwelt they there until the latter time; and now when they shall begin to come, the Highest shall stay the springs of the stream again, that they may go through: therefore sawest thou the multitude with peace.—II Esdras 13: 40-47.

The advocates of the so-called "British-Israel" theory hold that Anglo-Saxons are of Israelitish descent from the ten tribes, Ephraim predominating. While we may not agree with many of their conclusions, some of which are highly speculative, perhaps we can agree with one of their main propositions, as it accords with the fact that by far the greater number of patriarchal blessings given in America and Britain that name lineage give it as of Ephraim.

According to their theory, which accords with the passages from Esdras just quoted, the ten tribes made their escape in a body from Assyria and went north, crossing the Euphrates and on up beyond the Black Sea, turning to the West into Northern and Central Europe, and up into the Scandinavian countries (leaving colonies and groups behind). In different groups and at different times, they are presumed to have made their way into the British Isles and their descendants eventually into British colonies and America. (At least the theory may be worthy of thought and study.)

Apparently the proponents of this theory do not attempt to differentiate among the ten tribes as of the present but regard them as pretty much merged "in Ephraim." They find place names in Europe and along the routes presumably taken over the centuries that are claimed to be of Israelitish origin. As, for example, Denmark is supposed to be "Danmark" or "Dansmark" from the tribe of Dan; and the name "Anglo-Saxon" is claimed to be from "Isaac's sons."

(See *British-Israel Truth*, by Archdeacon Denis Hanan H. Aldersmith, chapter 6. The Covenant Publishing Company, London.)

Biblical Genealogy Simple

Biblical genealogy was comparatively simple. It traced family lineage through men only and, as a rule, ignored the mothers. It was literally "our forefathers." For example, Matthew, in the opening chapter of his gospel, gives the genealogy of Joseph, the foster father of Jesus, from Abraham down to Jesus, though Joseph was only the foster father. The genealogy of Mary he did not give at all, and she was the mother of Jesus. Jesus inherited nothing by blood relationship from Joseph. All that Jesus inherited biologically was from his mother and her side of the house. And it must have been through her that he was of "the seed of David according to the flesh" (Romans 1:3) and heir to "the throne of his father David" (Luke 1:32). With such a precedent, maternal lines must be reckoned with in our lineage.

The Family Tree Like a Net

It has been very well said that the ancestry of a given person, called the "family tree," is more like a net than a tree, meaning that there are lines branching out in every direction, crossing and recrossing. Each of us has one father and one mother, two grandfathers and two grandmothers. Thus far it is rather simple. One step back, and we have four great-grandfathers and four great-grandmothers. A step farther we have eight of each, and then sixteen of each. The number increases mathematically and rapidly to an astonishing total if we push it back far enough. In other words, there are blood streams coming into our persons from many directions and from many ancestors. The various mothers in this ancestry probably contributed as much and sometimes more than the fathers to the characteristics of their posterity.

America the "Melting Pot" of Genealogy

It goes without saying that American lineage is mixed, so many

racess having contributed to the population in the United States and Canada. This mixing and crossing of lines accounts for the fact that sometimes two members of one family are named as of different lineage in their patriarchal blessings. One brother may have inherited some very marked characteristics from a father or grandfather, or mother or grandmother, while the other brother (or sister) inherited marked characteristics from another line of descent: and thus one might be named as of Ephraim and another of Manasseh or even of Judah or Benjamin; just as one brother may be more German and another more English when there has been a mixture of German and English blood in parentage.

In the naming of lineage, I have noticed that sometimes a statement is expressly made that a person is of the *lineage* of Ephraim; while in another case the statement is made that the person's *inheritance* shall be with Ephraim; which may mean by appointment rather than by descent.

Tribal Lineage Mixed

The Jews, during much of their history, observed strictly their laws and traditions concerning marriage and kept the tribal strain rather to itself; but it was not always so, even in the Holy Land, nor is it always so in modern times.

At the time when the Jews were carried away into Babylon (the ten tribes having already been taken away to Assyria) there were remnants of the various tribes left in Palestine. (As late as in the time of the apostles, Luke mentioned a woman in Jerusalem "of the tribe of Asher" (Luke 2:36). When the Jews returned to Jerusalem, those remnants were still there. *Smith's Bible Dictionary* says of that situation:

During and after the captivity, the Jews laid aside their prejudices, forgot their peculiar *tribal pride*, and became *one nation* . . . and since that time no

one of them is able to trace his lineage to any particular tribe, but may reasonably claim to have the blood of the whole twelve mingled in his veins.—Edition of 1892, page 50.

If that be true, though Jews are predominantly of Judah, in a family presumably Jewish, there might be an outcropping in one member of the family of long latent but strong racial traits marking him logically as being of Benjamin or some other one of the tribes, rather than of Judah. In such an event, two members of that family might receive patriarchal blessings assigning them to two different tribes.

The ten tribes, with Ephraim at their head, even in the days of the Northern Kingdom in Palestine, were never as zealous as the Jews to observe Mosaic laws and customs. In fact, they were quite given to apostasy and dabbled in idolatry and heathen customs, and not only married among the heathen "gentiles" but crossed and recrossed tribal lines in marriage, which probably continued after they were carried away in captivity. The *Jewish Encyclopedia* says of them:

Under the dynasty of Omri and thereafter, tribal divisions began to be *ignored*, consequently the whole Northern Kingdom was often poetically called Ephraim (Hosea 5: 3, 4; Isaiah 7: 4; Jeremiah 31: 17-20).—Volume 4, page 35.

If that be true, it is possible that even when the lineage is predominantly of Ephraim, there may be a strong admixture of other racial lines which may crop out in a family in one member and not in the others. So one may be called of Judah, and one of Ephraim.

You will observe by now that this matter of tracing or naming lineage is not such a simple thing as it might appear to be. All through history, even among the isolationist Jews, love has broken over racial lines and brought into families new strains to be reckoned with. Do not flatter yourself that you have a purebred and unmixed lineage right back to

Abraham or Judah or Ephraim or Benjamin—or even back to the "Mayflower."

The Value of Naming Lineage

This matter of naming lineage, unless it be in the case of a Jew of Jewish name and physiognomy, or perhaps an American Indian, would seem to be a matter known only through the spirit of prophecy, or we might say by the "discernment of spirits."

To me, it is not of primary importance in the blessing. Obviously not, because it is optional with the evangelist. As it is stated in the revelation, he *may* "if so led point out the lineage of the one who is blessed."

The reasons for naming the lineage and the reasons giving it significance may be that in some cases it is a comfort and an inspiration to people to feel that they are descendants of Ephraim or Manasseh or Judah or Benjamin. Personally, I believe that the blessing is much more concerned with the future of the individual. It is more important to know which way he is going from now on; and the counsel given to him, the blessing concerning his soul, the rededication—if we may call it that—should be forward-looking for the shaping of his own life, rather than dwelling too much upon the far distant past from which his ancestors have emerged.

The Significance of Naming the Lineage

This matter, however, may have a forward-looking phase to it—looking forward to the return of Israel, the various tribes thereof, and the appointment of inheritances to those various tribes during the millennium. This seems to be the phase on which the older patriarchs dwelt. For example, here is a quotation from a blessing given by John H. Lake in 1904:

Adopted into the family of God, you are his and belong to the tribe of

Ephraim, and when the time comes that the allotment shall be made by the direction of Jesus Christ, you shall receive your inheritance with that tribe, and there occupy and carry out the purposes of God in the great thousand years.

Those patriarchs were evidently looked forward to the millennium when they named the lineage of an individual. I suppose there is scriptural support to their theology. For example, in Matthew 19: 28, it is said that Jesus is to judge the twelve tribes of Israel. And in Revelation 7: 4, it is stated that of the twelve tribes, one hundred and forty-four thousand were sealed.

There are many things in the prophecies concerning the future which are very speculative. This seems to be one of them on which we do not have too much light. While the Spirit may direct the patriarch in particular cases to point out the lineage of the individual which would indicate the inheritance to be received in the distant future, I think that the blessing is more concerned with the needs of the individual now, in his life here, to make due preparation to enter into the finest inheritance possibly obtainable under the providences of God.

John was content to leave many things to the future. He said, "It doth not yet appear what we shall be, but this we know that at his appearing we shall be like him." Our main concern should be to become like Christ and trust the future in his hands. The man who accepts Christ as his Savior is of his spirit and whole-heartedly obeys the gospel; he may feel absolutely confident that, in the due time of the Lord, he will receive the finest inheritance he is able to enjoy and fitted to receive.

The Best

"The enemy of the *best* is not the worst, but it is the *second best*, and if we today, any of us, accept anything but the *best*, we are sinning."
—W. Wallace Smith.