

SOMETHING TO CHEW ON

Every individual has a unique genetic makeup, but families, tribes and races may also be distinguished by specific genetic traits. The best known markers are the blood groups which, as well as varying from person to person, tend to follow different patterns in different ethnic populations.

A recent report in the scientific magazine *Nature* claims to have discovered a genetic marker which identifies Jewish priests - the *cohanim* - and distinguishes them from other Jews. A particular gene on the male Y chromosome was found to be far less common in Jews bearing the name Cohen (or variants such as Kohen, Kahn or Kahane) than in a random sample of other Jews.

Though Jews have for the most part lost their tribal identities, the notion of priest (Hebrew, *cohen*) has been passed down through the centuries to the present day, often (though not invariably) preserved in their distinctive surnames. Geneticists reasoned that if priests had preserved their lineage, even imperfectly, from the time of Aaron, then their distinctiveness might be revealed particularly in the Y chromosome, which (like priesthood) is passed from father to son.

Included in those examined were both Ashkenazi and Sephardic Jews: the pattern was the same for each, proving that the distinctive trait predated the separation of these two branches 1,000 years ago. The leader of the research team, from the Technion in Israel, commented: "The findings confirm the Biblical and religious tradition that the Jewish priesthood originated in a common male ancestor, presumably Aaron, and has been authentically preserved, despite the wide geographic and cultural dispersion of the Jews". There are estimated to be about 350,000 Cohens in the world. A Cohen is still required, at least in orthodox Judaism, for the performance of certain blessings and rituals - though in Reform Judaism their place has been taken by rabbis, who may be from any tribe.

Sadly, the research may fuel controversy and debate in Jewry. Some may now require the *cohanim* to be tested; others may want to go further and look for genetic traits to distinguish Jews in general - with implications for the age-old question of 'Who is a Jew?' For us, "He is not a Jew, which is one outwardly..." (Romans 2:28).

This also has interesting implications in relation to the prophesied temple yet to be established again in Jerusalem. For the Jews to once again be offering the daily sacrifice; there is need for a priesthood to be re-established. The prophet Joel and Jesus' Olivet prophecy foretell a time in which the daily sacrifice will be taken away by the invader. So, the recent discoveries on how to distinguish the priestly qualification, so important under Jewish law, is timely in our age as another pointer to Biblical endtime prophecy fulfillment.

As Christians with Jesus as our High Priest and no need for animal sacrifices and a return to the levitical priesthood, it is still amazing that God has preserved the priestly gene and allowed it to be identified; so that his word can be fulfilled in Israel. Look for a time soon when events in the middle East will bring about the establishment of a Jewish temple in Jerusalem, safe borders for Israel and the daily sacrifice offered again. This will no doubt be a time of jubilation and triumph in Israel, but sadly shortlived; as the prophetic scriptures also tell us that Israel will be invaded, the temple desecrated, the Jews taken

into captivity; and a time of tribulation for the world such as never was or ever shall be, under the reign of the man of sin.

However, God will 'let ' for only so long and these events will also herald the nearness of the coming of the world's saviour Jesus within a few years.

" Pain is inevitable, but misery is optional"

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