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“BEING OF THAT LINEAGE”: GENERATIONAL CURSES AND INHERITANCE IN THE BOOK OF ABRAHAM

John S. Thompson

Abstract: *The seeming appearance of a lineal or generational curse in the Book of Abraham has been used erroneously to marginalize people and justify racist ideas in Latter-day Saint history. To avoid any further misinterpretation of scripture in ways that are hurtful to others, the following attempts to elucidate the meaning of lineal curses within the Book of Abraham’s claimed ancient provenance. “Cursed” often reflected a simple legalistic concept, applicable to any person regardless of race, that meant one was currently in a state of disinheritance. An individual might be in a state of disinheritance if they violated any requirement necessary to receive their inheritance, and any descendant who remained an heir of a person who no longer had an inheritance to give was also considered disinherited or “cursed,” even though they may have personally done nothing wrong. This ancient understanding of cursing as disinheritance provides better context and clarity to many of Joseph Smith’s revelations and translations, including the Book of Abraham. Arguably, the scriptures and revelations of the Latter-day Saint tradition, including the Bible, indicate that the eternal blessings of a kingdom (land) and priestly kingship/queenship (priesthood) originate from God but must be inherited through an unbroken ancestral chain forged via covenant. Indeed, the express purpose of sealing children to parents in modern Latter-day Saint temples is to make them “heirs.” Consequently, moving towards a better understanding of the roles inheritance and disinheritance play in receiving the divine blessings of the covenant might be beneficial generally and help readers avoid racist interpretations of the Book of Abraham and other scripture. This is especially the case when it is understood that being disinherited, in a gospel context, does not need to be a permanent status when one relies on the grace of the Holy Messiah and*

submits to those divine laws and covenant rites whereby one can literally inherit the promised blessings.

The Book of Abraham, which Joseph Smith started publishing in 1842 as a divinely revealed translation of a text “purporting to be the writings of Abraham ... upon papyri,” gives a first-person account of two major events from the patriarch’s life: 1) his initial calling by God at an altar where he nearly experienced capital punishment at the hands of a “priest of Elkenah,” who “was also the priest of Pharaoh” (see Abraham 1:1–31) and 2) his later covenant with God that included divine temple-like instruction concerning pre-mortal spirits (whose organization and relationships are compared to various heavenly bodies) as well as the creation of the earth and mankind (see Abraham 2:1–5:21).¹ Passages within the first event appear to suggest that some kind of generational curse prohibited the king of Egypt from having the right to priesthood. The reader is told that from the biblical Ham “sprang that race which preserved the curse in the land” and that Pharaoh, as a descendant of Ham, was “of that lineage by which he could not have the right of Priesthood,” though the pharaohs generally would “fain claim it from Noah, through Ham” (Abraham 1:21, 24, 27).²

1. For the original publication of the Book of Abraham see “Book of Abraham and Facsimiles, 1 March–16 May 1842,” 704–706, 719–22, *The Joseph Smith Papers*, <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/book-of-abraham-and-facsimiles-1-march-16-may-1842/1>. Citations of the Book of Abraham used throughout this study are from the current (2013) edition. Pertinent differences in the original publication and earliest manuscripts will be noted. In addition to the original published header quoted above, several contemporary sources demonstrate that Joseph Smith and his associates believed the Book of Abraham translation came from “writings” on the papyri. Other sources are noted in John Gee, *An Introduction to the Book of Abraham* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2017), 83–86. Consequently, efforts to promote a narrative that Joseph Smith only relied on the pictures and/or the mere possession of ancient papyri to imagine a Book of Abraham that had no corollary, either real or assumed, with a text on the papyri is glossing what Joseph Smith and his contemporaries claimed. An early published report of Joseph Smith’s acquisition of the papyri appears in Oliver Cowdery, “Egyptian Mummies – Ancient Records,” *Latter Day Saints’ Messenger and Advocate* 2 (Dec. 1835): 223–27.

2. The meaning of the term “race” in Joseph Smith’s day included: “The lineage of a family, or continued series of descendants from a parent who is called the stock. A *race* is the series of descendants indefinitely. Thus all mankind are called the *race* of Adam; the Israelites are of the *race* of Abraham and Jacob. Thus we speak of a *race* of kings, the *race* of Clovis or Charlemagne; a *race* of nobles, etc.” Noah

Given traditional assumptions in the Western world that all black Africans were descendants of Noah's son Ham and perhaps even Cain, both of whose stories contain curses, the Book of Abraham's denying priesthood to the Egyptian pharaohs on account of their descendancy from Ham prompted some to use this text as a justification for The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints' ban denying priesthood and temple rituals to black people of African descent prior to June 1978. Beginning in the late 1960s and early 1970s, however, Armand Mauss and Lester Bush argued that many of the explanations for the modern ban based in the Book of Abraham and other scripture were assertions that do not actually appear in or were over-reaching the texts.³ Their work prompted a flurry of subsequent scholarship revisiting the historical sources in an attempt to determine the ban's modern origins and to scrutinize the many explanations for it.⁴ In more recent years,

Webster, *American Dictionary of the English Language* (New York: S. Converse, 1828), s.v. "race," emphasis in original.

3. See Armand L. Mauss, "Mormonism and the Negro: Faith, Folklore, and Civil Rights," in *Neither White nor Black: Mormon Scholars Confront the Race Issue in a Universal Church*, ed. Lester E. Bush, Jr. and Armand L. Mauss (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1984), 9–30; Lester E. Bush, Jr. "Mormonism's Negro Doctrine: An Historical Overview," in *Neither White nor Black: Mormon Scholars Confront the Race Issue in a Universal Church*, ed. Lester E. Bush, Jr. and Armand L. Mauss (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1984), 53–129.

4. See, for example, Ronald K. Esplin, "Brigham Young and Priesthood Denial to the Blacks: An Alternate View," *BYU Studies Quarterly* 19, no. 3 (1979): 394–402; Newell G. Bringhurst, *Saints, Slaves, and Blacks: The Changing Place of Black People Within Mormonism* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1981); Lester E. Bush, Jr., "Whence the Negro Doctrine? A Review of Ten Years of Answers," in *Neither White nor Black: Mormon Scholars Confront the Race Issue in a Universal Church* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1984); Arnold H. Green, "Gathering and Election: Israelite Descent and Universalism in Mormon Discourse," *Journal of Mormon History* 25, no. 1 (Spring 1999): 195–228; Armand L. Mauss, *All Abraham's Children: Changing Mormon Conceptions of Race and Lineage* (Champaign, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2003); Newell G. Bringhurst and Darron T. Smith, *Black and Mormon* (Champaign, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2004), 13–18, 20, 23, 28–29; Claudia Bushman, *Contemporary Mormonism: Latter-day Saints in Modern America* (Westport, CT: Praeger Publishers, 2006); Russell W. Stevenson, *For the Cause of Righteousness: A Global History of Blacks and Mormonism, 1830–2013* (Salt Lake City: Greg Kofford Books, 2014); W. Paul Reeve, *Religion of a Different Color: Race and the Mormon Struggle for Whiteness* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 133, 138, 147, 200–201, 205–206; Max Perry Mueller, "Black, White, and Red: Race and the Making of the Mormon People, 1830–1880" (doctoral dissertation, Harvard University, 2015); Matthew L. Harris and Newell G. Bringhurst, *The Mormon Church and Blacks: A Documentary History* (Champaign, IL: University of

Church leaders published an official statement disavowing the many reasons given thus far for the modern ban's existence, including those reasons based on the Book of Abraham. The statement acknowledges that many of these past explanations were influenced by racist ideologies of their day.⁵

Due to racist interpretations of the Book of Abraham, some have assumed that:

1. Generational curses denying priesthood in the Book of Abraham must be a relic of Joseph Smith's modern American-influenced racism.⁶ This assumption, along with other controversies surrounding the Book of Abraham, is fueling a movement within the Latter-day Saint community to increasingly marginalize the Book of Abraham, calling into question its place in Latter-day Saint canon and claiming

Illinois Press, 2015), 12–14, 31, 35, 44, 48–50, 58, 73–74, 90–91, 99, 104, 113, 116–17. John Gee indicates that racist interpretations of Book of Abraham passages do not appear in Church publications until 1895 (Gee, *Introduction to Book of Abraham*, 163–73). However, racist interpretations of the Book of Abraham did exist in other sources prior to that time. For example, Parley P. Pratt commented in April 1847 that the Black schismatic leader William McCary “had ‘got the blood of Ham in him which lineage was cursed as regards [to] the priesthood’” (“Historian’s Office General Church Minutes, 1839–1877;” 1846–1850; Meetings in Winter Quarters while Brigham Young was West, 1847 April–July; Sunday Meeting Minutes, Winter Quarters; Church History Library; The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints; <https://catalog.churchofjesuschrist.org/assets/32fcc85a-a3db-4751-8e4a-df46a5bd68a3/0/0>). While not explicitly mentioning where his idea came from, Pratt’s statement likely draws upon the unique Book of Abraham teaching that Ham’s descendants were cursed with respect to priesthood.

5. “Race and the Priesthood,” *Gospel Topics Essays*, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (2013), <https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/manual/gospel-topics-essays/race-and-the-priesthood>. Matthew Harris and Newell Bringhurst state, “The church now teaches that the ban was rooted in racism, not divine revelation.” Harris and Bringhurst, *The Mormon Church and Blacks*, 119. To the contrary, the Church’s essay cited above only states that the many reasons or justifications given for the ban were rooted in racism, but it has not made a statement on the origin of the ban itself: “Over time, Church leaders and members advanced many theories to explain the priesthood and temple restrictions. None of these explanations is accepted today as the official doctrine of the Church.”

6. For such a view see Ryan Stuart Bingham, “Curses and Marks: Racial Dispensations and Dispensations of Race in Joseph Smith’s Bible Revision and the Book of Abraham,” *Journal of Mormon History* 41, no. 3 (July 2015): 22–57.

it is essentially a nineteenth-century pseudepigrapha of Joseph Smith and his scribes.⁷

2. Generational curses appearing in the Book of Abraham and other scripture, being unjust, are not actually generational curses. This approach requires allegorizing or glossing the curse-related material to explain away or deny its existence in the text. For example, in his otherwise astute critique of racially motivated interpretations of scripture, Armand Mauss claimed that there are no scriptural grounds for assuming that curses upon single individuals, such as Cain or Ham, can be applied to their descendants:

If we take either the Old Testament or the Pearl of Great Price account of Cain's punishment, we are told very little about the "curse" and nothing at all about the "mark" except the cryptic comment that it was to protect the bearer from being killed. Nor are we given any grounds to suppose that either the "curse" or the "mark" should apply to any of Cain's descendants. ... There is absolutely no scriptural basis for assuming

7. For example, Terryl Givens and Brian Hauglid attempt to marginalize the Book of Abraham by suggesting that Joseph Smith never claimed the Book of Abraham was part of his divine calling and likely did not intend it to be canonized either (Terryl Givens and Brian M. Hauglid, *The Pearl of Greatest Price: Mormonism's Most Controversial Scripture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2019), 201). A rebuttal of this point is in John S. Thompson, "'We May Not Understand Our Words': The Book of Abraham and the Concept of Translation in The Pearl of Greatest Price," *Interpreter: A Journal of Latter-day Saint Faith and Scholarship* 41 (2020): 41–42, <https://journal.interpreterfoundation.org/we-may-not-understand-our-words-the-book-of-abraham-and-the-concept-of-translation-in-the-pearl-of-greatest-price/>. Most recently see Dan Vogel, *Book of Abraham Apologetics: A Review and Critique* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 2021), 95–118. See response to Vogel by Jeff Lindsay, "Book of Abraham Polemics: Dan Vogel's Broad Critique of the Defense of the Book of Abraham," *Interpreter: A Journal of Latter-day Saint Faith and Scholarship* 47 (2021): 107–50, <https://journal.interpreterfoundation.org/book-of-abraham-polemics-dan-vogels-broad-critique-of-the-defense-of-the-book-of-abraham/>. See also response to Vogel by Stephen O. Smoot, "Framing the Book of Abraham: Presumptions and Paradigms," *Interpreter: A Journal of Latter-day Saint Faith and Scholarship* 47 (2021): 263–338 (especially, 302–304), <https://journal.interpreterfoundation.org/framing-the-book-of-abraham-presumptions-and-paradigms/>.

that anything Ham himself did was involved in the
denial of the priesthood to his descendants. ...⁸

Both of these conclusions, though sometimes well-meaning, are erroneous, having interpreted the text through a modern lens. When the Book of Abraham is viewed within its claimed ancient provenance, the existence and mechanics of its generational curse is understood to be neither racist nor unjust, nor is it any reflection of the worthiness of a descendant affected by it. Rather, its “curse” can be understood simply as an expression of a disinheritance as well as the natural consequences of a disinheritance among one’s descendants.

A quick illustration to provide a framework: if a person had a family heirloom, such as a precious jewel, taken away due to an action that violated the terms by which one was to inherit such an heirloom, their loss could be referred to as a “curse” in scriptural language. Since this person no longer has the family heirloom to pass on to their own descendants, then any person who remains an heir of the one who lost the jewel are also considered “cursed” or disinherited, because they simply cannot receive what their forefather no longer has to give them.

As will be shown, ancient scriptures portray God using family inheritances, forged within covenant bonds, as the distribution mechanism of the divine blessings, particularly the blessings of a kingdom (land) and royal powers (priesthood). This arguably creates an environment wherein children and fathers/mothers must look to one another in order to obtain the heavenly blessings together, strengthening family relationships. However, it also appears to create an environment in which children can be naturally cut off, through no fault of their own, from any divine blessing that an ancestor lost and no longer has to pass down to their posterity.

To remedy this natural consequence, Joseph Smith’s and subsequent prophetic revelations clarified the means by which the progeny of one who was cut off can still inherit the divine blessings, if they so desire. A descendant can either aid their disinherited ancestors through repentance and restore them to the family chain, allowing the inheritance to flow once again, or, if an ancestor persists in their choice to abide not the covenant laws by which the blessings come, a descendant can use the law of adoption to forge inheritance links with those who do abide in the covenant. In this way, any believing child, regardless of race, can overcome being legally cut off or cursed (i.e., disinherited) from the

8. Mauss, “Mormonism and the Negro,” 14–15.

divine blessings. Conversely, anyone who chooses to follow the tradition or remain the heir of someone who has rejected the true blessings are considered "cursed" or cutoff — i.e., in a state of disinheritance — from the divine blessings, with their fathers, until such a time as they are brought to know the incorrectness of their fathers' tradition and (re)turn to the covenant family wherein the blessings flow.

It is within these broader legal concepts that the Book of Abraham should be understood if one is to avoid racist misinterpretations or avoid wresting scripture in reaction to racism. Viewed in its proper historical context, the Book of Abraham's generational curse regarding priesthood, an inherited blessing, is consistent with biblical and other scriptural teachings and with the greater theological system that Joseph Smith restored. The implications of these legal concepts on any modern priesthood ban will be addressed in the conclusion.

What Does the Book of Abraham Actually Say?

Details within the text that Joseph Smith published indicate that Abraham's kin had turned from the Lord and his commandments to other traditions, worshipping "heathen" gods (Abraham 1:5). Abraham's own father had converted to the religious authority of the pharaohs, believing they had legitimate claim to the "right of priesthood." Abraham, however, states that the pharaoh was "of that lineage by which he could not have the right of priesthood" and indicates that he has records to prove such (Abraham 1:27–28).

Presumably drawing upon these records, Abraham gives details concerning the pharaoh's lineage, explaining that "this king of Egypt was a descendant from the loins of Ham, and was a partaker of the blood of the Canaanites by birth. From this descent sprang all the Egyptians, and thus the blood of the Canaanites was preserved in the land" (Abraham 1:21–22). From a purely historical point of view, a claim of Canaanite descendancy for a pharaoh during the Abrahamic era is possible as some pharaohs in that period of Egyptian history appear to have originated from Canaanite territories and gained control in some of the northern Delta regions of Egypt, comprising the Fourteenth Dynasty.⁹

Abraham's claim that "from this descent sprang all the Egyptians" is problematic in light of biblical understanding that most of the Egyptians

9. See Kim S. B. Ryholt, *The Political Situation in Egypt During the Second Intermediate Period, c. 1800–1550 B.C.* (Copenhagen: University of Copenhagen, Museum Tusculanum Press, 1997), 94–117, 251–55, 295–99.

were descendants of another son of Ham with the eponymous name Mitsraim/Mizraim (the Hebrew word for “Egypt”) and not from his son Canaan (see Genesis 10:6). Either 1) Abraham incorrectly assumed all Egyptians were Canaanite like the pharaoh of his day (for this view, see John Gee’s discussion),¹⁰ however, Abraham claims he is appealing to written records, not just assumptions, as proof of lineage, making this view problematic; 2) Abraham’s statement is accurate and the Egyptian people generally were Canaanite in ways that history has not understood; or 3) the antecedent of “from this descent sprang all the Egyptians” is “the loins of Ham,” not the “blood of the Canaanites.” The original published text has an additional comma after Canaanites and reads “this King of Egypt was a descendant from the loins of Ham, and was a partaker of the blood of the Canaanites, by birth. From this descent sprang all the Egyptians,” If the phrase “and was a partaker of the blood of the Canaanites” was meant to be understood as a parenthetical set apart by the commas, then the rest can be read as saying “this king of Egypt was a descendant from the loins of Ham ... by birth. From this [Ham’s] descent sprang all the Egyptians. ...”¹¹ The phrases in question could also be viewed in parallel:

- [A] this king of Egypt was a descendant from the loins of Ham,
- [B] and was a partaker of the blood of the Canaanites by birth.
- [A'] From this [Ham’s] descent sprang all the Egyptians,
- [B'] and thus [through this king’s lineage] the blood of the Canaanites was preserved in the land.

The text goes on to support a reading that “all the Egyptians” sprang from Ham, not Canaan, as it reveals their origin through Ham’s daughter (with no mention of her husband), not through his son Canaan.

Abraham then goes further back and reveals that the very founders of Egypt were also descendants of Ham. The first governmental leader of Egypt was one of the sons of Egyptus, who was “the daughter of Ham, and the daughter of Egyptus” (Abraham 1:23). This daughter had discovered the land of Egypt and settled her family there.¹² Her son, having the eponymous name-title Pharaoh, is described as a “righteous

10. See Gee, *Introduction to Book of Abraham*, 101–102.

11. “Book of Abraham and Facsimiles,” 705.

12. On the Egyptian tradition concerning the founding of ancient Egypt by a woman, see Hugh W. Nibley, “A Pioneer Woman,” in *Abraham in Egypt* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1981).

man" who sought "earnestly to imitate that order established by the fathers in the first generations [i.e., the patriarchs from Adam to Noah]" (Abraham 1:26). In spite of his righteousness, however, Noah "cursed him as pertaining to the Priesthood" (Abraham 1:26).

After connecting both the Canaanite pharaoh of his own day as well as the original Pharaoh of the founding family to Ham, Abraham states "and thus, from Ham, sprang that race which preserved the curse in the land" (Abraham 1:24) and concludes that Pharaoh was "of that lineage by which he could not have the right of Priesthood, notwithstanding the Pharaohs would fain claim it from Noah, through Ham, therefore my father was led away by their idolatry" (Abraham 1:27).¹³

In contrast to the lineage of the pharaohs not having the right of priesthood, Abraham declares at the beginning and end of this particular narrative-event, framing the whole, that he is the one, according to the records, that has the right of priesthood through his lineage:

I became a *rightful heir*, a High Priest, *holding the right belonging to the fathers*. It was conferred upon me from the fathers; *it came down from the fathers, ... through the fathers unto me*. I sought for mine appointment unto the Priesthood *according to the appointment of God unto the fathers concerning the seed*. ... I shall endeavor, hereafter, to delineate the chronology *running back from myself to the beginning of the creation*, for the records have come into my hands, ... the *records of the fathers*, even the patriarchs, *concerning the right of Priesthood*, the Lord my God preserved in mine own hands ... (Abraham 1:2–4, 28, 31)

To summarize: Abraham appears to be claiming that he has a right to priesthood because of his lineage, "it came down from the fathers ... through the fathers unto me," but the pharaoh does not because of his lineage. What does it mean for a right of priesthood to come "through" the fathers? Why would someone not have the right of priesthood simply because of their lineage, especially if they are righteous?

There are several gaps in the details of this text as provided. It assumes the reader already knows what "the curse" is and how curses operate. It does not give particulars on why this curse exists or how it is being "preserved ... in the land." It also does not explain why Noah

13. Since the Egyptian practices appear to have "imitated" those of the original patriarchs according to Abraham, then "idolatry" here may be more a function of lacking authority rather than a commentary on a specific practice.

cursed Pharaoh pertaining to the priesthood though he was a “righteous man.”

The Book of Abraham also assumes the reader knows who the Canaanites are. Readers may view them either as the descendants of Ham’s son Canaan who are discussed frequently in the Bible (see Genesis 9:22, 10:6–19, and 12:5–6) or, less plausibly, as the antediluvian “people of Canaan” mentioned in Joseph Smith’s restored Enoch-narrative within the Book of Moses (see Moses 7:6–12, noting that the term “Canaanites” is not used there).¹⁴ Additionally, the Book of Abraham gives no indication from where Ham’s wife Egyptus comes or what relationship, if any, she has to the curse.

Due to these and other holes in the text, speculative interpretations emerged to fill in the gaps. For example, some concluded that the pharaohs could not have priesthood because they were descendants of Cain through Egyptus.¹⁵ This linkage can only be made through a series of steps that include assumptions and racist interpretations:

1. Stated: The Book of Abraham mentions that the pharaoh of Abraham’s day was a “partaker of the blood of the Canaanites.”
2. Stated: The Book of Moses mentions an ante-diluvian group of people in Enoch’s day called “the people of Canaan.” This text also mentions that a “blackness came upon” all these “children of Canaan” in the context of their conquering a land that became cursed with much heat and barren (Moses 7:8). They were “despised among all people” (v. 8), became isolated as no one else would dwell in the “unfruitful and barren” land with them (v. 7), and for some undeclared reason Enoch did not preach among them (v. 12).

14. A footnote in current editions of the Latter-day Saint scripture cross-reference readers to the Canaanites of the Enoch-narrative (see Abraham 1:21, fn. c) which is problematic as discussed below.

15. B. H. Roberts is one of the earliest on record to explicitly suggest that Egyptus may be one of Cain’s descendants. He proposed the idea in a series of questions: “Was the wife of Ham, as her name signifies, of a race which those who held the Priesthood were forbidden to intermarry? Was she a descendant of Cain, who was cursed for murdering his brother? And was it by Ham marrying her, and she being saved from the flood in the ark, that “the race which preserved the curse in the land” was perpetuated? If so, then ...” B. H. Roberts, “To the Youth of Israel,” *The Contributor* 6 (1885): 296–97. Subsequent publications repeated this idea. For some examples, see Lester E. Bush Jr., “Mormonism’s Negro Doctrine,” 80–81.

3. Stated: The Book of Moses mentions later that the seed of Cain were "black" and isolated from or "had not place among" all other people (see Moses 7:22).
4. Assumption: Due to similar descriptions ("blackness"/"black" and isolated from other people) the antediluvian Canaanites of the Book of Moses must be Cain's descendants.
5. Assumption: The antediluvian Canaanites of the Book of Moses are the Canaanites mentioned in the Book of Abraham.
6. Assumption: The pharaoh of Abraham's day in the Book of Abraham is a descendant of these antediluvian Canaanites.
7. Assumption: Since Noah and Ham are Seth's descendants, the pharaoh in the Book of Abraham must have been a descendant of the antediluvian Canaanites, and thus Cain, through Ham's wife Egyptus.
8. Assumption: The Book of Abraham mentions that Ham's wife Egyptus was of a "forbidden" race that Ham should not have married.

By spanning many gaps with assumptions, some arrive at the conclusion that the Egyptian pharaohs could not have the priesthood because they were descendants of Ham's wife Egyptus, a forbidden wife because she was a black descendant of the cursed Cain through the black, despised, and isolated antediluvian Canaanites of Enoch's day. Since both Cain's descendants and the antediluvian Canaanites are described as "black" or having "blackness," the combination of all the factors above were combined to become one justification for withholding priesthood from black Africans. However, no explicit or direct connections actually appear in the texts between the Canaanites in the Book of Abraham and the much earlier "people of Canaan" in the Book of Moses, between any Canaanites and Cain, between Egyptus and any ancestor, or between Egyptus and the word "forbidden." Further, whether the term "black" or "blackness" in these verses and elsewhere are always a reference to skin color in ancient texts is arguable.¹⁶

16. For recent interpretations of "black" or "blackness" of the Enochic Canaanites see Adam Stokes, "The People of Canaan: A New Reading of Moses 7," *Interpreter: A Journal of Latter-day Saint Faith and Scholarship* 47 (2021): 159–80, <https://journal.interpreterfoundation.org/the-people-of-canaan-a-new-reading-of-moses-7/>. On the use of these terms in other contexts see Ethan Sproat, "Skins as Garments in the Book of Mormon: A Textual Exegesis," *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 24 (2015): 138–65; Gerrit M. Steenblik, "Demythologizing the Lamanites' 'Skin of Blackness,'"

Filling the gaps in the Book of Abraham with assumptions can certainly distort the text and lead to hurtful racist interpretations. However, when challenging these flawed assertions, it is important not to swing the pendulum too far the other way and assert or assume incorrectly that lineal curses are not scriptural or must be reflections of modern racism. There is biblical and broader ancient Near Eastern cultural precedent for concluding that one's personal actions could indeed cause a loss of priesthood and other divine blessings among one's descendants if nothing is done to overcome the state of things in the family. This is due to the concept of inheritance that appears to be central to the operations of the covenant that God makes with Abraham and others. Inheriting divine blessings from God through one's lineage, not *directly* from deity, is an ancient ideology and practice that Joseph Smith appears to have restored and which provides a better context for understanding the Book of Abraham.

Inheriting Blessings, Cursing as Disinheritance

Notwithstanding the scriptural tradition of portraying all blessings outlined in covenants coming from God, a closer reading suggests that they were not actually given directly from God to individuals in an *ad hoc* manner, like some kind of royal grant. Rather, they are referenced consistently as an "inheritance" and appear to be transmitted through familial lines and governed by inheritance laws.

Inheriting Land in the Bible

For example, the Hebrew Bible portrays the earth as a divine creation and possession, to be sure,¹⁷ but it also portrays God giving the earth, or portions of it, to mortals as an inheritance that is passed from generation

Interpreter: A Journal of Latter-day Saint Faith and Scholarship 49 (2021): 167–258, <https://journal.interpreterfoundation.org/demythicalizing-the-lamanites-skin-of-blackness/>; David M. Belnap, "The Inclusive, Anti-Discrimination Message of the Book of Mormon," *Interpreter: A Journal of Latter-day Saint Faith and Scholarship* 42 (2021): 195–370, <https://journal.interpreterfoundation.org/the-inclusive-anti-discrimination-message-of-the-book-of-mormon/>; Todd Uriona, "Life and Death, Blessing and Cursing: Reconceptualizing the Lamanite 'Skin of Blackness,'" *Interpreter: A Journal of Latter-day Saint Faith and Scholarship* (forthcoming); and Clifford Jones, "Understanding the Lamanite Mark and Curse," *Interpreter: A Journal of Latter-day Saint Faith and Scholarship* (forthcoming).

17. E.g., see Genesis 1:1, 2:4; Exodus 9:29, 19:5; Deuteronomy 10:14; Psalms 24:1, 50:10–11, 89:11; and Isaiah 14:2, where "the land of the Lord" is literally "Yahweh's land."

to generation. This suggests that not only must there be a relationship with God but some sort of familial connection must also exist in order to receive the divine blessings of a kingdom or land:

And [God] said unto [Abraham], I am the Lord that brought thee out of Ur of the Chaldees, to give thee this land to inherit it. And he said, Lord God, whereby shall I know that I shall inherit it? ... [In answer to this question, God instructs Abraham to participate in a ritual with him and shows him a vision followed by this summary:] In the same day the Lord made a covenant with Abram, saying, Unto thy seed have I given this land. (Genesis 15:7–18)

The above text indicates that entering a covenant with God was the means whereby Abraham would know that he personally would inherit land ("how shall I know that I shall inherit it?"). Interestingly, in the very moment he enters into this covenant, assuring his own personal position as an heir to the blessing, the Lord says: "unto thy seed have I given this land." The sudden and unexpected shift from Abraham obtaining land to his seed obtaining land makes sense in the cultural/legal context of "inheritance," the very topic governing this moment as indicated in Abraham's question. In other words, the reason that Abraham inheriting land is tantamount to his children receiving land is that Abraham's children can now inherit the land their father himself has inherited (from whom precisely Abraham inherits the land is not explicitly stated in this moment).

Though God as the creator of the earth is party to the covenants that allow the land to be obtained, the biblical record assumes the children would "inherit" the land from their fathers:

And God Almighty bless thee [Jacob] ... And give thee the blessing of Abraham, to thee, and to thy seed with thee; that thou mayest inherit the land wherein thou art a stranger, which God gave unto Abraham. (Genesis 28:3–4)

Remember Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, thy servants, to whom thou [God] swarest by thine own self, and saidst unto them, I will multiply your seed as the stars of heaven, and all this land that I have spoken of will I give unto your seed, and they shall inherit *it* for ever. (Exodus 32:13)

And Moses called unto Joshua, and said ... thou must go with this people unto the land which the Lord hath sworn

unto their fathers to give them; and thou shalt cause them to inherit it. (Deuteronomy 31:7)

These passages explicitly state that the children are receiving their blessing (in this case land) as an inheritance from their fathers, to whom the land was previously given or promised.

Because each subsequent generation in the Hebrew Bible appears to enter into their own covenant with God, scholars have debated whether the blessings are truly inherited or just given directly by God to each person, similar to ancient royal grants.¹⁸ Bernard Jackson argues that given the explicit hereditary wording in the texts, it is difficult to understand God's relationships with successive generations as royal grant or even "covenant renewal," rather,

Modern English lawyers might understand this in terms of the doctrine of 'privity of contract', under which 'third party' beneficiaries cannot enforce a benefit promised to them in a contract to which they are not parties. ... Hence, the need to reaffirm the covenant to successive generations of beneficiaries. Such 'confirmation' is hardly 'renewal' in a theological sense.¹⁹

As each succeeding generation enters a covenant with God in the examples above, they appeal to the former covenants God made with their fathers wherein He promised that their seed could possess the blessings as heirs. This shows that the successors recognized their dependence upon the previous generations possessing the divine blessing in order to truly "inherit" them, but this dependence existed in tandem with maintaining the family's covenant relationship to God via subsequent affirmations or repetitions of covenants. Such a legal setup created an environment in which the hearts of the children turned to their fathers as well as to God at the same time.

Although the lands were literally inherited in mortality, the statements above indicate that they understood that these inheritances of land were "for ever" or as an "everlasting possession" signifying that they understood that the physical land literally given to them in time (mortality) would be their abode, if faithful, throughout eternity. Indeed,

18. On covenants as royal grant see Moshe Weinfeld, "The Covenant of Grant in the Old Testament and in the Ancient Near East," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 90, no. 2 (April–June 1970): 184–203.

19. Bernard S. Jackson, *Studies in the Semiotics of Biblical Law* (Sheffield, UK: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000), 238.

scholars are increasingly arguing that the Hebrew Bible indicates, and Jews and Christians of classical antiquity believed, that "heaven" was simply a continuation of life on earth, not some other-worldly place or dimension.²⁰ In other words, receiving divinely appointed land in mortality was effectively a place for individuals and their heirs to inhabit during the future "heaven" on earth.

A purpose of covenants in the biblical and Near Eastern traditions was to create kinship relationships where one may not exist, allowing such things as inheritances to pass between parties that were formed by marriage or adoption.²¹ Although actual examples of adoption are scanty in the Hebrew Bible, it is generally understood to exist. For example,

20. See, for example, Jon D. Levenson, *Resurrection and the Restoration of Israel: The Ultimate Victory of the God of Life* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2008); N. T. Wright, *The Resurrection of the Son of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2003). Biblical evidence for a Jewish belief in a bodily resurrection comes mainly from the book of Daniel, which indicates that both the righteous and wicked will rise again: "And many of them that sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt" (Daniel 12:2). 2 Maccabees also preserves the belief that family relations will continue and that vicarious work for the dead was practiced in this life because of a belief that it would have benefit in the resurrection: "Do not fear this butcher [mother and sons are being put to death], but prove worthy of your brothers. Accept death, so that in God's mercy I may get you back again with your brothers" (2 Maccabees 7:23, 29). "He [Judah, upon learning of the slaying of some fellow soldiers] also took up a collection, man by man, to the amount of two thousand drachmas of silver, and sent it to Jerusalem to provide for a sin offering. In doing this he acted very well and honorably, taking account of the resurrection. For if he were not expecting that those who had fallen would rise again, it would have been superfluous and foolish to pray for the dead. But if he was looking to the splendid reward that is laid up for those who fall asleep in godliness, it was a holy and pious thought. Therefore he made atonement for the dead, that they might be delivered from their sin" (2 Maccabees 12:43–45).

21. Frank Cross outlined the work of others and highlighted that the fundamental meaning of the term *bērit* "covenant" was the incorporation of individuals or groups by agreement into a *family* structure where one did not exist naturally. Frank Cross, "Kinship and Covenant in Ancient Israel" in *From Epic to Canon: History and Literature in Ancient Israel* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998), 3–21. For a more exhaustive study of this idea, see Scott W. Hahn, *Kinship by Covenant: A Canonical Approach to the Fulfillment of God's Saving Promises* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2009). Precedence for the idea of divine adoption in the Old Testament occurs in Exodus 4:22–23, wherein God calls the people of Israel his "firstborn" son: "Israel is my son, even my firstborn. So I said to you 'Let my son go that he may serve me.'" God also "adopts" David's son Solomon in 2 Samuel 7:12–15. God states that He will be Solomon's father and Solomon will

prior to the births of Ishmael and Isaac, Abraham indicated that his heir would need to be someone else in his household, suggesting an adoption (see Genesis 15:2–3).

The relationship of adoption to God's covenant with Israel becomes more emphasized in the New Testament.²² Although Paul seems to assert that anyone can become "heirs" of God via "adoption" (see Galatians 4:4–7; Romans 8:15–17, 23, 9:4; and Ephesians 1:4–6), he also argues that this does not mean the literal seed of Abraham's body is no longer necessary. Indeed, he asserts that the Gentiles must still be grafted or adopted into Abraham's literal family in order to inherit the blessings from God that are flowing *through them*:

Hath God cast away his people [the Israelites, because he can adopt]? God forbid. . . . For if the casting away of them be the reconciling of the world, what shall the receiving of them be, but life from the dead? For if the firstfruit be holy, the lump is also holy: and if the root be holy, so are the branches. And if some of the branches be broken off, and thou [Gentiles], being a wild olive tree, wert grafted in among them, and with them partakest of the root and fatness of the olive tree; Boast not against the branches. But if thou boast, thou bearest not the root, but the root thee. (Romans 11:1, 15–18)

The implication here is that the olive tree of Abraham's literal seed is the foundation into which the families of the earth can be grafted or adopted, becoming heirs thereby and fulfilling God's repeated statement in a literal/legal way that through Abraham's seed all the nations of the earth would be blessed.

The first explicit mention of a covenant in the Bible is when God says he will "establish" his covenant with Noah in Genesis 6:18 and 9:9. Jacob Milgrom pointed out that *hēqîm*, "establish," is a Hiphil form of the verb and thus means "maintain" or "uphold." Such a rendering suggests that God's covenant with Noah is not new but being maintained from an

be his son and God will establish his throne forever. He will discipline Solomon if needed and even renames him Jedidiah "loved of God" (2 Samuel 12:25).

22. See, for example, Bradley Trick, *Abrahamic Descent, Testamentary Adoption, and the Law in Galatians: Differentiating Abraham's Sons, Seed, and Children of Promise* (Leiden, NDL: Brill, 2016); Francis Lyall, "Roman Law in the Writing of Paul—Adoption," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 88, no. 4. (1969): 460–64; David Bartlett, "Adoption in the Bible," in *The Child in the Bible*, ed. Marcia J. Bunge (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2008): 377–85.

earlier era.²³ Katherine Dell demonstrates that the covenant passages in the story of Noah draw heavily upon terms and phrases from the creation story and that biblical texts often combine creation themes with covenants, leading her to wonder if the creation itself was a covenant act.²⁴ Latter-day Saints would certainly agree. In this view, God creates and gives the earth (i.e., a kingdom) via covenant to Adam and Eve, over which they have dominion (i.e., priestly kingship/queenship) as in Genesis 1:26–28. The ongoing narrative continues to show God ensuring the land of this earth is passed down through the generations as an inheritance. Indeed, the story of the creation of the earth “is not presented as an independent ‘doctrine’ but belongs in the context of an extended story that moves from the beginning toward the fulfillment of God’s purpose for all creatures and the whole creation.”²⁵ The genealogy from Adam to Abraham provides a continuity through which the divine blessing of land is flowing as an inheritance.

In biblical texts there were two complementary systems of inheritance that are still prevalent in modern societies: 1) the legal order of succession — i.e., the rules governing natural born heirs: early biblical practice seemed to favor sons over daughters, children over the deceased’s siblings, older over younger, and the eldest son as executor of the inheritance for the family; and 2) a written declaration of intent allowing for adopted heirs or other exceptions to the established legal order. The second overrules the first.²⁶ These practices were not just

23. Jacob Milgrom, “Covenants: The Sinaitic and Patriarchal Covenants in the Holiness Code (Leviticus 17–27),” in *Sefer Moshe: The Moshe Weinfeld Jubilee Volume: Studies in the Bible and the Ancient Near East, Qumran, and Post-Biblical Judaism*, ed. Chaim Cohen, Avi Hurvitz, Shalom M. Paul (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2004), 91–101. On covenants in the Ancient Near East generally, see Kenneth A. and Paul J. N. Lawrence, *Treaty, Law and Covenant in the Ancient Near East*, 3 vols. (Wiesbaden, DEU: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2012).

24. Katherine J. Dell, “Covenant and Creation in Relationship,” in *Covenant as Contexts: Essays in Honour of E. W. Nicholson*, ed. A. D. H. Mayes and R. B. Salters (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 111–34.

25. Bernhard W. Anderson, *Contours of Old Testament Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1999), 92.

26. On the stipulations and legal practices of inheritance portrayed in the Bible see, for example, Yosef Rivlin, “Inheritance,” in *The Oxford Encyclopedia of the Bible and Law*, ed. Brent A. Strawn (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015); Calum Carmichael, “Inheritance in Biblical Sources,” *Law & Literature* 20, no. 2 (Summer 2008): 229–42; Richard H. Hiers, “Transfer of Property by Inheritance and Bequest in Biblical Law and Tradition,” *Journal of Law & Religion* 121 (1993): 121–55; Arthur Mason Brown, “The Concept of Inheritance in the Old Testament”

part of the culture of the day but existed within the theological and eschatological framework of biblical covenants and divine blessings.²⁷

In the Hebrew Bible, more was required of an heir than just being a descendant or adoptee. Obedience and fealty to God were integral to the covenant's stipulations and thus one's right to inherit:

Ye shall therefore keep all my statutes, and all my judgments, and do them: that the land, whither I bring you to dwell therein, spue you not out [i.e., wickedness can prevent one from being an heir or legal possessor of the land]. And ye shall not walk in the manners of the nation, which I cast out before you: for they committed all these things [the wicked acts outlined in the previous verses], and therefore I abhorred them. But I have said unto you, Ye shall inherit their land, and I will give it unto you to possess it, a land that floweth with milk and honey: I am the Lord your God, which have separated you from other people. (Leviticus 20:22–24)

And Moses sware on that day, saying, Surely the land whereon thy feet have trodden shall be thine inheritance, and thy children's for ever, because thou hast wholly followed the Lord my God. (Joshua 14:9)

For evildoers shall be cut off: but those that wait upon the Lord, they shall inherit the earth. ... the meek shall inherit the earth; ... For such as be blessed of him [the Lord] shall inherit the earth; and they that be cursed of him shall be cut

(PhD dissertation, Columbia University, 1965). Again, the adoption of children was certainly a legitimate practice in biblical culture whereby heirships were created where one did not exist naturally. See, for example, the story of Mephibosheth, who was included in the royal inheritance even though not naturally a part of Davidic family (2 Samuel 9:7–13). On the firstborn as executor see Eryl W. Davies, "The Inheritance of the Firstborn in Israel and the Ancient Near East," *Journal of Semitic Studies* 38 (1993): 175–91; L. R. Helyer, "The Prōtotokos Title in Hebrews," *Studia Biblica et Theologica* 6 (1977): 3–28. Paul appears to be drawing on Jewish, not Roman, inheritance ideology when describing Christ as the first-born who obtains the inheritance and shares it with his "brothers" (Hebrews 1:6; 2:11).

27. On the theological framework concerning land inheritances see, for example, Jong Keun Lee, "The Theological Concept of Divine Ownership of the Land in the Hebrew Bible," (ThD dissertation, Boston University School of Theology, 1993); and Christopher J. H. Wright, *God's People in God's Land: Family, Land, and Property in the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1990).

off. . . . The righteous shall inherit the land, and dwell therein for ever. (Psalm 37:9, 11, 22, 29)

A good man leaveth an inheritance to his children's children: and the wealth of the sinner is laid up for the just [i.e., the sinner's inheritance will be given to the righteous]. (Proverbs 13:22)

A wise servant shall have rule over a son that causeth shame, and shall have part of the inheritance among the brethren [i.e., a good servant (not a naturally born heir) will be adopted, receive the inheritance, and rule in the household, whereas a wicked son will be cut off from the inheritance and become the ruled (servant)]. (Proverbs 17:2)

Note that in the Psalm passage above, unrighteousness brings the curse of being "cut off" from the inherited land, which they were to dwell in "for ever." Being cursed is often associated with the word *kāraṭ* "cut off" from one's family and inheritance. *Kāraṭ* is often used in biblical passages relative to covenant making, wherein a sacrifice is "cut" in two pieces, and the parties of the covenant walk between the pieces to symbolize a cutting penalty of death or separation for those who break their agreement.²⁸ The implication is that those who break their covenant through unrighteousness are exiled from the family — i.e., cut off from their inheritance.²⁹

When Cain acts wickedly and kills his brother Abel, God's "curse" (Heb. *ʾārūr*) upon Cain is a term typically used as an execration against one's person or property: "And now art thou [Cain] cursed from the earth, which hath opened her mouth to receive thy brother's blood from thy hand" (Genesis 4:11). Cain's curse, plainly and simply stated, is "from the earth." God is severing him from the land that he was to inherit from Adam and Eve. Being landless (i.e., kingdom-less), he no longer gets to be a beneficiary of the land's yield. He is to be a fugitive and

28. See Genesis 15:9–10, 18. "Made" in v. 18 is translated from *karath* "to cut." Cf. Jeremiah 34:18–19.

29. See also examples in Genesis 17:14; Exodus 12:19, 31:14; Leviticus 7:21, 25, 27, 17:4, 9, 10, 18:29, 19:8, 22:3; and Numbers 15:30. "In the majority of offenses, 'cutting off' means a 'cutting out' which leads to 'banishment' or 'excommunication' from the cultic community and the covenant people." *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*, ed. G. Johannes Botterweck, Helmer Ringgren, and Heinz-Josef Fabry, vol. 7 (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1974), 348. See also Donald John Wold, "The Meaning of the Biblical Penalty *Kareth*" (PhD dissertation, University of California—Berkeley, 1978).

wanderer — an exile from his kingdom (Genesis 4:12). If the earth or land from which Cain is now cut off in mortality was understood to be an everlasting or eternal possession or kingdom — i.e., his future heaven — then the weight of his curse becomes clear not only in the immediate, mortal, social context but in the theological and eschatological context. In other words, losing an inheritance in time is a curse that can affect one's eternity.

Inheriting Priesthood in the Bible

Not only was land part of the divine blessings and inheritance in the biblical tradition but priesthood also appears to be a covenant blessing obtained through inheritance. In the Mosaic covenant, priesthood was inherited by the generations of Aaron:

And take thou unto thee Aaron thy brother, and his sons with him, from among the children of Israel, that he may minister unto me in the priest's office, even Aaron, Nadab and Abihu, Eleazar and Ithamar, Aaron's sons. (Exodus 28:1)

And the holy garments of Aaron shall be his sons' after him, to be anointed therein, and to be consecrated in them. (Exodus 29:29)

But the Levites have no part among you; for the priesthood of the Lord is their inheritance (Joshua 18:7)

One's genealogy was sought as proof to inherit priesthood during the second temple period:

And these were they which went up from Tel-melah, Tel-harsa, Cherub, Addan, and Immer: but they could not shew their father's house, and their seed, whether they were of Israel: ... 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. 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 with Thummim. (Ezra 2:59, 62–63)

Similar to the requirements of land, righteousness was also a requirement to continue in one's right to inherit priesthood. For example, a holy man said to Eli that the priesthood has been in "the house of [Eli's] father":

Did I plainly appear unto the house of thy father, when they were in Egypt in Pharaoh's house? And did I choose him out of all the tribes of Israel to be my priest, to offer upon mine altar, to burn incense, to wear an ephod before me? and did I give unto the house of thy father all the offerings made by fire of the children of Israel? (1 Samuel 2:27–28)

However, due to the wickedness of Eli's sons, the Lord rescinded the blessing of priesthood from Eli's "house" and spoke of another "house" wherein the priesthood would be established:

Behold, the days come, that I will cut off thine arm, and the arm of thy father's house, that there shall not be an old man in thine house. . . . I will raise me up a faithful priest, that shall do according to that which is in mine heart and in my mind: and I will build him a sure house; and he shall walk before mine anointed for ever. (1 Samuel 2:31, 35)

The presence or absence of priesthood in one's "house" makes sense in terms of inheritance. Note also that the inheritance of priesthood, like land, was not only for mortality but understood to be a possession "for ever." Likewise, the Psalmist declared: "The Lord hath sworn, and will not repent, Thou art a priest for ever after the order of Melchizedek" (Psalm 110:4).

The Hebrew Bible does not explicitly mention an inheritance of priesthood in Abraham's covenant, but he is shown performing priestly actions such as sacrificing at altars and receives assurance that through him and his seed "shall all the nations of earth be blessed" (Genesis 22:18; cf. Genesis 12:3), a likely allusion to an inherited priesthood by which they would bless the nations. Later Jewish tradition claims that Abraham did indeed have a priesthood that his posterity inherited. Melchizedek, Abraham's contemporary, is the first in the Hebrew Bible to be called "priest," and the Babylonian Talmud maintains that the priesthood held by Melchizedek was given to Abraham who passed it on to his descendants.³⁰

When Cain killed his brother, he not only lost his inheritance of land as noted above, but the text also suggests he was cut off from a priesthood inheritance. After the Lord tells him he is cursed from the earth, Cain's response suggests he understood the full implication of this curse: "Behold, thou hast driven me out this day from the face of

30. See Nedarim 32b in the Koren Noé Talmud (Babylonian Talmud), William Davidson Edition, Sefaria, <https://www.sefaria.org/Nedarim.32b?lang=bi>.

the earth; and from thy face shall I be hid” (Genesis 4:14). Menahem Haran demonstrated years ago that being “before the Lord” (from the Hebrew *liphnê Yahweh* meaning literally “to the face of Yahweh”) often indicated the presence of a temple, which is not out of the question since Cain is making offerings (see Genesis 4:5).³¹ In other words, Cain appears to understand that his curse not only disinherits him from his earth kingdom or land but it also disinherits him from the priesthood by which he would normally enter a temple and stand before the face of God.

Inheriting Land in Ancient Egypt

Concepts of inheritance and possessing blessings in time and then eternity also appear in ancient Egypt, which Latter-day Saints would expect since they are told in the Book of Abraham that the first pharaoh sought earnestly to imitate the order of the original patriarchs (see Abraham 1: 26). Like the Judeo-Christian notion of living forever on earth noted earlier, Egyptologists have long noted that dwelling eternally on earth figures into ancient Egyptian conceptions of salvation.³² For example, Egyptian tombs, from the earliest periods, were called a *pr dt* “house of eternity” in which the tomb owner could effectively dwell on earth forever among family and friends: “The timely construction of a tomb was a goal in life, one that afforded the certainty of not slipping, at death, out of the context of the life of the land as a social, geographical, and cultural space, but rather of having a place where one remained present after death, integrated into the community of the living.”³³ *Pr dt* can refer to the whole private estate of the person in mortality, suggesting a belief that everything present in time can continue into eternity. The dead *w3h tp t3* “enduring on earth” or being able to “go

31. Menahem Haran, *Temples and Temple-Service in Ancient Israel: An Inquiry into the Character of Cult Phenomena and the Historical Setting of the Priestly School* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1978), 26. In the Book of Moses, Cain not only offers sacrifice but he then makes covenant oaths, counterfeiting the progressive temple rites of courtyard sacrifices and then covenanting in the temple proper (Moses 5:29–31).

32. See Jan Assmann, *Death and Salvation in Ancient Egypt* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2005), 175–81. James Allen, “Some Aspects of the Non-Royal Afterlife in the Old Kingdom,” in *The Old Kingdom Art and Archaeology: Proceedings of the Conference Held in Prague, May 31–June 4, 2004*, ed. Miroslav Barta (Prague: Academy of Sciences of the Czech Republic, 2006), 9–17.

33. Assmann, *Death and Salvation*, 13.

forth by day, going upon the earth among all the living" are some of the eternal blessings appearing in ancient Egyptian texts.³⁴

The land, tomb, and tomb equipment were typically viewed as gifts from the king, who was the living Horus on earth and representative of the gods. These objects were typically labeled with a *ḥtp-dī-(n)swt* formula: "A gift which the king [and gods may also be mentioned] gives" The presence of this formula likely indicates that the king either literally gave the property so labeled to the deceased or at least is acknowledged as the ultimate source of these things.³⁵ Indeed, connection to the king was so important that hieroglyphic texts on tomb chapel walls often preserve interactions the deceased had with the king in life, and the tombs themselves were often organized in a grid, like homes along streets, around the kings' pyramid tombs. Many officials were even given the honorific kinship title of *s3 nswt* "son of the king" who himself had the title *s3 r'* "son of Re."³⁶ These and other concepts may suggest the

34. Mahmoud El-Khadragy, "Some Significant Features in the Decoration of the Chapel of Iti-ibi-iqer at Asyut," *Studien zur Altägyptischen Kultur* 36 (2007): 114; Harold M. Hays, *The Organization of the Pyramid Texts: Typology and Disposition* (Leiden, NDL: Brill, 2012), 46. Compare John Gee, "The Use of the Daily Temple Liturgy in the Book of the Dead," in *Totenbuch-Forschungen: Gesammelte Beiträge Des 2. Internationalen Totenbuch-Symposiums, Bonn, 25. Bis 29* (Wiesbaden, DEU: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2006), 75–77.

35. Günther Lapp, *Die Opferformel des Alten Reiches: Unter Berücksichtigung einiger späterer Formen* (Mainz am Rhein, DEU: Verlag Philipp von Zabern, 1986); Ronald J. Leprohon, *The Great Name: Ancient Egyptian Royal Titulary* (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2013), 18–19. James Allen indicates that the *ḥtp-dī-(n)swt* "may have meant to acknowledge the king's gift of the tomb itself or, more loosely, royal permission for the tomb's construction; the latter is perhaps likelier, since the mass of evidence indicates that most tombs after the Fourth Dynasty were built from the owner's own resources." Allen, "Aspects of the Non-Royal Afterlife," 14. See also Violaine Chauvet, "The Conception of Private Tombs in the Late Old Kingdom (Egypt)" (master's thesis, Johns Hopkins University, 2004). H. Satzinger argues that the *ḥtp-dī-(n)swt* was understood as a past occurrence "an offering the king has given;" providing evidence that it refers to the king's past action or permission that gave rise to the tomb and the means for its services. H. Satzinger, "Beobachtungen zur Opferformel: Theorie und Praxis," *Lingua Aegyptia* 5 (1997): 177–88. The king may even attend the presentation of the tomb elements as discussed in David P. Silverman, "The Nature of Egyptian Kingship," in *Ancient Egyptian Kingship*, ed. David O'Connor and David P. Silverman (Leiden, NDL: Brill, 1995), 64–65.

36. Jochem Kahl, "Nsw und Bit," in *Zeichen aus dem Sand: Streiflichter aus Ägyptens Geschichte zu Ehren von Günter Dreyer*, ed. Eva-Maria Engel, Vera Müller, and Ulrich Hartung (Wiesbaden, DEU: Harrassowitz, 2008), 307–27.

Egyptians viewed their eternal blessings as an inheritance from the king, who was the son of god.

Like Israelite society, ancient Egyptian inheritances were conveyed either through the legal order of succession (favoring sons over daughters, children over siblings, and older over younger) or through written declarations.³⁷ Adoption was a legitimate means for securing an heir.³⁸ In earlier periods, the practice was to establish the eldest son as sole heir, but this was replaced by dividing the property among all children. The eldest son, however, continued to play an important role as administrator among his siblings and typically received a larger share. Already in the Old Kingdom, land was an object of inheritance.³⁹

Curses in ancient Egypt included the idea that the property of the one cursed would no longer be part of an inheritance. In the Decree of Demedjibtawy (Eighth Dynasty, Koptos), the wrongdoer would not only lose his own possessions but also lose the possessions that belonged to his father — i.e., they are cut off from the family inheritance.⁴⁰ This in turn would impact any inheritance that could have passed down to his successors. In the Chapel of Meru/Bebi (Sixth Dynasty, Saqqara) a curse indicates that the recipient's heirs will not be able to receive any inheritance and establish their homes.⁴¹ On the Stela of Iuwelot (Twenty Second Dynasty, Karnak), the inheritance of the one who is cursed is given to another.⁴² Children no longer inheriting the land and possessions of their father is the natural consequence of a father who lost the land or possessions through wrongdoing. If a child wants the land, they would have to obtain it some other way.

37. Schafik Allam, "Inheritance in ancient Egypt," *Bulletin de l'Institut d'Égypte* 77 (1999): 39–44. "Inheritance" in *The Oxford Encyclopedia of Ancient Egypt*, ed. Donald Redford (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 2:158–61. Sandra Lippert, "Inheritance," in *UCLA Encyclopedia of Egyptology*, ed. Elizabeth Froid and Willeke Wendrich (Los Angeles: UC Press, 2013), <http://digital2.library.ucla.edu/viewItem.do?ark=21198/zz002hg0w1>.

38. Eugene Cruz-Uribe, "A New Look at the Adoption Papyrus," *Journal of Egyptian Archaeology* 74 (1988): 220–23; Christopher Eyre, "The Adoption Papyrus in Social Context," *Journal of Egyptian Archaeology* 78 (1992): 207–21.

39. Nigel Strudwick, *Texts from the Pyramid Age* (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2005), 192–93.

40. Strudwick, 123–24.

41. *Ibid.*, 225.

42. K. Jansen-Winkel, *Inschriften der Spätzeit II* (Wiesbaden, DEU: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2007), 79–80.

Inheriting Priesthood in Ancient Egypt

In Egypt, priesthood was also an inheritance that could be passed from generation to generation. During the Old Kingdom, the inheritability of priestly offices in private funerary and royal funerary cults are attested.⁴³ From the Middle Kingdom onwards, state and temple offices appear as objects of inheritance.⁴⁴ Use of an *jmyt pr* document to convey state priesthood inheritances suggests that these inheritances were also subject to an approval by the vizier or king, similar to Israelite inheritances that depended not only on birth but also the ratification by God by adherence to his covenant.

Similar to cursing a person from an inheritance of land, cursing in ancient Egypt included the disinheritance of offices, including priesthood. A graffito for Djediah (23rd Dynasty, Khonsu Temple at Karnak) indicates that the son of one cursed would not receive the office of his father.⁴⁵ Similarly an Endowment Stela (19th Dynasty, Bilgai) contains a curse against a wrongdoer saying that his son will not ascend to his (the wrongdoer's) office.⁴⁶ While it may seem unjust to deny priesthood from the child of one who is cursed, a child simply cannot inherit their father's office if the father no longer has the office to give. It is the natural consequence upon one's children when cursed from one's office. If a child wants the priestly office, they will have to obtain it some other way.

43. See Peter der Manuelian, "Nj-k-'nh and the Earliest hrjw rnpt," *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 45, no. 1 (January 1986): 1–18, which includes statements of a father designating his children to inherit his duties as ka-priest in private tombs and also as priest in the temple of Hathor in the Old Kingdom period. See also Paule Posener-Kriéger, "Vour transmettez vos fonctions à vos enfants ...," in *Mélanges Jacques Jean Clère*, Cahiers de Recherches de l'Institut de Papyrologie et d'Égyptologie de Lille 13, ed. Juan Carlos Moreno García (Villeneuve d'Ascq, France: Université Charles de Gaulle – Lille 3, 1991), 107–12.

44. See, for example, the inheritance of a priestly title on the Stela of Ahmose-Nefetari in Michel Gitton, "La résiliation d'une fonction religieuse: Nouvelle interprétation de la stèle de donation d'Ahmès Néfertary," *Bulletin de l'Institut français d'archéologie orientale* 76 (1976): 65–89, plate 14.

45. Helen Jacquet-Gordon, *The Temple of Khonsu*, vol. 3, *The Graffiti on the Khonsu Temple Roof at Karnak: A Manifestation of Personal Piety* (Chicago: The Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago, 2003), 55, plate 55.

46. Alan H. Gardiner, "The Stela of Bilgai," *Zeitschrift für Ägyptische Sprache und Altertumskunde* 50 (1912): 49–57.

Inheriting Land in Joseph Smith's Revelations

Like the ancient traditions noted above, Joseph Smith's revelations include the idea that the divine blessing of earth or land would be an inherited possession in mortality and continue into eternity. The Book of Mormon boldly declares that inheriting the covenant blessing of land is required in order to be saved: "how can ye be saved, except ye inherit the kingdom of heaven?" (Alma 11:37). Lehi, the founding father of the principal nations in this text, appears to understand this and declares to his sons:

Notwithstanding our afflictions, we have obtained a land of promise, a land which is choice above all other lands; a land which the Lord God hath covenanted with me should be a land for the inheritance of my seed. Yea, the Lord hath covenanted this land unto me, and to my children forever, and also all those who should be led out of other countries by the hand of the Lord. (2 Nephi 1:5)

Lehi clearly declares that he obtained land because of a covenant with God and that it would become an inheritance for his posterity to possess "forever." Like the biblical requirements outlined above, Lehi also indicates that righteousness was a requirement to maintain possession of the inheritance forever: "And if it so be that they shall keep his commandments they shall be blessed upon the face of this land, and there shall be none to molest them, nor to take away the land of their inheritance; and they shall dwell safely forever" (2 Nephi 1:9).

That Lehi's promised land was expected to be inherited by his own children for time and eternity ("forever") is further substantiated in his remark to his son Joseph: "And may the Lord consecrate also unto thee this land, which is a most precious land, for thine inheritance and the inheritance of thy seed with thy brethren, for thy security forever, if it so be that ye shall keep the commandments of the Holy One of Israel" (2 Nephi 3:2).

When Jesus appears to the Book of Mormon people after his resurrection, he affirms the laws and covenant ideas of inheriting land: "the Father hath commanded me that I should give unto you this land, for your inheritance" (3 Nephi 20:14). He then declares that even though the covenant people of the Book of Mormon as well as those in Jerusalem would be scattered by the Gentiles and be exiled from their inheritances for a time due to their own wickedness, the covenant and inheritances would one day be restored:

I will gather my people together as a man gathereth his sheaves into the floor. ... And behold, this people will I establish in this land, unto the fulfilling of the covenant which I made with your father Jacob; and it shall be a New Jerusalem. ... And I will remember the covenant which I have made with my people; and I have covenanted with them that I would gather them together in mine own due time, that I would give unto them again the land of their fathers for their inheritance, which is the land of Jerusalem, which is the promised land unto them forever, saith the Father. (3 Nephi 20:18, 22, 29)

The covenant blessing is explicitly stated to be the "land of their fathers" that will be an inheritance forever for the descendants.

Similar to Cain's curse of being cut off from the earth and its yield, becoming an exiled vagabond, Samuel the Lamanite indicates that the wickedness of the Nephites brought a curse upon their lands and goods that they became "slippery," suggesting a lack of ability of the Nephites to hold their lands and possessions, indicative of their inability to hold on to their heaven (see Helaman 13:31, 33, 36).

In addition to the Book of Mormon, Joseph Smith had other canonized revelations that speak of inheriting land "from generation to generation" — including the idea that righteousness, not just lineage, was a required stipulation — and that the land or earth would be an eternal possession or heaven:

But blessed are the poor, who are pure in heart, ... for the fatness of the earth shall be theirs. ... And their generations shall inherit the earth from generation to generation, forever and ever. (D&C 26:18, 20)

The poor and the meek of the earth shall inherit it. Therefore, it [the earth] must needs be sanctified from all unrighteousness, ... That bodies who are of the celestial kingdom may possess it forever and ever; for, for this intent was it made, and created (D&C 88:17–18, 20)

In contrast to the "pure in heart" and "meek" who will inherit the earth, those who are wicked will be "cut off" from or "not inherit" the land:

And the rebellious shall be cut off out of the land of Zion, and shall be sent away, and shall not inherit the land. (D&C 64:35)

Inheriting Priesthood in Joseph Smith's Revelations

Some may question whether inheriting priesthood through one's lineage is part of the theology Joseph Smith restored based on the fact that, since the earliest days of the modern Church, priesthood has been distributed through ecclesiastical lines of authority irrespective of any familial inheritances. However, the revelations of Joseph Smith seem to suggest that the ecclesiastical lines of authority must eventually be reorganized and sealed up into familial lines of authority if priesthood is to be enduring through eternity.

For example, the crowning revelation that formalized the stipulations and blessings of the covenant in the Church includes this declaration:

All covenants, contracts, bonds, obligations, oaths, vows, performances, connections, associations, or expectations, that are not made and entered into and sealed by the Holy Spirit of promise, of him who is anointed, both as well for time and for all eternity, and that too most holy, by revelation and commandment through the medium of mine anointed, ... are of no efficacy, virtue, or force in and after the resurrection from the dead; for all contracts that are not made unto this end have an end when men are dead. (D&C 132:7)

A plain reading of this text suggests that any covenant or ordinance performed in the Church, including priesthood ordinations, that are not ultimately “sealed up,” will not have any efficacy or force both “in the resurrection” (i.e., in the millennial day) or “after the resurrection” (i.e., throughout eternity).

That temples are the place where this sealing up is to occur was declared earlier in an 1841 revelation of the Prophet concerning the building of the Nauvoo temple:

For, for this cause I commanded Moses that he should build a tabernacle, that they should bear it with them in the wilderness, and to build a house in the land of promise, that those ordinances might be revealed which had been hid from before the world was. Therefore, verily I say unto you, that your anointings, and your washings, and your baptisms for the dead, and your solemn assemblies, and your memorials for your sacrifices by the sons of Levi, and for your oracles in your most holy places wherein you receive conversations, and your statutes and judgments, for the beginning of the revelations and foundation of Zion, and for the glory, honor,

and endowment of all her municipals, are ordained by the ordinance of my holy house, which my people are always commanded to build unto my holy name. (D&C 124:38–39)

Again, a plain reading of this text suggests that all covenants and ordinances that the ecclesiastical Church performs are only “ordained” (a much earlier revelation uses the word “confirmed” — see Moses 5:59) “by *the* ordinance of my holy house.” In other words, these two revelations seem to be saying that anything the Church does must ultimately be ratified or sealed (authorized) through the temple in order for it to have any efficacy in and after the millennial day, the time when the kingdom of heaven is fully established on earth.

Since the ratifying ordinance or sealing in temples that Joseph Smith restored includes organizing the children of God into family units of a patriarchal order, wherein children are literally declared “heirs,” then it would appear that establishing lines of inheritance for the purpose of maintaining one’s priesthood in and after the resurrection are part of the theology that Joseph Smith restored.

More recently, President M. Russell Ballard said it this way: “Although the Church plays a pivotal role in proclaiming, announcing, and administering the necessary ordinances of salvation and exaltation, all of that, as important as it is, is really just the scaffolding being used in an infinite and eternal construction project to build, support, and strengthen the family. And just as scaffolding is eventually taken down and put away to reveal the final completed building, so too will the mortal, administrative functions of the church eventually fade as the eternal family comes fully into view.”⁴⁷

In other words, the ecclesiastical lines of authority appear to have been established at the founding of the Church as a temporary measure due to the broken inheritance lines caused by apostasy and broken covenants. However, the ecclesiastical lines of authority are seeking to repair these broken familial lines and inheritances through the work of temples. If not, then the priesthood and all covenants will have no efficacy, virtue, or force in and after the resurrection.

Casual readers of Joseph Smith’s revelations can become confused if they do not recognize that revelations addressing the ecclesiastical lines of authority exist in tandem with those that address the familial

47. M. Russell Ballard, “Women of Dedication, Faith, Determination, and Action,” address, BYU Women’s Conference, May 1, 2015, transcript, https://womensconference.byu.edu/sites/womensconference.ce.byu.edu/files/elder_m_russell_ballard_0.pdf.

inheritances of priesthood that the Church is attempting to reconstruct through its temples. Priesthood in some of Joseph Smith's revelations is indeed portrayed as a family inherited blessing rather than just an ecclesiastically bestowed line of authority.

For example, a December 1832 revelation that Joseph Smith obtained while reviewing the manuscript of his Bible revisions includes this passage:

Therefore thus saith the Lord unto you, with whom the priesthood hath continued through the lineage of your fathers, for ye are lawful heirs according to the flesh, and have been hid from the world with Christ in God: therefore your life and the priesthood hath remained, and must needs remain, through you and your lineage, until the restoration of all things spoken by the mouths of all the holy prophets since the world began. (D&C 86:8–11)

“The priesthood hath continued through the lineage of your fathers” and being “heirs, according to the flesh” certainly emphasizes the perspective that priesthood, or at least the right to receive it, was understood to be an inheritance obtained from previous generations within one's lineage. It also indicates that subsequent generations would also have a right to priesthood via their lineage.

Priesthood is an inherited right by lineage according to an answer Joseph Smith gave to some questions from Elias Higbee:

Questions by Elias Higbee: What is meant by the command in Isaiah, 52d chapter, 1st verse, which saith: Put on thy strength, O Zion — and what people had Isaiah reference to? He had reference to those whom God should call in the last days, who should hold the power of priesthood to bring again Zion, and the redemption of Israel; and to put on her strength is to put on the authority of the priesthood, which she, Zion, has a right to by lineage; also to return to that power which she had lost. (D&C 113:7–10)

Similarly, Joseph Smith's revelation concerning “evangelical ministers” or the patriarchal order indicated that it was a priesthood inherited from father to son:

The order of this priesthood was confirmed to be handed down from father to son, and rightly belongs to the literal descendants of the chosen seed, to whom the promises were

made. This order was instituted in the days of Adam, and came down by lineage (D&C 107:40–41)

While this priestly order was formalized as an ecclesiastical office within the Church that was literally passed down as an inheritance within the Smith family for decades, it was meant to reflect the truism that such an order is to exist among all families, as "instituted in the days of Adam." Consequently, entering the patriarchal order in temples can be viewed as the fulfillment or the ordaining within families of this ecclesiastical office.

Joseph Smith's revelation restoring details concerning the Abrahamic covenant includes the following text:

Thou [Abraham] shalt be a blessing unto thy seed after thee, that in their hands they shall bear this ministry and Priesthood unto all nations; ... and in thee (that is, in thy Priesthood) and in thy seed (that is, thy Priesthood), for I give unto thee a promise that this right shall continue in thee, and in thy seed after thee (that is to say, the literal seed, or the seed of the body) shall all the families of the earth be blessed (Abraham 2:9, 11)

The covenant includes God's "promise" that the right of priesthood would continue in Abraham and in his literal seed, even to the point that his seed is equated with priesthood itself. The emphasis on the priesthood continuing through the literal seed of the body again suggests a familial inheritance of priesthood is at play in the theology Joseph Smith restored.

Similar to the ancient societies, Joseph Smith's revelations also included curses for wickedness that would sever priesthood from an individual and thus, as a natural consequence, from the inheritance of their posterity. During the height of religious persecution in Missouri, the prophet Joseph Smith penned a letter to his followers, later canonized as scripture, that included a generational curse by God against any persecutor: "Cursed are all those that shall lift up the heel against mine anointed, ... they shall be severed from the ordinances of mine house. ... they shall not have right to the priesthood, nor their posterity after them from generation to generation" (D&C 121:16, 19, 21).

Declaring subsequent generations cursed from priesthood and temple ordinances due to the actions of a forefather seems unjust and appears to contradict Smith's later truth claim, also canonized, that "men will be punished for their own sins, and not for Adam's transgression" (Articles of Faith 2). However, these objections are overcome when they

are understood in the context of inheritance laws. If a parent is cut off from possessing a blessing due to their own wickedness, the natural consequence is that a child and all subsequent generations who remain the heir of that parent simply cannot inherit what the parent no longer possesses.⁴⁸

The curse against the Lamanites in the Book of Mormon appears to be a denial of priesthood due to their iniquity and refusal to obey the Lord's chosen servant. The text states explicitly:

Inasmuch as they will not hearken unto thy words they shall be cut off from the presence of the Lord. And behold, they were cut off from his presence. And he had caused the cursing to come upon them, yea, even a sore cursing, because of their iniquity. (2 Nephi 5:20–21)

The wording of the curse here is the same as Cain's noted earlier, namely being cut off from "the presence of the Lord" or, in other words, being disinherited from the priesthood that gave one access to the temple wherein God's presence is found. Implicit in a curse denying priesthood dominion is that the Lamanites were also disinherited from the domain or land they would have also inherited from Lehi and over which they would have ruled.

48. Spencer W. Kimball suggests that subsequent generations are cursed because their fathers do not teach them the truth: "Among Church members rebellion frequently takes the form of criticism of authorities and leaders. They 'speak evil of dignities' and 'of the things that they understand not,' says Peter. (2 Peter 2:10, 12.) They complain of the programs, belittle the constituted authorities, and generally set themselves up as judges. After a while they absent themselves from Church meetings for imagined offenses, and fail to pay their tithes and meet their other Church obligations. In a word, they have the spirit of apostasy, which is almost always the harvest of the seeds of criticism. ... Such people fail to bear testimony to their descendants, destroy faith within their own homes, and actually deny the 'right to the priesthood' [D&C 121:21] to succeeding generations who might otherwise have been faithful in all things." Spencer W. Kimball, *The Miracle of Forgiveness* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1969), 42–43. While such is certainly a truism and worth contemplation, this D&C text does not appear to address any additional conditions, such as one's failure to teach the next generation or the next generation's wickedness, as a reason the curse continues from generation to generation (indeed, the pharaoh of the Book of Abraham was still cursed from the right of priesthood even though he was "a righteous man"). The text simply asserts that all subsequent generations are cursed because their ancestor persecuted God's "anointed." Not having a blessing to give as an inheritance to one's posterity provides the best explanation, consistent with biblical and ancient cultural understanding, for why the curse would be generational regardless of any other conditions.

Without the contextual understanding that inheritance laws bring to the reader, the Book of Mormon's generational curses can appear prejudiced:

And cursed shall be the seed of him that mixeth with their [the Lamanite's] seed: for they shall be cursed even with the same cursing. (2 Nephi 5:23)

And it came to pass that whosoever did mingle his seed with that of the Lamanites, did bring the same curse upon his seed. (Alma 3:9)

The contextual material surrounding Alma 3:9 clarifies that the act of intermarriage alone is not the issue here, rather "that they might not mix *and believe in incorrect traditions*, which would prove their destruction" (v. 8) and "therefore whosoever *suffered himself to be led away* by the Lamanites, were called under that head" (v. 10). Note, a person who intermarried with *and* followed the incorrect traditions of the Lamanites was "called under that head" — i.e., they became followers or "children/seed" of the Lamanites, following the rules of adoption.

According to the natural consequences of inheritance, if the Lamanite "head" is cursed, then anyone who placed themselves "under that head" would bring the "same curse" of being cut off — i.e., you cannot inherit what your adopted father does not have to give. Joining a lineage that has been disinherited not only prevents the individual who placed themselves in that lineage to receive the inheritance of land or power but their posterity would also be cut off with them: "the same curse upon his seed."

Overcoming Curses in Joseph Smith's Revelations

Such curses abound in scripture and in the ancient world as has been shown. Joseph Smith's revelations, however, provide means whereby those who find themselves cursed or cut off due to their own actions or the actions of a forefather can still obtain an inheritance of a kingdom (land) and power (priesthood) that are promised in the covenant. First and foremost, the Book of Mormon indicates that through the Atonement of Jesus Christ that any breaches of the covenant or severance from one's inheritance can be repaired among those who put their faith in Christ and repent (see, for example, Alma 5:51, 7:14, and 3 Nephi 11:33, 38).

The Book of Abraham outlines how anyone can still be a lawful heir of the blessings even if they were cut off from them due to the actions of a progenitor. If they cannot inherit the blessings through their own

lineage, then they can become Abraham's seed through adoption: "And I will bless them [the nations] through thy name; for as many as receive this Gospel shall be called after thy name [adopted], and shall be accounted thy seed, and shall rise up and bless thee, as their father" (Abraham 2:10).

Abraham himself seemingly could not inherit the priesthood from his own father who had turned away from God, so Jewish tradition, noted above, and a revelation of Joseph Smith indicate that "Abraham received the priesthood from Melchizedek" (D&C 84:14, cf. Genesis 14:18–20; Hebrews 7). In the context of inheritance laws, this would imply that Abraham became Melchizedek's adopted son whereby he could inherit the blessings of the covenant such as priesthood.

Ultimately, Joseph Smith revealed that the full covenant rituals of the temple are the formal means by which one is adopted or "sealed" into the family of Abraham.⁴⁹ His 1843 revelation on the covenant indicates explicitly that a marriage between a man and woman that is "sealed unto them by the Holy Spirit of promise" in which they were promised to "*inherit* thrones, kingdoms, principalities, and powers, dominions, all heights and depths"—and they do not shed innocent blood—then they shall have the promised blessings "in time, and through all eternity," and this glory "shall be a fullness and a continuation of the seeds forever and ever" (D&C 132:19). The promise of continuing seed suggests that the inherited blessings would also continue through the heirs of the man and woman so married.

Indeed, Joseph Smith also taught that there must be a "welding link" between the generations and that temple ordinances for the dead would make that possible:

Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord: And he shall turn the heart of the fathers to the children, and the heart of the

49. The foundational study of this concept is Gordon Irving, "The Law of Adoption: One Phase in the Development of the Mormon Concept of Salvation, 1830 1900," *BYU Studies* 14 (Spring 1974): 291–314. See also Jonathan A. Stapley, "Adoptive Sealing Ritual in Mormonism," *Journal of Mormon History* 37, no. 3 (Summer 2011): 53–118; Samuel Brown, "Early Mormon Adoption Theology and the Mechanics of Salvation," *Journal of Mormon History* 37, no. 3 (Summer 2011), 3–52; and Samuel Brown, "The Early Mormon Chain of Belonging," *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 44, no. 1 (Spring 2011), 1–52. Most modern studies such as Stapley's and Brown's, however, overlook the concept of literal inheritance along actual family lines as central to the sealing's purpose.

children to their fathers, lest I come and smite the earth with a curse' [Malachi 4:5–6]. ... It is sufficient to know, in this case, that the earth will be smitten with a curse unless there is a welding link of some kind or other between the fathers and the children, upon some subject or other — and behold what is that subject? It is the baptism for the dead. For we without them cannot be made perfect; neither can they without us be made perfect. Neither can they nor we be made perfect without those who have died in the gospel also; for it is necessary in the ushering in of the dispensation of the fulness of times, which dispensation is now beginning to usher in, that a whole and complete and perfect union, and welding together of dispensations, and keys, and powers, and glories should take place, and be revealed from the days of Adam even to the present time. (D&C 128:17–18)

The idea that one cannot “be made perfect” without their ancestors and must, therefore, create a welding link that binds together all the dispensations from the present back to Adam makes the most sense when viewed through the concept of inheritance.

According to Joseph Smith’s revelations, after the ministries of Christ in Jerusalem, in the Book of Mormon lands, and among the house of Israel in other parts of the earth, there was a universal apostasy wherein all the families of the earth severed themselves from the covenant blessings in one way or the other. The Book of Mormon plainly states that “they had all become corrupt” (Jacob 5:39). Thus all modern families have been effectively disinherited from God or cursed, and everything would be wasted, in every meaning of the word, if not for the Restoration.

Nothing in scriptural law suggests that a curse or disinheritance imposed on all the families of the earth due to the great apostasy is any different than the curse or disinheritance imposed upon Cain and his descendants, upon Ham and his descendants, upon Laman and Lemuel and their descendants, or any others who have abandoned the covenant of the Lord. Everyone has ancestors that rejected the covenant requirements at one point or another and so all families have been severed from the divine inheritance; all are cut off. Joseph Smith’s revelations and the practices that grew out of them appear to demonstrate that these broken lines of inheritance can be repaired through faith in Christ, repentance, and temple covenants. Additionally, he claimed that a modern priesthood chain of authority was given directly from heaven so that those in the latter-days would have the needed authority to reconstruct the family

kingdom and inheritance chains back through the generations to Adam and, ultimately, to God, allowing the family kingdom of kings and queens to be fully established. Joseph Smith revealed a God who is a God of law, expecting all commandments and legal requirements to be fulfilled as well as a God of mercy who makes a way possible through Christ for such to be fulfilled in any persons' life: "Now, the decrees of God are unalterable; therefore, the way is prepared that whosoever will may walk therein and be saved" (Alma 41:–8).

In nothing mentioned above is one's racial profile a qualifying test to receive an inheritance. The only legal requirements are righteousness (including repentance) and covenants that bind the generations so that the blessings can be received by inheritance. While an entire family or lineage can be cut off from an inheritance due to the actions of a forefather, the inheritance laws of the scriptural traditions discussed do not discriminate based on race, in the modern sense of that word. Every individual and their family can be heirs, whether by natural birth or by adoption, and every individual and their family can be cursed or disinherited when the covenant is breached. The Book of Mormon makes this position very clear:

And now behold, my beloved brethren, I would speak unto you; for I, Nephi, would not suffer that ye should suppose that ye are more righteous than the Gentiles shall be. For behold, except ye shall keep the commandments of God ye shall all likewise perish; and because of the words which have been spoken ye need not suppose that the Gentiles are utterly destroyed. For behold, I say unto you that as many of the Gentiles as will repent are the covenant people of the Lord [i.e., although all Gentiles' lineages are disinherited and will reap the destruction of their false kingdoms and priesthoods, individual Gentiles may still be heirs by being adopted through repentance and numbered among the "covenant people," thus they are not "utterly" or entirely destroyed]; and as many of the Jews as will not repent shall be cast off [disinherited]; for the Lord covenanteth with none save it be with them that repent and believe in his Son, who is the Holy One of Israel. (2 Nephi 30:1–2)

The Book of Abraham and Inheritance

Within the context of inheritance laws relative to covenant blessings, we return to the Book of Abraham to determine more precisely why the pharaoh and Egyptians of Abraham's day did not have the right to priesthood. The only explicitly mentioned and active cursing respecting priesthood in this story comes from Noah: "Noah ... blessed him [Pharaoh] with the blessings of the earth, and with the blessings of wisdom, but cursed him as pertaining to the Priesthood" (Abraham 1:26). As noted earlier, this earliest Pharaoh was the eldest son of Egyptus, a daughter (or descendant) of Ham. The later Pharaoh of Abraham's day was also a descendant of Ham and a "partaker of the blood of the Canaanites," as noted earlier.

Since Noah is the explicitly stated source of the curse in the Book of Abraham, and this curse is related to the lineage of Ham, not some antediluvian curse upon Cain, then it makes more sense to interpret the "blood of the Canaanites" in the Book of Abraham as descendants of Ham's son Canaan (see Genesis 10:6, 15–19), and not the Canaanites from the Book of Moses that lived in Enoch's day. In fact, the book of Genesis actually preserves a story in which Noah curses some of Ham's descendants due to something Ham did, and this moment seems to be the best framework for interpreting the text of the Book of Abraham. The biblical account of this curse is as follows:

And Noah began to be an husbandman, and he planted a vineyard: And he drank of the wine, and was drunken; and he was uncovered within his tent. And Ham, the father of Canaan, saw the nakedness of his father, and told his two brethren without. And Shem and Japheth took a garment, and laid it upon both their shoulders, and went backward, and covered the nakedness of their father; and their faces were backward, and they saw not their father's nakedness. And Noah awoke from his wine, and knew what his younger son had done unto him. And he said, Cursed be Canaan; a servant of servants shall he be unto his brethren. (Genesis 9:20–25)

The text is certainly a difficult one to fully understand. Since Canaan is the one cursed, it is easy to assume that he, not Ham, did something wrong, and the text needs to be amended or read in different ways. However, viewed through the lens of inheritance, one can make sense of it as it stands.

The exact reason for Noah's cursing is not clear.⁵⁰ However, it leaves no ambiguity concerning the consequence of Ham's action: a curse upon Canaan. That an action of Ham would bring a curse upon Canaan makes legal sense in the context of inheritance laws. Like a child not being able to have the priestly office of a cursed father in ancient Egypt noted above, if Ham was disinherited from his covenant blessings for any reason, such would naturally prevent his son Canaan, and the Canaanites who descend from him, from inheriting those blessings from Ham. Ham would no longer have them to give to his posterity.

Why the Hebrew Bible singles out Canaan being cursed is likely a function of the larger contextual struggle for land between the

50. Speculations include ideas such as: 1) pointing out the close correlation of Ham's action of seeing "the nakedness of his father" to similar biblical prohibitions elsewhere, suggesting that Ham may have had sexual relations with his father's wife (a mother, step-mother, or concubine): "The nakedness of thy father's wife shalt thou not uncover: it is thy father's nakedness" (Leviticus 18:8); "And the man that lieth with his father's wife hath uncovered his father's nakedness" (Leviticus 20:11); "Cursed be he that lieth with his father's wife; because he uncovereth his father's skirt" (Deuteronomy 27:20). In addition to incestual concerns, such an act could also be viewed as Ham usurping Noah's power or authority, similar to Absalom's act of treason enacted by sleeping with his father David's harem: "And Ahithophel said unto Absalom, Go in unto thy father's concubines, which he hath left to keep the house; and all Israel shall hear that thou art abhorred of thy father: then shall the hands of all that are with thee be strong. So they spread Absalom a tent upon the top of the house; and Absalom went in unto his father's concubines in the sight of all Israel" (2 Samuel 16:21; cf. 1 Kings 2:22). "To lie with a monarch's concubine was tantamount to usurpation of the throne (2 Samuel 3:7 and 16:21–22). For this reason Abner took Rizpah (2 Samuel 3:7). The same concept stands behind Ahithophel's advice to Absalom, to "go into his father's concubines" (16:21), and Adonijah's request for Abishag the Shunamite was clearly associated with this custom (1 Kings 2:21–24)." Anson Rainey, "Concubine: In the Bible," in *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, 2nd ed. (New York: Macmillan, 2006); 5:133–34. 2). Pointing out traditions that indicate Ham's wrongdoing may be that he stole a priesthood-related garment from his father, which legend claims was the same garment given to Adam in the garden of Eden and represented priestly or kingly authority. See, e.g., Stephen D. Ricks, "The Garment of Adam in Jewish, Muslim, and Christian Tradition," in *Temples of the Ancient World*, ed. Donald W. Parry (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1994), 705–39. 3). Speculating that the text was amended to provide a basis for aggression against the Canaanites — i.e., Ham did not do anything wrong and any idea of a curse is a false narrative added to the text — chiefly as a reaction to the misuse of this story to justify racism and slavery throughout history. Certainly we should condemn the misuse of this text as justification for racism and slavery throughout history, but wisdom dictates that we should try to fully understand the text as it stands before amending scripture to suit our own purposes.

Israelites and Canaanites in the biblical text. Such a narrow focus in Genesis does not necessarily mean that the other children of Ham are not also disinherited or cursed. Legally speaking, they most assuredly would be. The Book of Abraham's claim that descendants of Ham's daughter Egyptus, not just those of Ham's son Canaan, were also cursed/disinherited is important evidence to verify this point. Indeed, the Bible's claim that Canaan would be a servant "of servants" could be read as indicating that Ham's entire household were no longer heirs but servants. In the context of inheritance laws, "servant" is not meant to indicate some kind of slavery, but rather one's status in a kingdom as a non-heir. Jesus's discussion of the difference between being a servant vs. son/heir in John 8:31–47 is instructive on this point.

Similar to the biblical narrative regarding Canaan, the Book of Abraham portrays Noah directly cursing Pharaoh, Ham's descendant, even though Pharaoh had not done anything wrong and was even declared a righteous man. Such cursing makes more sense when understood as a simple statement of the disinherited status of the pharaoh who was maintaining his inheritance through Ham. Indeed, the Book of Abraham explicitly states that Pharaoh's *lineage* was the reason for his inability to obtain priesthood, rather than any personal misdeed he did that Noah disliked.

In other words, any curse of Noah severing Ham from the covenant blessings, including land and priesthood, affects his son Canaan and his descendants (including the Canaanite pharaoh of Abraham's day), his son Mitzraim and his descendants, the Egyptians, and upon all other descendants of Ham who maintain their connection to divine blessings through him. The Book of Abraham states that the pharaohs of Egypt would "fain claim the priesthood from Noah, through Ham" (Abraham 1:27), but that simply was not possible, according to Abraham, because Ham did not currently have the priesthood to give to his descendants. They would need to get it some other way.

Abraham claiming authority from his fathers versus the pharaohs' claiming authority from their fathers (through Ham) is a theme that has parallels in other books of scripture. For example, in the Book of Moses, Noah and his sons prior to the flood are called the "sons of God," but the wicked claim that they, not Noah and his sons, are the true "sons of God," having the authority and blessings (see Moses 8). In a related and poignant moment, the very first words attributed to Satan in mortality is "I am also a son of God" immediately after Adam and Eve were told to "repent and call upon God in the name of the Son forevermore"

(Moses 5:8, 13). These are stories, among many, that address who has the true inheritance as “sons of God” — which lineage has the real authority that came down through covenant abiding fathers, whether natural or adopted, from the divine and which has a counterfeit inheritance of priesthood or land based on the false traditions of the fathers.

Historically, the pharaohs of Egypt, as did most rulers in antiquity, claimed that they were the ones with the divine right to rule the earth and to be the great high priest of the people. They claimed the title “Son of Re” in their standard titulary to affirm this. Consequently, they viewed all other nations as subservient to them and symbolically depicted them below windows over which the pharaoh appeared or on footstools under the pharaoh’s foot.⁵¹ To emphasize their right to rule, the Egyptians even made lists of surrounding city-states or nations on clay figurines that became the subject of cursing rituals.⁵² Longer versions of these lists appear on temple pylons next to images of the pharaoh about to smite the heads of bound foreigners.⁵³ In the hierarchy of the cosmic order of Egyptian ideology, the gods and king had authority and reigned supreme while common Egyptians, foreigners, and nature were subservient, in that order.⁵⁴

In spite of the disinherited status of Pharaoh, son of Egyptus, in the Book of Abraham, it still portrays Noah blessing him for his righteousness with “wisdom,” for such does not depend on an inheritance to acquire. Noah also blessed Pharaoh with the “blessings of the earth,” which can appear problematic since land is typically an inherited right. The phrase “blessings of the earth,” however, does not appear anywhere else in scripture, so it is not clear if receiving the blessings of the earth means the same thing as inheriting the earth itself and having dominion over it. The New Testament’s “prodigal son” declares: “How many hired servants of my father’s have bread enough and to spare, and I perish with hunger!

51. For a good discussion on this, see David O’Connor, “Egypt’s Views of ‘Others,’” in *Never Had the Like Occurred: Egypt’s View of Its Past*, ed. John Tait (Abingdon, UK: Routledge, 2016), 155–86.

52. Robert K. Ritner, *The Mechanics of Ancient Egyptian Magical Practice* (Studies in Ancient Oriental Civilization 54) (Chicago: The Oriental Institute, 1993), 136–42.

53. For a discussion of these lists and their physical counterparts in geography see Donald B. Redford, *Egypt, Canaan, and Israel in Ancient Times* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992).

54. On this order see David O’Connor and Stephen Quirke, “Introduction: Mapping the Unknown in Ancient Egypt,” in *Mysterious Lands*, ed. David O’Connor and Stephen Quirke (Abingdon, UK: Routledge, 2007), 10–15.

I will arise and go to my father, and will say unto him, Father, I have sinned against heaven, and before thee, And am no more worthy to be called thy son: make me as one of thy hired servants" in order that he may at least benefit from the blessings of his father's estate (Luke 15:17–19). It may be that Pharaoh, likewise, was blessed by Noah to enjoy the blessings of the earth even though he did not have legitimacy to rule the earth as a king-priest through the lineage by which he was claiming it.

Egyptus and the Curse of Cain

Again, the Book of Abraham explicitly mentions Noah's curse and Ham's seed, so any interpretation of the text should privilege that framework. There is nothing that indicates God's curse upon Cain or Cain's descendants is operative in this story. Some late antiquity, medieval, and even early American sources promoted the idea that a member of Noah's family may have married someone from the seed of Cain, the memory of which still persists into popular culture of recent years.⁵⁵ Neither the Hebrew Bible nor the New Testament, however, make such a claim.

As noted earlier, some within the Church speculated that Ham's wife Egyptus in the published Book of Abraham was Cain's descendant.⁵⁶ The Book of Abraham, however, makes no such claim. It does not speak of the parents or ancestors of Ham's wife at all. In spite of this, the idea that Egyptus is a descendant of Cain has become so ingrained in the modern Church's thought and dialogue that aging but currently utilized official Church sources still make this point.⁵⁷ Even Armand Mauss, who was

55. For example, a classical Jewish tradition maintains that Naamah, the sister of Tubal-cain and a descendant of Cain (Genesis 4:22), was a wife of Noah and the mother of Ham himself (Genesis Rabba XXIII:3). See also Benjamin Braude, "The Sons of Noah and the Construction of Ethnic and Geographical Identities in the Medieval and Early Modern Periods," *William and Mary Quarterly* LIV (January 1997): 103–42. See also William McKee Evans, "From the Land of Canaan to the Land of Guinea: The Strange Odyssey of the Sons of Ham," *American Historical Review* 85 (February 1980): 15–43. The 1991 London West End musical *Children of Eden* adapts this popular notion by having the character Yonah, who believes she will perish in the flood before becoming the wife of Noah's son Japheth, sing the lyrics, "This won't be the first time I've stayed behind to face the bitter consequences of an ancient fall from grace. I'm a daughter of the race of Cain. I am not a stranger to the rain." Stephen Schwartz, "Stranger to the Rain," *Children of Eden*, music and lyrics by Stephen Schwartz, book by John Caird (New York: Music Theatre International, 1991).

56. See also Harris and Bringham, *The Mormon Church and Blacks*, 158.

57. For example, the Guide to the Scriptures accessible at the Church's official website simply states, "Ham's wife, Egyptus, was a descendant of Cain." "Ham," in

trying to question similar baseless conclusions in his paper, incorrectly assumed that the Pearl of Great Price actually states that Ham's wife descended from Cain: "Mormons usually corroborate this interpretation of the biblical account with reference to our own Pearl of Great Price, where we are told that Ham's wife was a descendant of Cain"⁵⁸

Interestingly, the name-title given to Ham's wife in the earliest manuscript copies of the Book of Abraham is not Egyptus at all, but rather "Zep-tah, which in the Chaldea signifies Egypt, which sign[i]fies that which is forbidden."⁵⁹ The reader is not told why Zeptah in the Chaldea "signifies Egypt," though Zeptah is, arguably, a good Egyptian name: Za(t)-Ptah, meaning "daughter of Ptah."⁶⁰ The reader is also not told why Egypt "signifies that which is forbidden."⁶¹ Further, neither Zeptah nor her daughter are called "forbidden" in the text, only the land Egypt explicitly "signifies" such. No other details concerning Ham's wife are given other than that stated above, so any claims of Zeptah/Egyptus being a descendant of Cain and the means by which his curse is passed along to the Egyptians is not supported by a careful reading of the text.⁶²

"Guide to the Scriptures," The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, <https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/scriptures/gs/ham>. See also the *Old Testament Student Manual Genesis-2 Samuel*, which mentions that Ham's sons were denied priesthood because he had married Egyptus, a descendant of Cain. *Old Testament Student Manual Genesis-2 Samuel* (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1980), 50–59.

58. Mauss, "Mormonism and the Negro," 14.

59. "Book of Abraham Manuscript, circa July–circa November 1835–A [Abraham 1:4–2:6]," 3, *The Joseph Smith Papers*, <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/book-of-abraham-manuscript-circa-july-circa-november-1835-a-abraham-14-26/3>.

60. On Zeptah as a viable ancient Egyptian personal name see "Zeptah and Egyptes," Book of Abraham Insights, Pearl of Great Price Central, August 28, 2019, https://www.pearlofgreatpricecentral.org/zeptah-and-egyptes/#_ftn4.

61. For one speculative idea, see Brent Metcalfe, "The Curious Textual History of 'Egyptus' the Wife of Ham," *The John Whitmer Historical Association Journal* 34, no. 2 (Fall/Winter 2014): 1–11.

62. During the review process for this article, I was made aware of a self-published work dealing with this topic: Matthieu Crouet, *Brigham Young and the Priesthood Ban: The Lineage Criterion* (Amazon Kindle, 2017). Crouet provides some similar arguments that the issue is lineage and not race per se; however, he perpetuates the assumption that the reason for the loss of priesthood among the pharaohs in the Book of Abraham was that Ham had married Cain's descendant, Egyptus, and that "marriage in and of itself can result in the loss of the priesthood to the posterity, even when the wife and the children would have embraced the beliefs of the husband or father" (p. 43). Again, attempting to tie Egyptus to Cain

Inheritances in the biblical and Egyptian cultures typically follow patriarchal lines, not matriarchal. In the Book of Abraham, the pharaohs claimed their right to priesthood from Ham, not Egyptus.⁶³ So no matter her ancestry, Ham's posterity would not be cut off from their inheritance of land or priesthood if Zeptah/Egyptus was in the covenant, just as Ishmael, the son of the Egyptian Hagar, was qualified as and understood to be Abraham's heir, until Isaac was born (see Genesis 15:4, 16:1–4, and 21:9–10). Since the biblical record indicates that Noah, his sons, and their wives were all part of the covenant promises of land and priesthood which the Lord established with them when they entered and left the ark (see Genesis 6:18 and 9:8–9), then there is nothing to indicate that marriage was the cause for any loss of priesthood in Ham's family. Consequently, any speculation that Egyptus carried a curse that affected her posterity has no real foundation and needs to be put to rest.

The Right of the Firstborn

Abraham initially mentions in his record that the blessing he was seeking was the "right of the firstborn." Based on this, some have attempted to explain Pharaoh's priesthood curse as a more narrowly focused ban only against the right to *preside*, rather than a ban against actually possessing priesthood. For example, Alma Allred states:

In the Book of Abraham, Abraham explains that he sought the blessings of the fathers and the right to be ordained to administer those blessings. He says that he became an heir holding the right belonging to the fathers. According to LDS theology, the right to administer the ordinances is held by the presiding priesthood authority on the earth. In the days of Abraham, that right was held by the presiding patriarch. It started with Adam and came in due course to Abraham. Abraham 1:3–4 stipulates that the appointment came by lineage. The right to preside was the birthright which went to Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, and finally to Ephraim.

is too speculative, nor does any scriptural text suggest that Ham's marriage to his wife was a cause for any loss of priesthood. To the contrary, Genesis suggests that the sons of Noah and their wives were all recipients of the covenant blessings (see below). Crouet's work does not focus on the mechanics of inheritance as the reason lineage is the criterion and not race.

63. Nibley's contention that the pharaohs were disqualified from priesthood due to their descent through Ham's daughter, thus a matriarchal line, is not foolproof without knowing who her husband was (see Nibley, *Abraham in Egypt*, 133–34).

According to these LDS scriptures, even though the priesthood did not remain exclusively with Ephraim, the right to preside did. Moses presided over Israel even though he was of the tribe of Levi. Joseph Smith, however, claimed to be a “lawful heir” because he was of the house of Ephraim (D&C 86:8–11). Since this authority was passed from father to only one son, when Noah gave it to Shem, Ham could not be the heir. Ham and Japheth, together with their descendants, did not have the right to administer the priesthood because it was given to Shem. Esau lost the right to Jacob. Reuben lost the right to Joseph. Manasseh lost that right when Jacob conferred it upon Ephraim. Each man who lost the birthright did not lose the right to be ordained to the priesthood; rather, he lost the right to preside as *the* presiding high priest in a patriarchal order. The scripture does not say that Pharaoh could not hold the priesthood; it says that he could not have the “right of priesthood” (Abraham 1:27). This right had been given to Shem, who in turn gave it to his successor in the patriarchal office.

Years after the right of priesthood had been passed to Abraham, the Pharaohs were feigning a claim to it from Noah. They did not merely claim priesthood; they claimed the right to preside over the priesthood. Pharaoh, the son of Egyptus, established a patriarchal government in Egypt; but he was of that lineage by which he could not have the “right of priesthood” or “the right of the firstborn,” which belonged to Shem and his posterity. In response to the Pharaoh’s claims, Abraham states: “But the records of the fathers, even the patriarchs, concerning *the right of priesthood*, the Lord my God preserved in mine own hands” (Abraham 1:31). In other words, Abraham retained the right to preside over the priesthood.⁶⁴

Allred asserts that priesthood was available generally to all sons but that the right to preside “was passed from father to only one son” — the birthright son. Unfortunately, Allred often conflates the mechanics and structure of priesthood in the ecclesiastical church with the priesthood

64. Alma Allred, “The Traditions of Their Fathers: Myth versus Reality in LDS Scriptural Writings,” in *Black and Mormon*, ed. Newell G. Bringhurst and Darron T. Smith (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2004), 45–46.

of a patriarchal order. In other words, in patriarchal or other ancient orders, receiving high priesthood (i.e., becoming a high priest) is the same as receiving the right to preside, especially in one's own family kingdom.⁶⁵ In other words, in ancient societies one did not separate high priesthood and presidency as Allred does based on modern ecclesiastical practices.

That receiving high priesthood itself is the right to preside is a concept that Joseph Smith appears to have restored: "The [high or] Melchisedek priesthood holds the right of presidency, and has power and authority over all the offices in the church, in all ages of the world, to administer in spiritual things" (D&C 107:3). Indeed, among "all ages of the world" the high priests of ancient religions wielded the supreme authority or presidency within their respective religions. Further, it was common to have multiple high priests, each presiding over their own family, district, or temple. In most ancient societies, the king himself was considered a high priest with the right to rule both politically and ecclesiastically. Smaller kingdoms (i.e., principalities) could each have a ruling king/high priest within a larger kingdom — for example, Melchizedek was both a king and high priest but did "reign under his father" (see Alma 13:18). Also, Lamoni and Antionmo each ruled as kings in their own lands but reigned under their father who was the king over all (see Mosiah 24:2; Alma 18:9 and 20:8).

While the current redaction of the Hebrew Bible seems to promote the idea that only one high priest and one temple could exist at a time in ancient Israel, other evidence calls this into question. Scholars are divided on whether the Jewish temples discovered at Elephantine and Leontopolis in Egypt had high priests for their establishment and function.⁶⁶ Latter-day Saints would certainly lean towards the idea that they did, in light of the Book of Mormon's claim. For example, Nephi

65. The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints' recent (2018) priesthood reorganization where only those actually serving in presiding roles are considered members of the high priest quorums appears to be an effort to better align with this principle.

66. Deborah W. Rooke, *Zadok's Heirs: The Role and Development of the High Priesthood in Ancient Israel* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2000); Bezalel Porten, et al., eds., *The Elephantine Papyri in English: Three Millennia of Cross-Cultural Continuity and Change* (Leiden, NDL: Brill, 1996); Joseph Mélèze-Modrzejewski, *The Jews of Egypt* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1995); Arthur Cowley, *The Aramaic Papyri of the Fifth Century* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1923); Eduard Sachau, *Aramäische Papyrus und Ostraka aus einer jüdischen Militär-Kolonie zu Elephantine* (Leipzig: Hinrichs, 1911).

and many others in the Book of Mormon implicitly or explicitly claim high priestly authority, establish temples, and preside over churches even though such already existed in Jerusalem (see 2 Nephi 5:16; Mosiah 11:11; Mosiah 23:16; Alma 13:10, 29:42, 46:6, 38; Helaman 3:25; and 3 Nephi 6:21, 27).

Like these ancient orders, Joseph Smith's restoration of priesthood, in its fullest eternal form relative to families and temples, indicates that anyone can obtain the fullness of the high or Melchizedek priesthood and possess all the powers, titles, keys of their kingdom, and rights to preside as king and high priest related to it:

[The order of Melchizedek] was not the power of a Prophet nor apostle nor Patriarc[h] only but of King or Priest to God to open the windows of Heaven and pour out the peace & Law of endless Life to man & No man can attain to the Joint heirship with Jesus Christ with out bein[g] administered to by one having the same power & Authority of Melchisede[c].⁶⁷

Indeed, the rights and titles of the high priesthood that anyone can obtain appear to include the right of the firstborn:

They [those who inherit the Celestial Kingdom] are they who are the church of the Firstborn: they are they into whose hands the Father has given all things — they are they who are priests and kings, who have received of his fulness, and of his glory; and are priests of the Most High after the order of Melchizedek, which was after the order of Enoch, which was after the order of the only begotten Son. ... They who dwell in his presence are the church of the Firstborn; and they see as they are seen, and know as they are known, having received of his fulness and of his grace; and he makes them equal in power, and in might, and in dominion. (D&C 76:54–57, 94–95)

Note that Joseph Smith believed this is what Paul had in mind when he declared that all could be “joint-heirs” with Christ (Romans 8:17). In other words, all can become a firstborn, a son of God, in similitude of Christ, thus becoming the “church of the Firstborn” and becoming part of the “order of the Only Begotten Son.” In this light, the Book of

67. “Discourse, 27 August 1843, as Reported by Franklin D. Richards,” 26, *The Joseph Smith Papers*, <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/discourse-27-august-1843-as-reported-by-franklin-d-richards/2>.

Abraham's ban against having the right of the firstborn, which is the right to preside as a high priest and king in one's own kingdom, is a ban against the high priesthood.

Allred cites D&C 86:8–11 to suggest that Joseph Smith claimed he was the sole "lawful heir [sic]" of the priesthood because he was of the house of Ephraim who had the sole right of firstborn anciently, but the text Allred cites does not actually say this. It actually states "ye [plural] are lawful heirs [plural]" of the priesthood, suggesting that the inheritance or right of priesthood was of a greater scope than just one singular president within it as Allred proposes.

The generational curse referenced earlier in D&C 121:16–21 also suggests that more than one can have the "right of priesthood" for it severs anyone who persecutes the Lord's anointed from this right: "They [plural] shall not have right to the priesthood, nor their [plural] posterity after them [plural] from generation to generation." Such a curse would not make sense if Joseph Smith alone had the "right."

There is one passage of scripture that can suggest that only one person has the right of the firstborn or presidency: "and I have appointed unto my servant Joseph to hold this power in the last days, and there is never but one on the earth at a time on whom this power and the keys of this priesthood are conferred" (D&C 132:7). This passage, in its context, is typically understood to reference the ecclesiastical church president's sole authority, though delegable, to authorize all ordinances and to ultimately confirm them, making one's calling and election sure (cf. D&C 124:39 and Moses 5:59). However, the keys of the kingdom of the Church are understood to operate differently than, though in harmony with, the keys of the family kingdom the Church is creating.

While the Church is indeed governed by the keys of one man, it seeks at the same time, as noted previously, to make every man and woman a king/high priest and queen/high priestess holding the keys of their own kingdom in a family system, both in time and eternity. The ecclesiastical church and patriarchal order are both true forms of government, but each function in different environments. Indeed, contrary to fundamentalist movements, no one today can actually have an independent family kingdom in a fully established patriarchal order, because all are currently subject to gentile governments worldwide and because, as this paper argues, they are all currently still cut off from their eternal inheritances due to the lack of complete welding links back to Adam and Eve. Consequently, a special dispensing of priesthood and chains of authority direct from heaven had to occur in modern

days to allow the Church the authority to create family kingdoms and construct the necessary welding links of inheritance back to Adam and Eve whereby men and women can legally and lawfully preside as kings/queens/priest/priestesses forever as heirs of Adam and Eve, who are heirs of Christ and, ultimately, the Father. All must operate within the structure of the Church and the presidencies/keys it holds until such a time as that scaffolding falls away and the family order and unbroken lines of inheritance are fully established.

Therefore, any assertions that the “right of priesthood” was only given to one person at a time and was separate from the priesthood generally is conflating the rules of an ecclesiastical kingdom of the Church operating in a gentile dominion with the rules of family kingdom that Abraham and the pharaohs understood and which Joseph Smith also began to restore. In other words, in antiquity and in Joseph Smith’s restoration of the patriarchal order there is not much distinction between having the right of priesthood, the right of the firstborn, and possessing the high priesthood. All who possess the high priesthood are ultimately defined as kings and queens possessing the right to preside, bless, and administer in the ordinances thereof, just as Abraham sought and as the pharaohs feigned.

Conclusions

For too many generations, people have used distinguishing “marks,” such as bodily features (the shape of the nose or skin color) and other common phenotypes as well as being known for certain skills or products or even symbols, flags, clothing, makeup, etc. to determine lineal or tribal affiliation. However, the use of quick “profiles” such as these can easily create errors of judgment. Outward appearances or other markers, even biological ones, are no legal basis or guarantee of lineal descent and one’s right to inherit or one’s disinherited status. Indeed, the only certitude given in the Book of Abraham for Abraham’s inherited right to priesthood does not come from any appeal to racial markers or the like but rather, simply, to the “records of the fathers.”⁶⁸ In other words, genealogies are an acceptable form of legal proof to obtain the divine blessings.

If Ham and those who maintained their inheritance through him are truly disinherited from the divine priesthood due to some crime Ham committed, then, based on the legal mechanics of inheritance laws, any

68. “Book of Abraham and Facsimiles,” 705.

claim that a modern person is a descendant of Ham and cannot inherit the priesthood through Ham would require: 1) proof that the modern was actually a descendant of Ham according to record, not simple profiling, 2) proof that Ham never (even beyond mortality) repented, rejoined the covenant, and became an heir once again, *and* 3) the modern descendant openly rejects inheriting their priesthood through Shem, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob but insists their authority comes from Ham as the pharaohs apparently did. However, 1) we are not yet able to prove any modern descendancy from Ham according to record, 2) no one knows Ham's current status in the eternal scheme of things, and 3) it is not apparent that anyone joining the Church in modern times rejects the priesthood of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob and instead claims their right through Ham.

Additionally, trying to determine if any modern is part of a cursed lineage, or not, overlooks one major issue: Joseph Smith's commentary on Malachi 4:5–6, noted above, indicates that without generational links providing an uninterrupted flow of the inheritance back to Adam, the "whole earth" would be smitten with a curse. In other words, all of us are cursed or disinherited from the divine blessings of land and priestly kingship/queenship given to Adam and Eve because all of us are descendants of ancestors, like Ham, who severed themselves from the covenant.

Understanding better the mechanics of inheritance law does not answer the question why a modern priesthood and temple ban existed. If anything, it complicates the matter. One of the earliest reasons Brigham Young gave for the modern ban was one of timing — i.e., which lineage should be restored to their inheritance first: "the Lord told Cain that he should not receive the blessings of the preisthood nor his see[d], until the last of the posterity of Able had received the preisthood [sic], until the redemption [sic] of the earth."⁶⁹ This explanation, however, does not overcome the problems of assuming a modern person's lineage based largely on appearance or even a supposed general geographic ancestry. Such bases are typically not enough to legally establish an inheritance as Abraham's report suggests. This also does not overcome the problem that all families have broken links and so no modern can fully claim their royal priesthood by lineal inheritance, not at least until the broken chains are reformed.

69. Brigham Young, "Address to Utah Legislature," February 5, 1852, George D. Watt Papers, Church History Library, transcript, <https://archive.org/details/CR100317B0001F0017/page/n3/mode/2up>.

If modern priesthood authority were established directly from heaven to Joseph Smith as a grace of God to circumvent the broken inheritances of priesthood that all families currently experience, then why would lineage be a basis for withholding priesthood to anyone? If lineage is the basis, then everyone should be denied priesthood since all lineages are currently cursed or disinherited. I suppose one could argue that giving priesthood through ecclesiastical channels, by the laying on of hands, to a modern provides that person the ability to work in temples to repair their own family inheritance lines, and if Brigham Young's claim that God determined some lineages would be delayed in this reconstruction project until other lineages were repaired first is doctrine, then an internal logic for a ban could be argued. But there is still the problem of profiling and assuming one's lineage without complete legal records to prove such and also the difficulty of why one, theologically, would need to be kept to their specific lineage when adoption exists as a legal means to receive an inheritance in some other way. In other words, why couldn't an actual descendant of Cain, if such exists, choose to be adopted and inherit the blessings as Abraham's, thus Abel's, seed? These and other questions still linger concerning the modern ban, even in light of inheritance laws.

It is hoped that this study at least provides a little more context and clarity to increase the accuracy of those addressing such difficult historical issues. While there is still no clear reason for the modern priesthood and temple ban and there is certainly still much work to do to overcome all the racist attitudes, feelings, and remarks that grew out of the practice, we do rejoice in the fact that today all can bind themselves to their ancestors and can begin or continue to create the welding link that will allow each to fully inherit the blessings of eternal life through their families — a work that will depend on our children to finish, thus turning our hearts to them, for even we will have to depend on them to provide us with the full legal claims to our inheritance and exaltation in Christ.

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