

DNA & the BOOK OF MORMON FOR DUMMIES

By Douglas Earl

This a brief summary of the major salient points for LDS members who have a casual interest in the thesis advanced by some dissident ex-members that say that the Native Americans of North, Central and South America do not have the same DNA as the Jews or the people living in Israel presently, and therefore the Book of Mormon is not true.

A summary of this article is as follows:

- 1. There is no such thing as a Jewish DNA.**
- 2. Lehi, Ismael, Zoram, and the Jaredites and their descendants, were not Jews or from the lineage of Judah.**
- 3. The one group of Jews that are allegedly the DNA marker for Jews today, are not Jews at all, but part of a haplogroup or haplotype that we would call LEVITES, i.e. the tribe from Israel that had the priesthood responsibilities, the tribe of Levi.**
- 4. DNA Studies support the proposition that the Native American populations of North, Central and South America came from 1-4 migrations of people, which is consistent with the Book of Mormon study.**
- 5. DNA studies confirm that Ancient Native Americans are in fact the ancestors of the Present Native Americans of North, Central and South America.**
- 6. DNA evidence does not discredit traditional LDS beliefs.**

#1: There is no such thing as a JEWISH DNA.

Jewish DNA researcher Dr. Ken Jacobs states: "The only Jewish subgroup that does show some homogeneity--descendants of the Cohanim, or priestly class--makes up only about 2 percent of the Jewish population. Even within the Cohanim, and certainly within the rest of the Jewish people, there's a vast amount of genetic variation."(1) The Cohan group is the Levite Priest group that developed post Lehi amongst those

living in Jerusalem and are now the measure of what a modern day Jew is said to be. They are not from the tribe of Judah as it existed in 600 B.C. (at Lehi's departure from the Jerusalem area).

Dr. David G. Stewart states: "Mitochondrial DNA studies have had little success in linking different Jewish groups, leading geneticists to discount mtDNA as being notoriously unreliable in ascertaining "Jewish" roots." (2)

He goes on to summarize the findings that conclude that there is no Jewish DNA as follows:

Nicholas Wade wrote: "A new study now shows that the women in nine Jewish communities from Georgia... to Morocco have vastly different genetic histories from the men.... The women's identities, however, are a mystery, because...their genetic signatures are not related to one another or to those of present-day Middle Eastern populations." (3)

Dr. Mark Thomas and colleagues reported: "In no case is there clear evidence of unbroken genetic continuity from early dispersal events to the present....Unfortunately, in many cases, it is not possible to infer the geographic origin of the founding mtDNAs within the different Jewish groups with any confidence."(4)

Dr. Shaye Cohen of Harvard University observed, "The authors are correct in saying the historical origins of most Jewish communities are unknown."(5) Even close mtDNA homologies would not necessarily prove an Israelite origin, but the conspicuous absence of such homologies provides strong circumstantial evidence of non-Israelite origins for the mtDNA and much of the other genetic makeup of most modern Jews. With no evidence that modern Jewish mtDNA constitutes a valid control of the genetics of ancient Israel--and considerable evidence to the contrary--claims of Israelite lineage cannot be either confirmed or denied based on mtDNA data.(6)

#2: Lehi, Ismael, Zoram, and the Jaredites and their descendants, were not from the Tribe of Judah or Jews.

Let us look at each of the major family lines in the Book of Mormon.

- a. **Lehi, Nephi, and Laman** descended from the 600 B.C. tribe of Manasseh, son of Joseph and Asenath, and were not Jews.

“And Aminadi was a descendant of Nephi, who was the son of Lehi, who came out of Jerusalem, who was a descendant of Manasseh, who was the son of Joseph who was sold into Egypt by the hands of his brethren.” (Alma 10:3)(7)

- b. **Ishmael** and his sons and daughters descended from the 600 B.C. tribe of Ephraim, son of Joseph and Asenath, and were not Jews. (See Book of Mormon topical guide)(8)

“It was Ephraim’s jealousy of Judah that in great measure brought about the separation of the two kingdoms (in 975 BC, or 375 years before Lehi left from the Jerusalem region), and that Rehoboam in vain tried to satisfy by going to Shechem to be crowned.” (Bible Dict. Page 666)(9) Thus the Jews and the Ephraimites separated. They largely did not intermarry not have anything to do with each other between 975 B.C. and 600 B.C. when Lehi left. Ephraim was given the birthright in Israel. The tribe of Judah did not like this. They have fought since that time. The Book of Mormon and the Prophet Isaiah state that they will reconcile in the last days.(10)

Asenath, the wife of Joseph, sold into Egypt, and the mother of the tribes of Ephraim and Manasseh, was Egyptian, the daughter of the chief priest of On or of Heliopolis. (Gen 46:20)(11) Dr. David G. Stewart states: “While her (Asenath) genealogy is unknown, there is no reason to believe that her mitochondrial lineage or that of her descendants, including the Lehtes, would have matched that of the tribe of Judah.” (12) Egyptian and ancient cultures expert, Hugh Nibley says that said chief priest, being an Egyptian, was a descendant of Ham and Egyptus. (13) If true, another, very distinct lineage, is added to the DNA mix of the Book of Mormon groups. In either event, the lineage of this group is definitely NOT JEWISH.

- c. **Zoram’s** lineage is not specifically stated, but it was not Jewish.

We know that Zoram was a servant of Laban: “...behold, I saw the servant of Laban, who had the keys of the treasury.” (14) In the culture of the Israelites, it was the law that no Israelite could be the servant of another Israelite. This means that Zoram was from some other tribe or lineage outside the 12 tribes of Israel. His posterity was mixed with the

lineage of Ephraim, through his wife, and his posterity became very numerous.⁽¹⁵⁾

- d. **The Jaredites** were not from any of the tribes of Israel and were Not Jewish as they predated the 12 Tribes of Israel.

The Jaredites came to the New World in the days of Peleg, which was after the time of the flood and before the birth of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and long before the Jews as a people, the Levites as a priest class, and the tribes of Joseph.⁽¹⁶⁾ They, the Jaredites, were the mother culture of the Americas. Although the history of the kings of the Jaredites shows a battle to the death of the leaders, the Jaredites as a people were scattered all over the face of the land and were present at the arrival of the people of Lehi. ⁽¹⁷⁾ This is evident as Nephi numbers the people that went with him to the land of Lehi-Nephi. After listing all the people we know to be his kindred, he adds: "and also my sisters, and all those who would go with me." "And all those who would go with me were those who believed in the warnings and the revelations of God; wherefore, they did hearken unto my words." ⁽¹⁸⁾ 2 Nephi 5:6 And again in 2 Nephi 5:9: "And all those who were with me did take upon them to call themselves the people of Nephi." ⁽¹⁹⁾ A good discussion of this point is found in Fair Digest and/or Fairwiki.

Later in this early history, large numbers of people are at war (2 Nephi 5:34), or are killed or are deciding whether it is righteous to have multiple wives. ⁽²⁰⁾ From the numbers obviously involved, additional people had joined the ranks of the immediate family of Nephi. These are the peoples that inhabited the land at the time of the arrival of Nephi, who no longer called themselves Jaredites, but nevertheless were from an earlier culture.

- e. **Mulek** the infant son of King Zedekiah was a Jew.⁽²¹⁾

Mulek was brought to the New World. We do not know who brought him. However, any servants that may have brought him could not have been Jews for the reasons previously stated concerning Zoram.

The group sailing and travelling on the waters at this time in history were the Phoenicians. They are thought to have been the ones bringing the baby and possibly his servants to the New World by most scholars

considering this issue. "The Phoenicians were a Semitic race, their language closely resembling Hebrew." (22) However they were never Israelites and not Jews.

Zarahemla was a descendant of Mulek and whoever was the wife of Mulek, whose heritage is unknown, mated to produce another lineage, which was possibly partly representative of the tribe of Judah as it existed in 600 B.C., and whose sample DNA is not available to us presently. It is probable that this combination is the only blood or DNA introduced into the New World that had a Jewish DNA marker (Tribe of Judah).

e. **Phoenicians** and other sailors were not Jews.

There is a large possibility of other groups coming to the New World whether by the Alaskan land bridge or by sea. (23) These groups, from whatever origin make up a part of the New World DNA.

The obvious conclusion of this section is that only Mulek, from all of the people and/or groups purported to have come to the New World in the Book of Mormon, is positively of the lineage of Judah as Judah existed in 585 B.C.

#3: The one group of Jews that are allegedly the DNA marker for Jews today, are not Jews at all, but part of a haplogroup or haplotype that we would call LEVITES, i.e. the tribe from Israel that had the priesthood responsibilities, the tribe of Levi.

Again from Dr. David G. Stewart concerning this Levite group: "The presence of mtDNA types in Native Americans that do not match those found in modern Jewish groups is fully consistent with both Book of Mormon and Bible accounts." (24) How so would we ask? Dr. Stewart explains:

The "Cohen Modal Haplotype," or CMH, is a genetic signature postulated to be inherited from Aaron Ha-Cohen, brother of Moses. This marker is believed to have originated approximately 3000 years ago, a suitable timeframe for a presumptive origin with the biblical Aaron. The CMH is present in approximately 45-55% of Ashkenazic and Sephardic Cohens, compared to 2-3% of non-Cohen Jews. It is

also found in the Buba clan of the Lemba tribe of Zimbabwe, the Bnei Menashe of India, and in several non-Jewish populations, including Armenians, Kurds, Hungarians, & central and southern Italians.” (25)

So understand to this point that there are two type of supposed “Jews,” the “Cohen Jews,” and the “non-Cohen Jews.” The haplogroup of the Cohen group is still only 55% present, but these are NOT Jews but Levites, the tribe of the priesthood. They did not intermarry as much and remained 55% purer. The non-Cohen Jews, which are the real Jewish DNA, are only 2% consistent in past and present populations. This goes back to the first point, i.e. there is no such thing as a Jewish DNA.

Dr. Stewart goes on to show that: “We would not expect that small groups that left Israel without Cohens would carry the “Cohen modal haplotype.” (26) Speaking of Lehi, Mulek, Ishmael and Zoram (and by default the Jaredites) “there is no textual evidence that Cohen priests were present among these groups. Had Cohens been present, it seems unlikely that Lehi and other non-Cohens could have officiated in ordinances like sacrifice that were confined to Levite Priests by the Mosaic Law. Cohens were specifically forbidden to intermarry with other Israelites, accounting for the high prevalence of the CMH in today's Jewish Cohens and its presence in only 2-3% of non-Cohen Jews even after an additional twenty-six centuries of intermixing. The presence of the CMH among diaspora Jewish groups with Cohens including the Lemba and Bnei Menashe, and its absence among Native Americans, is an expected finding fully consistent with the Book of Mormon story.” (27)

#4: The DNA haplogroups A, B, C and D, found in North, Central and South America are said to be similar to the DNA haplogroups of Siberia and Mongolia, which is not contrary to the claims of the Book of Mormon.

The major Anti Book of Mormon claim of Ex-Mormons Murphy, Southerton and others is that the DNA of the native peoples of North, Central and South America closely align with those peoples of ancient Siberia and Mongolia. Dr. Stewart summarizes the data gathered to date: “Over 98% of Native Americans tested to date carry mitochondrial DNA haplogroups A, B, C, or D. Outside of the Americas, these haplogroups are most commonly found in Mongolians and south Siberians, and are rarely

found in modern Jews. Another 1% carry haplogroup X, which is found in south Siberian, European, and Near Eastern populations.” (28) Some Mormon thinkers try to find Native Americans that fit in the haplogroup X in an attempt to show that there is a connection with “near eastern” populations. They are missing the point and misreading the date.

We will fast forward to Dr. Stewart’s conclusion on this subject:

While some claim that the DNA similarities between Native Americans, Mongolians, and Siberians discredit LDS teachings, I find just the opposite: the consistency between genetic data, history, scripture, and modern patriarchal blessings is remarkable. Current **DNA studies provide no evidence that the haplogroups shared between these groups were found in Mongolia or Siberia before the dispersion of Israel.** Existing data also suggest that the prevalence of these haplogroups may have increased significantly over time among East Asian populations. Virtually nothing is known about the genetics of ancient Israel. The prophet Jeremiah, a contemporary of Lehi, declared that the "ten tribes" were dispersed to the "lands of the North" (Jeremiah 3:18, 16:15, 23: 8, 31:8)--a designation for which few lands seem as appropriate as the vast steppes of Siberia and Mongolia. (29)

The 10 tribes, of which Ephraim and Manasseh (Joseph) were a part, were dispersed to the lands North of Israel or Jerusalem, i.e. Mongolia and Siberia. The DNA of A, B, C, D and X of the Native Americans comes from exactly where it should come from, the dispersed remains of the 10 Tribes of Israel. The more fleshed out conclusion to date is stated as follows:

Very little is known of the peoples inhabiting Mongolia before 200 BC--over five centuries after the dispersion of the "lost tribes." Ethnohistory provides abundant evidence of large people-groups of almost entirely unknown origins who settled in Mongolia and south Siberia, which were active areas for mass migration from across central Asia. As a nomadic people traveling over vast areas but leaving few permanent settlements, the ancient ancestors of the Mongolians are particularly difficult to trace. The nomadic character of the equestrian Mongols, whose predecessors ruled an empire from Eastern Europe to the Pacific, the absence of any real natural barriers across thousands of miles of territory that comprise the largest plain in the world, and the history of hundreds of migrations of people-groups, would lead the objective scholar to question the genetic basis for Murphy's assumption that those living in Mongolia and southern Siberia today harbor essentially the same gene pool as that present thousands or even tens of thousands of years ago. (Dr. Stewart) (30)



Another Explanation for this same Haplogroup DNA comes from the possible Jaredite beginnings: For those that have viewed the artifacts of the Olmec grave crypts, there is much evidence that faces of the Olmec are the faces of the peoples of the Tartary, i.e. the steppes of Mongolia, Siberia and the islands of the sea. In



1568, Catholic Priest Fernando de Alva Ixtlilxochitl wrote that the first settlers “came from the great Tartary, and was (were) part of those who came from the division of Babel.” (31) Let me share with you a few of the faces prevalent either from the Olmec graves and/or the Olmec culture. The suggestion here is that these faces may represent a look at some of the same faces of this “Mother Culture” of the peoples of the Americas:



These are just three of the many similar artifacts of the Olmecs. It is not unreasonable to conclude that in matters of the burial of the death, one places objects of worth to the individual, that bear some visual connection to the subjects thus buried. If that is true, then the multitude of like objects found in places like the Museum of Anthropology in Xalapa Mexico, dating to the time of the Olmec native population, i.e. from



approximately 2300 B.C. to 300 B.C. may tell us something about the look of these early peoples.

This is just one of the many similar Olmec heads found in the Museum of Anthropology in Xalapa Mexico. Notice the features of this man. These

features are consistent with many of the other heads found in this primarily Olmec area. The faces found in the the grave sites and the basalt faces of the Olmec leaders may support the writings of Father Alva to the point that the Olmecs, or our Jaredites, came across Mongolia and China, made a water crossing over the Pacific and landed in Mesoamerica. From there, their eventual homeland became in the land North, or by the Gulf of Mexico. Whether the Jaredites did in fact have these faces, or whether the Jaredites brought with them people that had these faces, is unknown. However, it is most likely that these faces were the faces of the mother civilization, the Olmecs and/or possibly our Jaredites. Then, in fact, the suggestion that the A, B, C, D and X haplogroups found in the North, Central and South American Native populations would be compatible with the narrative of the Book of Mormon and add a whole additional level and explanation.

Thus the predominance of A, B, C, D and X haplogroups in Native Americans may have one or both of the above explanations, i.e. 1) the dispersion of the 10 tribes and/or the migration of the Jaredites.

#5. DNA Studies support the proposition that the Native American populations of North, Central and South America came from 1-4 migrations of people, which is consistent with the Book of Mormon study.

From a recent article by Dr. David G. Stewart we find the following results of recent studies:

The mtDNA research of Dr. D. Andrew Merriwether suggests that the mitochondrial genetics of Native Americans could be explained by a single migration,⁽³²⁾ while others believe that there may have been two to four migrations of closely related people-groups.

One writer notes: "Most Indians of North America, and all Indians of Central and South America seem to be descended from this first wave of migrants...Similarities in Amerindian languages, as well as in DNA, point to the conclusion that a very small group of migrants gave rise to this enormous, far flung assemblage of peoples in a relatively short time." (33)

He concludes: "Genetic evidence of one or a few closely- related founding groups serving as the ancestors of the overwhelming majority of Native Americans is fully consistent with traditional LDS views of Native American origin from the Lamanites, Nephites, and Mulekites." (34)

As a subservient point to consider, the peopling of the Americas long held position, i.e. that of the Bering Land Bridge theory, is now being widely discounted. Dr. Stewart states:

Most individuals would be surprised to learn how few data points current consensus theories for the peopling of the Americas such as the Bering Land Bridge Theory are based upon, and how many scholars in the field hold widely different views. Recent archaeological finds in South America that appear to be older than those in North America have led some scholars to champion the **Pacific Colonization Theory**, while others note that the data are too sparse to settle the debate. (35)

#4: DNA studies confirm that Ancient Native Americans are in fact the ancestors of the Present Native Americans of North, Central and South America.

This is a critical fact to Book of Mormon believers. This is not the case in most traditional populations of Europe, the Middle East, Asia and

Africa and supports the claims of the book. Dr. Stewart states: "The only compelling genetic validation that the ancient inhabitants of an area are the ancestors or close relatives of modern peoples can come from comparisons of ancient and modern DNA. DNA studies have demonstrated that the early inhabitants of the New World appear to have had all of the main mtDNA haplogroups (A, B, C, and D) found in modern Native Americans, supporting the belief that ancient Native Americans are in fact the ancestors of the present ones." (36)

Thus, wherever these groups came from, at least it can be said that they have remained in tact in these major haplogroups from over a very long period of time, i.e. 3,000+ years.

In Contract to this, look at a study of the people of Iceland reported by Dr. Stewart:

Dr. John Butler has pointed out an Icelandic study that found that mtDNA and Y-chromosome haplotypes of many known ancestors were **not detectable** in modern populations just over a century later. The study traced the genealogy of over 131,000 modern Icelanders back to ancestors born between 1848 and 1892 and between 1742 and 1798.⁽³⁷⁾ The authors wrote that "86.2% of Icelandic males descend from just 26% of potential male ancestors born between 1848 and 1892. Women demonstrate even more dramatic trends due to the shorter female intergenerational time: 91.7% of modern females descend from only 22% of potential female ancestors born between the same years.

This study documents that dramatic shifts in haplotype prevalence can occur and that genetic evidence for many known ancestors is entirely lost in an advanced, peaceful, relatively isolated society over the course of little more than a century. It also cautions against drawing sweeping ethnohistoric conclusions about haplotypes present in many different groups based exclusively upon their prevalence in modern populations. One can appreciate the lack of any scientific basis for critics' demands that groups facing frequent episodes of war, persecution, famine, and disease, while experiencing ongoing intermarriage with other groups, should maintain strong haplotype commonalities over 2600 years of separation.

As so apply stated concerning the Native Americans:

"Approximatley ninety per cent of the Amerindian population died out following contact with the Europeans; most of this was due to infectious disease against which they had no defense."⁽³⁸⁾

“Since different genes likely provide different resistances to infectious disease, it may be that eliminating 90% of the pre-contact gene pool has significantly distorted the true genetic picture of Lehi's descendants. “ (39)

Conclusion

There is no such thing as a Jewish DNA. Understanding that point, eliminates the need to be concerned about whether the descendants of the Americas match up to a Jewish model. Even if there was a Jewish DNA, Lehi, Ismael, Zoram, and the Jaredites and their descendants, were not Jews or from the lineage of Judah. Only the child Mulek claims to have a Jewish lineage and the small X haplogroup found in the Americas may come from that ancestor.

The one group of Jews that are allegedly the DNA marker for Jews today, are not Jews at all, but part of a haplotype that we would call LEVITES, i.e. the tribe from Israel that had the priesthood responsibilities; the tribe of Levi. Even among this group, there is a very low percentage of DNA consistency.

On the plus side, DNA Studies support the proposition that the Native American populations of North, Central and South America came from 1-4 migrations of people, which is totally consistent with the position of the LDS people and the reported history of the Book of Mormon.

Additionally, DNA studies confirm that Ancient Native Americans are in fact the ancestors of the Present Native Americans of North, Central and South America. This means that this is one group of people that stayed somewhat DNA pure over a very long period of time.

Finally, the ultimate conclusion at this point is that DNA evidence does not discredit traditional LDS beliefs.

References:

This article is written almost totally from the article by David G. Stewart, Jr., entitled "DNA and the Book of Mormon," *FARMS Review* 18/1 (2006): 109–138. Please refer to the article for a much more complete and well written explanation of the DNA issues. This piece by Douglas Earl is merely an attempt to make the various points of this article and other authors more understandable for those who are superficially interested in this question. See also other David G. Stewart Jr. articles on this subject found at the Fair Digest web site or a Fair Wiki.

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- [20.](#) 2 Nephi 5:34 and concerning multiple wives just 46 years after leaving Jerusalem see Jacob 1:15
- [21.](#) Book of Mormon Topical Guide page 235. See Helaman 6:10 & Helaman 8:2
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