

Christian Problems With the Two Houses of Israel

by J.K. McKee posted 15 August, 2003 www.tnnonline.net

We are indeed living in exciting times as the Two Houses of Israel, Judah and Ephraim, and those from all the nations, enjoin themselves to one another and are made one people of Israel in Messiah Yeshua. As many of you already are aware, many Jewish people are coming to saving faith in Yeshua, and many non-Jewish people, mostly in mainstream Christianity, are coming to a knowledge of their Hebraic Roots and are recognizing themselves as a part of Israel. While these are indeed exciting things, there is a substantial amount of controversy.

The Messianic Jewish movement has its problems with the Two-House teaching largely because it is unwilling to share the title of Israel with non-Jews. Many of us who have been in Messianic Judaism know about the inequality between Jew and non-Jew in Messianic Judaism, and this led us to embrace some form of the Two-House understanding. But many others today who have come to believe this have never been in Messianic Judaism. They are coming directly into this, and as such are experiencing criticism from those of mainstream Christianity, not quite knowing what to do.

The fact that mainstream Christianity, and not just those of Messianic Judaism, has its own problems with the Two-House teaching, is something that must be taken very seriously. It must be taken seriously because in the long run, mainstream Christianity, and not Messianic Judaism, will prove to be the primary critic of the restoration of all Israel—simply because it has bigger numbers and is more established.

So, what are the specific Christian problems with the Two-House teaching?

What does the Two-House teaching advocate?

Regardless of the fact that there are many people who teach, in some form or another, a belief in the Two Houses of Israel, there are constants that we should all agree upon that will make us separate from mainstream Christianity. Understanding this is imperative so we can properly handle Christian criticism:

1. The Two-House teaching advocates that God has only one group of elect, the people of Israel.

This runs contrary to the widespread dispensational belief that God has two groups of elect: Israel and the Church. We believe that the Lord has only one group of chosen ones, the people of Israel, composed of the House of Judah, the scattered House of Israel/Ephraim, and all those from the nations who would join.

2. The Two-House teaching advocates that there are more physical Israelites on Planet Earth than today's 14-15 million Jewish people.

Christianity fails to accept the belief that the physical descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob are more than today's Jewish people. While many Christians support the State of Israel and the Jewish people, their support ends at support. If it were proven that many of today's non-Jewish Believers were physical descendants of the Patriarchs, or just connected to Israel in some greater way, then these non-Jewish Believers might actually start living as such.

3. The Two-House teaching advocates that all of Israel should live as Israel.

This is the crux of where our major problems rest. When one sees himself as a part of Israel, he should want to live as Israel. This means following the commandments of God as laid out in His Torah, including: observing the seventh-day Sabbath or *Shabbat*, celebrating the appointed times of Leviticus 23, and eating kosher. This runs contrary to today's mainstream Christian theology, which largely teaches that the Law of Moses was abolished by the Messiah. It also affects our view of the end-times.

What are Christians saying about the Two-House Teaching?

Because the Two-House movement is only now making significant inroads into mainstream Christianity, as many Believers are seeing themselves as a part of Israel and are desiring

to live as Israel, there is not a substantial amount of *specific* Christian criticism of the belief that Judah and Ephraim are to be reunited in the end-times, as opposed to the criticism that presently exists from Messianic Judaism. This is due to change given time and as more and more people see the unfortunate apostasy that is growing in today's Church and leave. There is, however, some criticism of the Two-House teaching of Judah and Ephraim that our ministry has been able to find from a Christian perspective.

Rich Robinson of Jews for Jesus, an organization that many of you know is not Messianic (but instead targets Jewish people for conversion to standard Christianity), says, quite truthfully of us, "The movement strongly distances itself from replacement theology, from the traditional dispensationalist separation of Israel and the Church, and from British-Israelism."¹ He also states, surprisingly, "In Christology and soteriology, the Two-House Theory is apparently evangelical,"² meaning that we believe that Yeshua the Messiah is Divine and in salvation by grace through faith. However, Robinson's two primary problems with the Two-House movement are, as he states, "It is in the area of ecclesiology and 'Israelology,' that the hallmark theology of the movement occurs...In terms of practical lifestyle, the movement seems to insist on law-observance."³

Perry Trotter, an evangelical Christian from New Zealand, writes in his article "A Brief Assessment of Two House Theology" that one of our "significant foundational errors" is the "denial of the distinctiveness of the ekklesia."⁴ He also states that "Two House Theology denies and displaces the ekklesia," and that "The church is truly a *new* entity."⁵ In response to the Apostle Paul's words in Ephesians 2:11-12 that non-Jewish Believers were "excluded from the commonwealth of Israel," indeed indicating that they are now a part of Israel, Trotter says, "What he does *not* say is that Gentile believers have now become part of Israel."⁶ Concluding his remarks about the Two-House teaching, Trotter states, "Other areas of concern include claims of obedience to Mosaic law."⁷

The last article, which circulated around the Internet in 2003 and caused quite a stir, is "Doctrines of Demons," produced by the charismatic Christian organization Morning Star Ministries. It should be noted that most of this article used broad-brush tactics to attack all Messianics as "heretics," both in Messianic Judaism and those of the Two-House movement. Nevertheless, it did have some things to say about the Two-House restoration and those who believe they may be a part of returning Israel. It says, "One of the offshoots of these aberrant teachings is the attempt to Judaize {nationality withheld} by making [people] think that they are members of the lost tribes of Israel. Compelling believers to return to the Law was referred to by the New Testament apostles as bringing them again under the yoke of slavery."⁸

As we review these Christian problems with the Two-House teaching, and there should be no doubt in our minds that more attacks *will be coming*, several common threads run throughout:

1. Christians have problems with Two-House ecclesiology.
2. Christians have problems with following the Torah.

A Proper Ecclesiology

Ecclesiology is the study of God's elect, and our Christian critics are absolutely correct in stating that Two-House ecclesiology is contrary to the widespread dispensational belief that the

¹ Rich Robinson (2001). *The Two-House (Messianic Israel) Theory that Ephraim is the Church. Jews for Jesus*. Retrieved 24 June, 2003, from <<http://www.jfjonline.org>>.

² Ibid.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Perry Trotter (2003). *A Brief Assessment of Two House Theology*, 07 January, 2003. *Christian Witness Ministries*. Retrieved 24 June, 2003, from <<http://www.christian-witness.org>>.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Rick Joyner, Robin McMillan, and Matt Peterson (2003). *Doctrines of Demons*, May 2003. *MorningStar Prophetic Bulletin*. Retrieved 24 June, 2003, from <<http://www.morningstarministries.org>>.

Lord has two groups of elect: Israel and the Church. It is said that we who believe in the restoration of all Israel denounce the existence of the Church. Confusion ensues because many in the Two-House community errantly teach that the scattered Northern Kingdom of Israel/Ephraim *is* the Church. In actuality the scattered seed of the Northern Kingdom is worldwide, with many in Christianity often referred to as the Church, but many others in Islam, Hindusim, Buddhism, etc. Only God knows where scattered Israel truly went, and it has to include *many people* in pagan religions.

Why is an accurate ecclesiology important? Because what you believe about God's elect affects your interpretation of Scripture. If you believe that the Lord has two groups of elect, and that you are part of a "Church" separate from Israel, then you are likely to believe that Scriptures relating to Israel do not readily concern you. But if you believe that you are a part of Israel, then Scriptures relating to Israel do concern you.

It has been accused of Two-House advocates that we deny the existence of what is often called the "New Testament Church." While it is true that we do not consider "the Church" to be a second group of elect—*especially since there is only one group of "unelect" or unsaved*—a review of the terms for "Church" is important so you understand who the "New Testament Church" really is.

Confusion ensues among many Believers concerning "the Church," because the Greek word *ekklēsia* (ἐκκλησία) has been largely mistranslated in our English Bibles. This word is better translated as "assembly" or "congregation," as it usually symbolizes the local body of Believers or the collective body of Believers. *LS* defines *ekklēsia* as "an assembly of the citizens regularly summoned, the legislative assembly" and "in N.T. the Church, either the body, or the place."⁹ In the Apostolic Scriptures *ekklēsia* is used as a term to define the Body of Messiah, and thus, by extension, is rendered as "church" in most English translations of the New Testament. *TDNT* remarks that "Since the NT uses a single term, translations should also try to do so, but this raises the question whether 'church' or 'congregation' is always suitable, especially in view of the OT use for Israel and the underlying Hebrew and Aramaic... 'Assembly,' then, is perhaps the best single term, particularly as it has both a congregate and an abstract sense, i.e., for the assembling as well as the assembly."¹⁰ This Christian commentary says that "assembly" would be the best, consistent translation for the word *ekklēsia*.

The Septuagint frequently translates the Hebrew word *qahal* (קהל), or assembly/congregation, as *ekklēsia*. *Qahal* is the Hebrew word for "assembly" or "congregation" used in the Tanach, which almost exclusively refers to Israel. *TWOT* tells us that "usually *qāhāl* is translated as *ekklēsia* in the LXX."¹¹ When the Apostolic writers used the Greek word *ekklēsia*, often rendered as "church" in our English Bibles, they did not see the *ekklēsia* as a separate assembly or group of people away from Israel. **They considered the *ekklēsia* to be Israel.**¹² It is not surprising by any means that one of the definitions given for the word *ekklēsia* does in fact include "Israel." *Thayer* states that "in the Sept. [*ekklēsia* is] often equiv. to קהל, the assembly of the Israelites."¹³ It is unfortunate that *ekklēsia* in most Bibles has been translated as "church," whereas it would be best rendered as either "assembly" or "congregation."¹⁴

⁹ H.G. Lidell and R. Scott, *An Intermediate Greek-English Lexicon* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994), 239.

¹⁰ K.L. Schmidt, "*ekklēsia*," in Geoffrey W. Bromiley, ed., *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, abrid. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1985), 397.

¹¹ Jack P. Lewis, "qāhāl," in R. Laird Harris, Gleason L. Archer, Jr., and Bruce K. Waltke, eds., *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, 2 vols. (Chicago: Moody Press, 1980), 2:790.

¹² Among many possible examples that could be given, James D.G. Dunn comments on Galatians 1:2, "Churches' might be better translated 'assemblies'... the assemblies so designated were continuous with 'the assembly of Israel' in the Jewish Scriptures" (*Black's New Testament Commentary: The Epistle to the Galatians* [Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1993], 30).

¹³ Joseph H. Thayer, *Thayer's Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2003), 196.

¹⁴ Two Christian translations that render *ekklēsia* as "assembly" include Young's Literal Translation and the Literal Translation of the Holy Bible by Jay P. Green.

How big a change would it be if we started viewing “Church” in our Bibles as “congregation” or “assembly”? The *ekklēsia* is the congregation or assembly that God has had ever since they were at the base of Mount Sinai. We should start properly seeing this assembly as the collective people of Israel of which all Believers are a part. We need to remedy a proper understanding of what *ekklēsia* is in our theology, as our Heavenly Father desires us to have a fully Biblical view of His Word and be more obedient to Him.

Considering the fact that a substantial amount of Christian theology is focused around the entity known as “the Church,” it would be logical to assume that there are prophecies in the Tanach or Old Testament concerning its existence. While there are prophecies such as Isaiah 53 speaking of Yeshua, the Suffering Servant, foretelling His atoning work for us, we should expect some similar treatment about the new body that God would (*supposedly*) later establish as salvation went out into the world. Sadly for those who believe that “the Church” has been established as a second group of elect, there are no such prophecies. On the contrary, all of the prophecies relating to the Messiah regard His coming to restore Israel and bringing Israel into its glory. Isaiah 49:5-6 is one such prophecy:

“And now says the LORD, who formed Me from the womb to be His Servant, to bring Jacob back to Him, so that Israel might be gathered to Him (For I am honored in the sight of the LORD, and My God is My strength), He says, ‘It is too small a thing that You should be My Servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob and to restore the preserved ones of Israel; I will also make You a light of the nations so that My salvation may reach to the end of the earth.’”

It is interesting that while there are no explicit prophecies in the Tanach speaking of the Messiah establishing a new assembly of elect, “the Church,” Yeshua’s own words scarcely speak of such a phenomenon, either. G.W. Bromiley notes the following in *ISBE*:

“In the teaching of Jesus Himself there is little mention of the Church. The only two references in the Gospels are both in Matthew (16:18: ‘On this rock I will build my church,’ and 18:17: ‘Tell it to the church’). In the second of these the reference might be to the Jewish synagogue, though the general context of Mt. 18 seems to suggest the emergent Christian community. Apart from the critical questions raised by some scholars, these verses give rise to many problems. For example, do they denote the intention of Jesus to found a Church?”¹⁵

Many Christians believe that Messiah Yeshua came to establish the Church as a second group of elect, and base it on His words in Matthew 16:18, which in most Bibles reads, “I also say to you that you are Peter, and upon this rock I will build My church; and the gates of Hades will not overpower it” (NASU). Roman Catholicism interprets these verses as meaning that with the Apostle Peter the Lord began an unending line of papal succession. Protestants, while validly recognizing that the Rock is not Peter, but is rather the Messiah, still consider these words as meaning that Yeshua established “the Church” as a second assembly of elect. But there are no prophecies that speak or allude to the establishment of a second assembly of elect by the Messiah. There are only those that speak of the restoration of Israel. When you look at the vocabulary of Matthew 16:18, it only confirms Yeshua’s mission to restore Israel.

In Jeremiah 33:6-8 our Heavenly Father promises, “Behold, I will bring to it health and healing, and I will heal them; and I will reveal to them an abundance of peace and truth. I will restore the fortunes of Judah and the fortunes of Israel and will rebuild them as they were at first. I will cleanse them from all their iniquity by which they have sinned against Me, and I will pardon all their iniquities by which they have sinned against Me and by which they have transgressed against Me.”

The critical promise here from the Lord regarding Israel is that He “will rebuild them as they were before” (NIV). The Hebrew verb rendered as “rebuild” in this passage is *banah* (בָּנָה), which in the Hebrew Scriptures can have several different applications, including: “to build,” “to

¹⁵ G.W. Bromiley, “Church,” in Geoffrey W. Bromiley, ed., et. al., *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, 4 vols. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988), 1:693.

rebuild,” “to work on a building,” or “to build a family” (*HALOT*).¹⁶ In the passage from Jeremiah “rebuild” is obviously the best translation. The Greek Septuagint reflects this, rendering *banah* as *oikodomeō* (οἰκοδομέω), which in the Apostolic Scriptures has a number of possible applications, including: “to construct a building, *build*,” “to construct in a transcendent sense,” “to help improve the ability to function in living responsibly and effectively, *strengthen, build up, make more able*” (*BDAG*).¹⁷ *Oikodomeō* is the Greek verb used in Matthew 16:18 speaking of Yeshua’s establishing of “the Church”:

“I also say to you that you are Peter, and upon this rock I will build [*oikodomeō*] My church; and the gates of Hades will not overpower it.”

When the Apostolic writers use the word *ekklēsia*, they are using it to refer to the *qahal* of Israel that existed in the wilderness. They never see *ekklēsia* as a term separate from the congregation of Israel, unless referring to a localized assembly of people.¹⁸ The word *ekklēsia* is used in Stephen’s apology in direct reference to the congregation of Israel at the base of Mount Sinai in Acts 7:38, which the KJV actually renders as “church”:

“This is he, that was in the church [*ekklēsia*] in the wilderness with the angel which spake to him in the mount Sina, and *with* our fathers: who received the lively oracles to give unto us.”

In the text from Matthew 16, we see that Yeshua the Messiah came to “rebuild” (*oikodomeō*) the assembly. This assembly is the congregation of Israel. Nowhere do the Apostolic writers envision a salvation for the nations that is separate from Israel. Yeshua the Messiah came to restore Israel and to bring Israel into its fullness. Sadly, in the centuries after the death of His Apostolic successors, anti-Semitism in the Roman Empire led to many interpretations of their writings that were independent of the Hebrew Scriptures. *Ekklēsia* as a term that referred to the *qahal* or congregation of Israel began being viewed as an independent “church,” with no Jewish origins.

Why Following the Torah is Important

The second problem that the Christian critics of the Two-House teaching have is that we believe and advocate that all Believers in Yeshua should follow the Torah. What is often implied with statements like “They advocate following the Mosaic law,” is that we encourage Torah observance *for salvation*. Supposedly, Christians believe that we ignore imperative Scriptures such as “For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, *it is* the gift of God; not as a result of works, so that no one may boast” (Ephesians 2:8-9). It is true that there are Messianic groups out there, some of which advocate the Two-House teaching, that would deny the reality of this verse. But our ministry clearly affirms that our works do not save us, and salvation is a free gift from God. In fact the Lord tells us in Isaiah 64:6, “For all of us have become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous deeds are like a filthy garment.” The correct context of this is understanding that all of our “righteous works” are like *menstruation garments*.¹⁹ I know that my works *do not and cannot save me from my sins*.

But why do we think that following the Torah is important?

Consider the fact that after Paul says that salvation is a free gift of God, he tells the non-Jewish Believers that God created them for good works (obedience to Him), *and* they were “at one time” separate from Israel:

“For we are His workmanship, created in Messiah Yeshua for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them. Therefore remember that formerly you, the Gentiles in the flesh, who are called ‘Uncircumcision’ by the so-called ‘Circumcision,’ *which* is performed in the flesh by human hands—*remember* that you were at that time separate from

¹⁶ Ludwig Koehler and Walter Baumgartner, eds., *The Hebrew & Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament*, 2 vols. (Leiden, the Netherlands: Brill, 2001), 1:139.

¹⁷ Frederick William Danker, ed., et. al., *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, third edition (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 696.

¹⁸ In Acts 19:32, 39, 40 *ekklēsia* is used to refer to the mob of people in Ephesus.

¹⁹ Heb. *beḡed idim* (בְּגֵד עֲדִימִים).

Messiah, excluded from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. But now in Messiah Yeshua you who formerly were far off have been brought near by the blood of Messiah" (Ephesians 2:10-13).

Christian critics of the Two-House teaching say that "brought near" does not equate to being made "part of" Israel. But notice that Paul first says that these people were "at that time separated from Christ, alienated from the commonwealth of Israel" (RSV). How can you be once separated or alienated from Israel *if you were not previously part of Israel*? What does it mean later when Paul says that the nations "are fellow heirs and fellow members of the body, and fellow partakers of the promise in Messiah Yeshua through the gospel" (Ephesians 3:6)?

Those of us who are non-Jewish and believe we are somehow a part of Israel take these words very seriously. Before our faith in the Messiah, we were separate from Israel, but now we have been brought back into the fold through faith in Him. We believe that if you are going to say you are Israel, you should live as Israel. This is really no different from Christians saying that those who profess to be Christians should live as Christians. The problem is that when you identify as being "Messianic," *correctly understood* to be one who believes himself to be a part of Israel and has faith in the Messiah—being Jewish or non-Jewish—*correctly living* as Israel requires obedience to God's Torah. This is not a required obedience out of salvation—because only saving faith in Yeshua saves us from sin—it is because the prophecies of the reunion tell us that all Israel will follow the Torah:

"I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will be careful to observe My ordinances" (Ezekiel 36:27).

"My servant David will be king over them, and they will all have one shepherd; and they will walk in My ordinances and keep My statutes and observe them" (Ezekiel 37:24).

Regardless of what a few liberal Two-House advocates might say, the Scriptures plainly tell us that when Israel is fully restored we will all be keeping God's commandments.

Our Heavenly Father says that if we follow the Torah, we will be a holy people:

"The LORD will establish you as a holy people to Himself, as He swore to you, if you keep the commandments of the LORD your God and walk in His ways" (Deuteronomy 28:9).

The call to be holy is something that has lost meaning in too much of modern Christianity. Many people know that something is missing in their faith and that there is more. Being Biblically sound means following Genesis to Revelation—*not* just Matthew to Revelation. Many Believers know this to be true and that there is something seriously off with Christianity today, especially given the state of our world and the sad perversions that exist in too much of the Church. Many will quote 1 Peter 1:14-16 saying that the Apostolic Scriptures call us to holiness, but they often cannot connect the Scriptural meaning of holiness:

"As obedient children, do not be conformed to the former lusts *which were yours* in your ignorance, but like the Holy One who called you, be holy yourselves also in all *your* behavior; because it is written, 'YOU SHALL BE HOLY, FOR I AM HOLY.'"

In this Scripture reference, the Apostle Peter quotes directly from Leviticus 11, where God says,

"For I am the LORD your God. Consecrate yourselves therefore, and be holy, for I am holy. And you shall not make yourselves unclean with any of the swarming things that swarm on the earth" (Leviticus 11:44).

How many Christians realize that part of being holy *or set-apart unto God* is eating appropriately? Peter quoted directly from the part of the Torah that deals with the dietary laws. It should not surprise us that aside from the Sabbath and the Biblical appointments, eating kosher is one of the areas that Christians who research the Messianic movement stumble over and oppose. But, it is one of the areas that our Heavenly Father wants us to follow, if we truly want to be holy. How serious are we? Sadly, only a few today are up to the challenge and willing to make the sacrifice.

Being holy or set-apart unto the Lord is not the only reason why we believe that following the Torah is important. The Apostle John writes in 1 John 3:4 that "sin is lawlessness" or "sin is

violation of *Torah*" (CJB). The Apostle Paul calls the antimessiah in 2 Thessalonians 2:3 "the man of lawlessness" or "the man who separates himself from *Torah*" (CJB). Most important are Yeshua's words in the Olivet Discourse, "Because lawlessness is increased, most people's love will grow cold" (Matthew 24:12).

Most often, Yeshua's words are translated as "because lawlessness is increased," but the Greek verb *plēthunō* (πληθύνω) fully means "be multiplied, grow, increase" (BDAG).²⁰ If we consider sin to be disobedience to God's *Torah*, as the Scriptures clearly indicate, then it is appropriate to understand that sin is increasing exponentially or *multiplying*, because it is being identified as such. Because the reunion of all Israel has begun, and because many Believers are now keeping the *Torah*, our Christian critics will find themselves in opposition because they do not want to change their lifestyles and keep the *Torah* themselves. Many may find themselves as being, sadly, propagators of lawlessness.

Knowing this, let us find ourselves as promoting a true gospel of repentance which identifies sin as disobedience to God's *Torah*, and when people confess their disobedience of His commandments. A true understanding of the *Torah* reveals that we do not follow it for salvation—but that the *Torah* shows us the need for salvation. We need the Messiah and His sacrifice covering our lives, because we are all guilty of disobeying the *Torah*. But once we have been redeemed, we do not dispense with foundational guidelines of Biblical Instruction. Rather, if we believe that Yeshua was sinless—meaning He *did not disobey the Torah*—then we should emulate Him and at least try to do the same through the power of the Holy Spirit.

Some Christians might tell us that following the *Torah* means that Two-House Messianics are "majoring in minors" or concerning themselves with minutiae that the Lord really does not care about. They will tell us that He just wants to make sure our hearts are right. But by disobeying God we demonstrate that our hearts are not right. It is one thing to be ignorant of the truth; it is another to know the truth and willfully reject it. Paul writes in Romans 5:13, "for until the Law sin was in the world, but sin is not imputed when there is no law."

Is God concerned about the minutiae? Yes, He is. Consider these words from Shimon Apisdorf, author of *Judaism in a Nutshell: Holidays*:

"God isn't some micromanaging, detail-obsessed control freak. He is the source of all existence, from the vast and awesome galaxies to the tiny fingernail on a newborn baby all the way down to the details like an *esrog* and not a lemon [for *Sukkot*], or a *sukkah* and not a tent. When God lays out the details of a *mitzva*, a commandment, He's just telling us how we need to relate if we want to achieve ultimate closeness—ultimate spirituality."²¹

This person, who is not a Believer in Messiah Yeshua, sees the significance of following the minutiae of Scripture—so why cannot much of Christianity? It is not as if keeping the *Torah* is a "salvation" issue; it is rather a "maturity" issue. Do we want ultimate closeness and spirituality with our Father? Obviously, many Christians who reject the *Torah* do not want that closeness (even though He ultimately knows the real reason). Yeshua says,

"Whoever then annuls one of the least of these commandments, and teaches others to do the same, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever keeps and teaches *them*, he shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven" (Matthew 5:19).

If you want to be great in the Kingdom of God, then follow and teach His *Torah*!

Following God's *Torah* is important because it is how the Lord expects us to be set-apart, and as all Israel is reunited, more of His people will be following it via the empowerment of the Holy Spirit. Furthermore, sin is defined as lawlessness or disobedience to the *Torah*. Christian critics of the Two-House teaching would do well to provide us with a viable alternative interpretation of what "lawlessness" is.

²⁰ BDAG, 826.

²¹ Shimon Apisdorf, *Judaism in a Nutshell: Holidays* (Pikesville, MD: Leviathan Press, 2001), pp 79-80.

Christianity's Problems with the Two-House Teaching in a Nutshell

As we have discussed, Christianity's basic problems with the Two-House teaching rest in ecclesiology and Torah observance. Our ecclesiology provides the first major alternative view to both replacement theology, advocating that the promises given to Israel now apply to "the Church," and to dispensationalism, which tells us that Israel and "the Church" are separate groups of chosen with separate purposes. The Two-House ecclesiology of Judah and Ephraim, one people of Israel, and all those of the nations who would join in, challenges the existence of the entity called "the Church" that often has no connection whatsoever to Israel. This frightens those of the establishment—*because it has major applications to one's theology*.

Why do Christians reject the message of Torah observance, when we have made it clear that following the commandments *does not bring salvation*, but rather is the way that our Heavenly Father wants us to live so we can be blessed? The simple answer to this question is that many Christians are comfortable in their traditions and they do not want to change their lifestyles. They do not want to be a part of Israel and they certainly do not want to live as Israel.

Some might say that they are to have the faith of a child, per Yeshua's words in Mark 10:15: "Truly I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a child will not enter it *at all*." While we are to be like children when coming to faith in Messiah, and not get caught up in complex theologies or soteriology, demonology, ecclesiology, eschatology, etc.—where does Yeshua tell us that once we are born again that we are to *stay as a child*? Are we not to be maturing in our faith?

In John 15:7, the Messiah tells us "If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you." What is intriguing about this verse is that the Greek verb *menō* (μένω) can also be translated as "continue."²² Are we not to be *continuing* in our faith? Are we not to be *growing and maturing*? Are we not to be ceding control of our lives over to the Lord by following what He has decreed for us?

These are some of the challenges that we face with Christianity in regard to the Two-House teaching. A substantial part of the Christian problems with this understanding will relate to Torah observance and their rejection of it. But before we continue stating on how we need to conduct ourselves with these people, we in the Messianic Two-House community should have a specific problem with Christians and *their handling of Israel*.

Why do Christians really support Israel?

In recent days there has been a renewed interest among evangelical Christians about Israel. Many well-known and prestigious Christian ministries and teachers are outspoken about support for the State of Israel and the Jewish people. But why is this the case? Is there any particular reason why Christians support Israel?

Most Christian support for Israel is based on the promise that God made to Abraham in Genesis 12:3: "And I will bless those who bless you, and the one who curses you I will curse. And in you all the families of the earth will be blessed." As a result, and because of the fact that the Jewish people have experienced terrible hardships over the centuries, many Christians today have a genuine interest to support the Jews and support the State of Israel. These are certainly good things. But is there another reason? Is Christian support for Israel based on a strong love for Israel and a desire on behalf of Christians to know more about their Hebraic Roots? You may be surprised to learn that this is not necessarily the case.

Consider the following quotation from the 06 October, 2002 issue of the New York Times, in an article called "Rapture and Rupture" by Maureen Dowd:

"Evangelicals fervently support Israel for theological reasons of their own, based on a literal reading of the Book of Revelation that entwines the Jewish commonwealth with the

²² Actually, *menō* has many possible renderings, as *TDNT* notes that "This word means a. 'to stay in a place,' figuratively 'to remain in a sphere,' b. 'to stand against opposition,' 'to hold out,' 'to stand fast,' c. 'to stay still,' and d. 'to remain,' 'to endure,' 'to stay in force'" (F. Hauck, "*ménō*," in *TDNT*, 581).

Apocalypse and the Second Coming.”²³ This article also says, “When the Rapture comes, they grieve, the holy alliance between Christians and Jews will suddenly become unholy, with Christians levitating and Jews left behind to deal with the Antichrist, plagues, sores, boils, frogs...and locusts from the ‘bottomless pit,’ each with a human face, horse’s body, scorpion’s tail and a sting that torments for five months.”²⁴

Similar sentiments are voiced by Israeli journalist and author Gershom Gorenberg in his book *The End of Days: Fundamentalism and the Struggle for the Temple Mount*. He comments, “the Christians will safely exit to the wings, while on stage, the Jews will find themselves at the center of the apocalypse.”²⁵ He also says, “On the Christian side are those who want to ‘bless’ Israel, and provide it with what they believe is the fuse for Armageddon.”²⁶

The real reason that many Christians support Israel is because Israel is a major player in the end-times. If they support Israel then they can be raptured out prior to the end-time Tribulation sooner. While it is certainly not the case with all Christians, it is definitely the case with many, especially among the evangelicals of America. These secular writers quoted from above see the truth; it is sad that many Messianics cannot. In my own opinion and experience, many Christians (but not necessarily all) who support Israel because of its role in the end-times, *although they are supposed to be “raptured out,”* do not support Israel because *they love Israel*, per se. ***They “support Israel” because they love themselves!***

Obviously, Yeshua the Messiah tells us in Matthew 24:29-31 that He returns to gather the saints to meet Him in the clouds *after* the Tribulation, **not** before. As all Israel is restored before Yeshua’s return, many non-Jewish Believers—possibly of scattered Israel/Ephraim—will need to stand with their Jewish brethren, especially those in the Land of Israel, but not so that anyone can be raptured “soon.” The Prophets speak of a greater exodus prior to Yeshua’s return which speaks of a repatriation of the scattered House of Israel/Ephraim to the Promised Land. This is what we should be in support of and looking toward:

“They will swoop down on the slopes of the Philistines on the west; together they will plunder the sons of the east; they will possess Edom and Moab, and the sons of Ammon will be subject to them” (Isaiah 11:14).

“In those days the house of Judah will walk with the house of Israel, and they will come together from the land of the north to the land that I gave your fathers as an inheritance” (Jeremiah 3:18).

“For behold, days are coming,” declares the LORD, “when I will restore the fortunes of My people Israel and Judah.” The LORD says, “I will also bring them back to the land that I gave to their forefathers and they shall possess it” (Jeremiah 30:3).

“Ephraim will be like a mighty man, and their heart will be glad as if *from* wine; indeed, their children will see *it* and be glad, their heart will rejoice in the LORD...I will bring them back from the land of Egypt and gather them from Assyria; and I will bring them into the land of Gilead and Lebanon until no *room* can be found for them” (Zechariah 10:7, 10).

How do we properly deal with Christians?

How do we of the Two-House Messianic community *properly deal* with Christians? This is an extremely difficult question to answer, because many non-Jewish Believers who have come out of the Church have been criticized, berated, and harassed by Christian family, friends, and colleagues. There is no easy answer to how we can deal with Christians, because many of them will not see the things that we see. Furthermore, it will be debated until the Kingdom comes

²³ Maureen Dowd (2002). *Rapture And Rupture*, 06 October, 2002. *New York Times*. Retrieved 25 June, 2003 from <<http://www.newyorktimes.com>>.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Gershom Gorenberg, *The End of Days: Fundamentalism and the Struggle for the Temple Mount* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 27.

²⁶ Ibid., 29.

whether or not the Messianic movement is a part of “Christianity,” but that question is probably best left to those in today’s Church, and not to us.

The best way we can deal with Christians is to remember the heart of the Torah: **love**. “You shall not take vengeance, nor bear any grudge against the sons of your people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself; I am the LORD” (Leviticus 19:18). Yeshua reemphasizes this in Mark 12:28-31:

“One of the scribes came and heard them arguing, and recognizing that He had answered them well, asked Him, ‘What commandment is the foremost of all?’ Yeshua answered, ‘The foremost is, “HEAR, O ISRAEL! THE LORD OUR GOD IS ONE LORD; AND YOU SHALL LOVE THE LORD YOUR GOD WITH ALL YOUR HEART, AND WITH ALL YOUR SOUL, AND WITH ALL YOUR MIND, AND WITH ALL YOUR STRENGTH.” The second is this, “YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF.” There is no other commandment greater than these.”

The commandment to love God and love our neighbor is the essence of the Torah. If we truly want to deal properly with Christians, then we have to **demonstrate this to them!** We have to let our Heavenly Father deal with those who have problems with us, remembering what our Lord Yeshua said about those who persecute us:

“Blessed are those who have been persecuted for the sake of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are you when *people* insult you and persecute you, and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of Me. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward in heaven is great; for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you” (Matthew 5:10-12).

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Unless otherwise noted, Scripture quotations are from the *New American Standard, Updated Edition* (NASU), © 1995, published by The Lockman Foundation.

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