

Who do you think you are?

You may watch the BBC programme – or even have traced your own ancestry. We can all claim to have Abraham as a ‘Great-many-times-Grandad’ – whose descendants were ‘as many as the stars’. A relative sent me a science article, which threw some light on my ancestry. It suggests I have Neanderthal ancestors! (It’s good to know your heritage!)

Viking disease, or Dupuytren’s contracture, is common in Euro-Asian communities, but rarely seen in Africa. It affects millions of people in the UK, such as Margaret Thatcher, actor Bill Nighy and a MU chaplain or two. It causes the fingers to bend towards the palm so they can no longer straighten, becoming more pronounced with age.

Genetic studies show that people with this condition have inherited some pieces of DNA from a distant Neanderthal ancestor. Neanderthals lived in Europe and western Asia until 40,000 years ago when they were replaced by another type of human – us! Homo sapiens came from Africa – and when they migrated into Europe and Asia they apparently bred with some Neanderthals before they became extinct. Hence the genetic fragments in our Euro-Asian populations.

Other studies reveal a Neanderthal gene variant that protects against the risk of miscarriage, also one that increases the risk of dying from Covid.

So – be careful who you marry – the consequences could have far-reaching effects on your descendants! I wonder if Abraham had Dupuytren’s contracture?

Be cautious about researching your ancestry – it may be less appealing than you’d like. If things get tough, you can try blaming it on your Neanderthal roots.

And if you wonder who God thinks you are, Isaiah 43.4 has the answer:

‘You are honoured and precious in my sight and I love you.’

