

# Revisiting the Two-House Teaching

by J.K. McKee posted 01 March, 2006 www.tnnonline.net

For quite some time (since 2005), the Messianic community has been bombarded with an entire array of issues and teachings that have been anything but good. These things have challenged our understanding of who Messiah Yeshua is, the recorded history of the First Century, hermeneutics and how we are to understand the Bible, and indeed the very authority of the Scriptures themselves. Since this wave of “teachings” has hit, and the consequent damage that they have caused, many of us have had to reevaluate and reconsider some things that we have picked up in our days in the Messianic movement. With some issues, we have had to return to previous beliefs and practices, discarding things that were passing off as “true,” but we discovered were not. With other things, we have had to fine-tune our theology and make sure that it is in fuller alignment in Scripture—and eliminate any unsound elements that may have been allowed to creep in.

While this has been especially true of some fringe teachings and beliefs that may have infected our Messianic theology, one issue that has been on my mind for some time has been the Two-House teaching. I have always believed that we have to approach the subject of the Two Houses of Israel from the Bible and from the prophecies of Israel's end-time restoration. We cannot add to the message by making unsubstantiated claims about scattered Ephraim, nor can we separate the Jewish expectations of Israel's restoration from the message. We have to understand that the message of Israel's restoration is ultimately the message of God's Kingdom coming to Earth—and Israel just happens to be the vehicle that He is going to use to accomplish it. I fear that not enough people approach it from this point of view, and so when I talk about “the Two-House teaching,” and when someone else is talking about it—we may be emphasizing *two totally different things*.

There are some elements of the Two-House teaching that are common among adherents. All believe that Believers through faith in Messiah Yeshua are a part of the Commonwealth of Israel. All believe that there is a scattered House of Israel/Ephraim among the nations that is to be reunited with the House of Judah or the Jewish people. All believe that the restoration of the Kingdom to Israel is extremely important. But this is probably where it stops. These three things can all be proven from the Scriptures, but what cannot be proven from the Bible is where scattered Ephraim has gone. Likewise, what cannot be proven from the Bible is the ancestry of any human being. It is frequently assumed in the Two-House community that if one is a non-Jewish Believer and Messianic that he or she is of “Ephraim.” Is this truly the case—or are some presumptuous claims being made? Furthermore, as many non-Jewish Believers have asserted themselves as being “Ephraimites,” great divisions have taken place with our Jewish brethren in Messiah over issues regarding the Torah and Jewish tradition.

The time has come for us to revisit some elements of the Two-House teaching and understand the role they play as one component of our Messianic theology—but *not the only component*. As with all beliefs that have to be frequently fine-tuned, we will be examining some aspects of the Two-House teaching that are assumed to be true by many proponents and adherents of it, but Biblically and historically are overstated. While the basic message of all Israel being reunited and restored as a part of God's end-time plan is valid, we must have a clear understanding of what this is, and not be dragged into side issues that will deter this restoration.

## In what way are we “Israel”?

A major issue in theology today is determining what the purpose of the Messiah coming to Earth was, aside from being sacrificed for our sins at Golgotha (Calvary) and providing atonement. Many are of the mistaken impression that Yeshua came to inaugurate a new program via the establishment of “the Church,” when in actuality this is not attested to in any of His teachings or in the testimony of the Apostles. They all recognize that Yeshua the Messiah came to fulfill the prophecies concerning Israel's restoration (Jeremiah 33:6-8; cf. Matthew 16:18).<sup>1</sup> As part

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<sup>1</sup> For a further discussion of this issue, consult the editor's article “When Did ‘the Church’ Begin?”

of this restoration, the good news was to be spread to the whole world, and as a result help gather in scattered Israel and those of the nations who would join to the God of Israel. **The God of Israel has always had a global vision of saving all members of the human race who would join to Him.** While Israel is His chosen nation, it nevertheless functions as the vehicle for Him to communicate His truth to the entire world. When one recognizes the God of Israel as the One True God, that person then becomes a part of Israel.

The Apostle Paul recognized this global vision as he was commissioned to be the “apostle of the nations” (Romans 11:13, LITV). For his time in the First Century, Paul had the training of a Jewish rabbi and was a Roman citizen, so he could go out into foreign lands and testify to others about the God of Israel and His Son, Yeshua. Paul plainly writes non-Jewish Believers in the vicinity of Ephesus that prior to their salvation experience they were separate from the Commonwealth of Israel, implying that now they have been made one with their Jewish brethren in Israel’s blessings—and responsibilities:

“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 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... So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints, and are of God’s household, having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Messiah Yeshua Himself being the corner *stone*, in whom the whole building, being fitted together, is growing into a holy temple in the Lord, in whom you also are being built together into a dwelling of God in the Spirit” (Ephesians 2:11-13, 19-22).

The term *sumpolitēs* (συμπολίτης) means “*fellow-citizen/compatriot*” (BDAG).<sup>2</sup> Paul writes that non-Jewish Believers in the Messiah have been given “citizenship in Israel” (NIV). Many non-Jewish Believers who have entered into the Messianic community know this to be true, and believe themselves to be part of the polity of Israel and applicable to follow the Torah. They realize that the prophecies detailing Israel’s restoration somehow involve “them.” But how specifically they involve “them” has been a question generating a variety of answers.

What is important is that when we review the prophecies of Israel’s end-time restoration, a major theme of this restoration is the reunion of the House of Judah and the scattered House of Israel, or Ephraim.<sup>3</sup> Judah, of course, is today’s Jewish people who have been the principal torchbearers of Israel for millennia. Ephraim composes the scattered members of the Northern Kingdom of Israel that was spread out and corporately assimilated into the nations of Planet Earth. They were to become “the fullness of the nations” as prophesied by Jacob (Genesis 48:19), understood by Paul as involving “the fullness of the Gentiles” (Romans 11:25) coming to faith.

According to Biblical prophecy, the Lord is going to restore all Israel in the Last Days. God’s plan is that by restoring Israel the message of salvation may finally reach to the ends of the Earth. The challenge is with understanding who is to be reunited in the Last Days. **Do we leave this to the Lord to determine—or should we undertake it ourselves?** In what way are we “Israel”? How far do we take this? What are some of the issues that have arisen?

The theological phenomenon that has arisen in the Messianic community known as the “Two Houses of Israel” has grown steadily since the mid-to-late 1990s. Many non-Jewish Believers, who have been led to embrace their Hebraic Roots, consider themselves to be a part of Israel. This is not just on a spiritual level, but also on a physical level. They assert themselves to be “of Ephraim,” meaning of the scattered Northern Kingdom of Israel taken captive by Assyria in 722-721 B.C.E. Whether they truly are or not, only God knows. Suffice it to say, in many sectors this viewpoint is seen by Messianic Jews with some extreme skepticism, if not hostility. This may be

<sup>2</sup> 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), 959.

<sup>3</sup> Isaiah 11:12; Jeremiah 3:18; 30:3; 31:31; 33:7, 14; 50:4, 20; Ezekiel 37:15-28; Hosea 1:11; Zechariah 8:13; 9:13; Hebrews 8:8, et. al.

because some of those defining themselves as “Ephraim” often do not know what the Two Houses of Israel are really all about.

We have three distinct choices that we can make when we look at what is being advocated by those who teach some form of the Two-House message:

1. It is a message of racial identity that advocates that most, if not all, non-Jewish Believers are physical descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. This identity extends to specific nationalities.
2. It is a message of knowing that you are “special” to God because you are physical Israel. It matters only what you feel about being “Ephraim,” because our Father wants to welcome you home.
3. It is a message that advocates that as a born again Believer, be you Jewish or non-Jewish, you are a part of the Commonwealth of Israel. As a part of Israel, you will be participating in the end-time prophecies that relate to Israel. This includes the regathering, reunification, and restoration of all Israel, including the scattered Northern Kingdom.

Of the three choices presented, **only the third can be truly supported by Scripture.** The first one is not based on an objective theology and scholastic view of history. The second is based often on emotions and human feeling. Neither the first nor second have anything to say about what being a part of Israel is about. Only the third is presented theologically and objectively. It recognizes the promises that God gave to Israel to multiply it, but that is not primary to being a part of the greater community of Israel—and certainly not primary to personal salvation. It advocates that as a part of Israel a born again Believer participates in Israel’s restoration.

### **What do we know for sure about the descendants of the Patriarchs?**

Any examination of Israel begins with the Patriarch Abraham, and the promises that God made to him concerning his offspring. Abraham, the grandfather of Jacob, believed the promises that the Lord made to him concerning his seed, after he told Him that he had no heir but Eliezer. God said that he would have an heir from his own body, and that he would have great numbers of descendants. This was counted to him as righteousness:

“Abram said, ‘O Lord GOD, what will You give me, since I am childless, and the heir of my house is Eliezer of Damascus?’ And Abram said, ‘Since You have given no offspring to me, one born in my house is my heir.’ Then behold, the word of the LORD came to him, saying, ‘This man will not be your heir; but one who will come forth from your own body, he shall be your heir.’ And He took him outside and said, ‘Now look toward the heavens, and count the stars, if you are able to count them.’ And He said to him, ‘So shall your descendants be.’ Then he believed in the LORD; and He reckoned it to him as righteousness” (Genesis 15:2-6).

*Avram* (אַבְרָם) had his name changed by God to *Avraham* (אַבְרָהָם), meaning “*exalted father*” (BDB)<sup>4</sup> or “father of a multitude,” an affirmation of His promises to him:

“No longer shall your name be called Abram, but your name shall be Abraham; for I will make you the father of a multitude of nations. I will make you exceedingly fruitful, and I will make nations of you, and kings will come forth from you. I will establish My covenant between Me and you and your descendants after you throughout their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be God to you and to your descendants after you” (Genesis 17:5-7).

What we must note here is that Abraham was promised to be the father of a “multitude of nations” or “many nations” (NIV), *hamon goyim* (הַמְּנוּן גּוֹיִם). Likewise, the Lord told him that he would become “most exceedingly fruitful” (ATS). This covenant between Abraham and God was to be an everlasting covenant continuing through the ages, meaning that Abraham continues to have myriads of biological descendants up to this day. In fact, the Rabbis of the Talmud say,

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<sup>4</sup> Francis Brown, S.R. Driver, and Charles A. Briggs, *Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1979), 4.

“Abram the same is Abraham. At first he became a father to Aram [Ab-Aram] only, but in the end he became a father to the whole world” (b.*Berachot* 13a).<sup>5</sup>

Perhaps the more intriguing promise is made to Jacob, the Patriarch who had his name changed to Israel. Jacob is a joint heir of his grandfather and inherits this same promise. The promise that was made to Abraham was passed onto Isaac (Genesis 26:3) and then to Jacob (Genesis 28:4). 1 Chronicles 16:15-17 emphasizes that “*The covenant* which He made with Abraham, and His oath to Isaac. He also confirmed it to Jacob for a statute, to Israel as an everlasting covenant.” The Lord promises Jacob that he too will give rise to many nations:

“God also said to him, ‘I am God Almighty; be fruitful and multiply; a nation and a company of nations shall come from you, and kings shall come forth from you. The land which I gave to Abraham and Isaac, I will give it to you, and I will give the land to your descendants after you’” (Genesis 35:11-12).

The Lord promised Jacob that from him would come forth “a nation and a congregation of nations” (ATS) or “A nation and a community of nations” (NIV), *goy u'qahal goyim* (גוֹי וְקִהְלָ גוֹיִם). What does this mean?

Let us consider the fact that God also gave a promise to Ishmael, the estranged son that Abraham fathered through Hagar. God said that through Ishmael would come forth “a great nation” (Genesis 17:20) or *goy gadol* (גוֹי גָדוֹל). Today, many recognize Ishmael to be the father of today’s Arabs, and likewise consider Jacob to be the father of the Jewish people. This is true. But has God been faithful to His promise when we consider that there are only 14-15 million Jews, and hundreds of millions of Arabs? By the numbers, the one that was promised a great nation has more descendants than the one promised many nations. There has to be something that we have missed.

We know that God’s promise to the Patriarchs experienced fulfillment in ancient times as Moses attests in Deuteronomy 1:10, “The LORD your God has multiplied you, and behold, you are this day like the stars of heaven in number.” Conservative Biblical scholars usually estimate that the Ancient Israelites certainly numbered in the hundreds of thousands during the Exodus. Moses’ next words are extremely perplexing:

“May the LORD, the God of your fathers, increase you a thousand-fold more than you are and bless you, just as He has promised you!” (Deuteronomy 1:11).

If we take Moses’ words at face value, then how many descendants of Israel are on Planet Earth today? Are they now in the hundreds of millions? Of course, if that is truly the case, then only God knows where all these people are.

The promise of physical multiplication is extended by Jacob/Israel to Ephraim, the younger son of Joseph, while his sons are in Egypt:

“But his father refused and said, ‘I know, my son, I know; he also will become a people and he also will be great. However, his younger brother shall be greater than he, and his descendants shall become a multitude of nations’” (Genesis 48:19).

Jacob/Israel said that Ephraim’s descendants would become a *melo ha'goyim* (מְלֵאֵה-הַגּוֹיִם) or “the fulness of the nations” (YLT). Genesis 48:16 says, “may they grow into a multitude in the midst of the earth.” The Hebrew verb rendered as “grow” is *dagah* (דָּגַהּ), meaning “**multiply, increase**” (TWOT).<sup>6</sup> It is related to the word *dag* (דָּג) or “fish.” The *ArtScroll Tanach* renders this promise as, “may they proliferate abundantly like fish within the land.” The Rabbinical understanding behind this is that just as fish multiply underwater, so would the Israelites multiply on the face of Planet Earth. But just as fish multiply underwater, *unseen by man*, so would the Israelites multiply on the Earth *unseen by man*, but seen by God.<sup>7</sup> In other words, it would be

<sup>5</sup> *The Soncino Talmud. Judaic Classics Library II.* MS Windows 3.1. Brooklyn: Institute for Computers in Jewish Life, 1996. CD-ROM.

<sup>6</sup> Earl S. Kalland, “דגה,” 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), 1:182.

<sup>7</sup> Cf. Nosson Scherman, ed., *ArtScroll Chumash, Stone Edition* (Brooklyn: Mesorah Publications, Ltd., 2000), 273.

going on without anyone realizing it. Ephraim is one of the names given to the Northern Kingdom of Israel, which would break off from the Southern Kingdom of Judah, following the death of King Solomon. The descendants of the Northern Kingdom of Israel/Ephraim would become this “fullness of nations.”

When we review the history of Ancient Israel, is it possible that many who know Yeshua the Messiah as their Personal Savior are physical descendants of the Biblical Patriarchs? This has been a question that many have been asking. But many asking this have also taken it to the extremes of believing that if one knows Yeshua, then obviously a person is a physical descendant of Israel. Others have taken it even further and have assumed that every single human being on Earth is a descendant of Abraham. **There is no Scriptural support for either of these claims.** The furthest we can go is in making the assumption that there are more physical Israelites on Earth than just the Jewish people of today. They may number in the hundreds of millions. But only God knows where such people are, and it is in simple fulfillment of His promise to multiply Abraham’s seed. Even if one is of physical Israel, one can still be a total pagan and reject the God of Israel. While it can have a bearing of our interpretations of the prophecies of Israel’s restoration and how events are to play out—it *does not guarantee anyone salvation.*

### Scattered into the Nations

Following the reign of Kings David and Solomon, Ancient Israel experienced a split into two different Kingdoms or Houses: the Northern House or Kingdom of Israel, also known as Ephraim, and the Southern House or Kingdom of Judah. Judah primarily consisted of the tribes of Judah, Benjamin, and some Levites. Ephraim summarily entailed the remaining ten tribes: Reuben, Simeon, Levi, Zebulun, Issachar, Dan, Gad, Asher, Naphtali, Mannaseh, and Ephraim (the last two represent “Joseph”).<sup>8</sup> Israel was split in two as a direct result of King Solomon’s idolatry:

“So the LORD said to Solomon, ‘Because you have done this, and you have not kept My covenant and My statutes, which I have commanded you, I will surely tear the kingdom from you, and will give it to your servant. Nevertheless I will not do it in your days for the sake of your father David, *but* I will tear it out of the hand of your son. However, I will not tear away all the kingdom, *but* I will give one tribe to your son for the sake of My servant David and for the sake of Jerusalem which I have chosen’ (1 Kings 11:11-13).

In Genesis 48:19, Jacob prophesies that Ephraim’s “descendants shall become a multitude of nations.” Interestingly, the Latin Vulgate translation of the Hebrew *hamon goyim* is *crescet in gentes*, meaning “to arise in Gentiles.” May we assume that Jacob was also prophesying that Ephraim’s descendants would have a tendency to be tempted to not live as Israel? In Jewish theology, the term “Gentile” is often synonymous with being “pagan.”

The Northern Kingdom had a weakness for wanting to be like the Gentiles, or the pagans around them, and it succumbed to idolatry and the worship of pagan gods. This is best evidenced by its first king, Jeroboam, setting up temples for golden calf worship and proclaiming, “behold your gods, O Israel, that brought you up from the land of Egypt” (1 Kings 12:28). As a result, in 722 B.C.E. the Northern Kingdom of Israel/Ephraim was attacked and finally taken into Assyrian captivity. Approximately 135 years later, between 597-587 B.C.E., the Southern Kingdom of Judah was taken to Babylon for also transgressing God’s commands and succumbing to idolatry. Judah, however, returned to the Land of Israel 70 years later, but Ephraim, aside from a few individuals, was never corporately heard from again. Around 539 B.C.E., we are told, “Israel went into exile from their land to Assyria, to this day” (2 Kings 17:23). The historian Josephus was forced to write similar words in the First Century: “the ten tribes are beyond Euphrates till now, and are an immense multitude, and not to be estimated by numbers” (*Antiquities of the Jews* 11.133).<sup>9</sup>

<sup>8</sup> 1 Kings 11:11-13, 26, 31-35; 12:15, 24; Isaiah 8:14; 2 Chronicles 11:4.

<sup>9</sup> Flavius Josephus: *The Works of Josephus: Complete and Unabridged*, trans. William Whiston (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1987), 294.

The fact that the Northern Kingdom was corporately assimilated into other nations is evidenced by the fact that the Assyrian Empire would take conquered peoples and transplant them in the lands of other conquered peoples, forcing them to relocate among foreigners to decrease the possibility of rebellion. Biblical archaeologist Siegfried H. Horn writes,

“Conquered peoples from the western portions of the empire were resettled in Assyria and in the eastern provinces, while captives from the eastern and southern regions were resettled in the West. Thus we are told in 2 Kings 17:24 that Sargon transported the captive Israelites to Assyria and in 2 Kings 17:24 that he repopulated the cities of Samaria with the peoples from Babylonia and Elam (southwestern Iran). More specifically, the Israelites were resettled in Halah (northeast of Nineveh), on the Habor (the Khabor River, a tributary that flows south into Euphrates from the highlands of southern Turkey and northeastern Syria), and in the highlands of the Medes (northwestern Iran).”<sup>10</sup>

Certainly, when we consider this scholastic evidence of Assyria's displacement of the Israelites, we must logically assume that many from the Northern Kingdom did become “lost” among foreign nations, and as such lost their Israelite heritage. Hosea 1:10 tells us that “in the place where it is said to them, ‘You are not My people,’ it will be said to them, ‘*You are* the sons of the living God.’” This indicates that while these people will lose their heritage as being part of Israel, somehow a few of them will still be considered to be His people. The Apostle Paul uses this and applies it to the salvation of the nations occurring in his day (Romans 9:24-26). Apparently, among enough of his audience in Rome, were members of scattered Israel. This may be confirmed from some of the things we see in the contemporary history.

An intriguing historical account exists in the Apocryphal Book of 1 Maccabees, when the Jews try to enlist the support of the Spartans to help them eject the Syrian Greeks under Antiochus who hold them under siege in around 160-150 B.C.E. The high priest Jonathan wrote, “It has been found in writing concerning the Spartans and the Jews that they are brethren and are of the family of Abraham” (1 Maccabees 12:21). He confirms that there were people from the scattered Northern Kingdom who had not returned to the Land of Israel. Apparently, the Jewish priesthood had the documentation proving that some of them were among the Greeks. Lee I. Levine, a professor of Jewish history and archaeology at Hebrew University, states, “According to 1 Maccabees (12:5-23)...a bond was forged between the citizens of Jerusalem and the people of Sparta, who saw themselves as descendants of Abraham and who sought to forge an alliance with Jerusalem.”<sup>11</sup>

Although some claim that the Two Houses of Israel have already been reunited, there are *specific end-time prophecies* that detail their reunion that have yet to be accomplished. These prophecies have not been fulfilled, because if they truly were then Messiah Yeshua would be physically present in Jerusalem right now reigning over the Earth. In fact, *EJ* notes that “The belief in the continued existence of the ten tribes was regarded as an incontrovertible fact during the whole period of the Second Temple and of the Talmud.”<sup>12</sup> **The Jewish expectation for Israel's complete restoration has still yet to be realized.**

## Who is to be restored?

Ezekiel 37:15-28 is probably the most critical Scripture passage concerning the Two Houses of Israel and their prophesied reunification under David, or the Greater David, who is Messiah Yeshua:

“The word of the LORD came again to me saying, ‘And you, son of man, take for yourself one stick and write on it, “For Judah and for the sons of Israel, his companions”; then take another stick and write on it, “For Joseph, the stick of Ephraim and all the house of Israel, his companions.”’

<sup>10</sup> Siegfried H. Horn, “The Divided Monarchy,” rev. P. Kyle McCarter, Jr., in Hershel Shanks, ed., *Ancient Israel: From Abraham to the Destruction of the Temple* (Washington, D.C.: Biblical Archaeology Society, 1999), 174.

<sup>11</sup> Lee I. Levine, “The Age of Hellenism,” in *Ibid.*, 233.

<sup>12</sup> Louis Isaac Rabinowitz, “Ten Lost Tribes,” in *Encyclopaedia Judaica. MS Windows 9x*. Brooklyn: Judaica Multimedia (Israel) Ltd, 1997.

Then join them for yourself one to another into one stick, that they may become one in your hand. When the sons of your people speak to you saying, "Will you not declare to us what you mean by these?" say to them, "Thus says the Lord GOD, 'Behold, I will take the stick of Joseph, which is in the hand of Ephraim, and the tribes of Israel, his companions; and I will put them with it, with the stick of Judah, and make them one stick, and they will be one in My hand.'" The sticks on which you write will be in your hand before their eyes. 'Say to them, "Thus says the Lord GOD, 'Behold, I will take the sons of Israel from among the nations where they have gone, and I will gather them from every side and bring them into their own land; and I will make them one nation in the land, on the mountains of Israel; and one king will be king for all of them; and they will no longer be two nations and no longer be divided into two kingdoms. They will no longer defile themselves with their idols, or with their detestable things, or with any of their transgressions; but I will deliver them from all their dwelling places in which they have sinned, and will cleanse them. And they will be My people, and I will be their God. 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. They will live on the land that I gave to Jacob My servant, in which your fathers lived; and they will live on it, they, and their sons and their sons' sons, forever; and David My servant will be their prince forever. I will make a covenant of peace with them; it will be an everlasting covenant with them. And I will place them and multiply them, and will set My sanctuary in their midst forever. My dwelling place also will be with them; and I will be their God, and they will be My people. And the nations will know that I am the LORD who sanctifies Israel, when My sanctuary is in their midst forever.'"

If you read these verses carefully, then you must come to the conclusion that this prophecy has yet to occur and the Two Houses of Israel have yet to be reunited. The House of Judah and the scattered House of Israel/Ephraim both *have not* returned to the Land of Israel. David, the Greater David—Messiah Yeshua—is not reigning over them from His throne in Jerusalem. The Messiah has yet to return to Earth, and Judah and Ephraim have yet to dwell securely in their own land. All of Israel is not observing the statutes and decrees of the Lord and obeying Him to their fullest extent. The entire world has not come to recognize the God of Israel as the One True God.

The challenge that has been caused internally among many proponents of the Two-House teaching is not the fact that all Israel has yet to be restored. The challenge is in understanding that it is *three*, not two groups of people that are to be united. The very terminology "Two Houses of Israel," if not used in tandem with terms such as all Israel, the whole House of Israel, or the Kingdom of Israel, can give the impression that all God is concerned with is *just* the Two Houses of Judah and Ephraim. This is not true, as a third group—the companions of the Two Houses—the nations or the Gentiles, are also included in the restoration process.<sup>13</sup> The Lord has a global vision that extends well beyond the people of Israel themselves. Israel is His tool by which the whole world may be saved.

### **There Were Northern Kingdom Israelites Who Became "Jews"**

Coupled with this is often the omission on the part of many Two-House advocates to recognize the fact that a sector of Northern Kingdom exiles became integrated into the Southern Kingdom of Judah, and thus would be considered to be "Jews" until this day. At the restoration of Temple worship under King Hezekiah, *after the dispersion of the Northern Kingdom*, the Passover is reinstated for all Israel. He sends an invitation to the remnants of survivors who were not taken by Assyria. He invited these people to attend the Passover with them, attested in 2 Chronicles 30:6-15:

"And the couriers went throughout all Israel and Judah with the letters from the hand of the king and his princes, even according to the command of the king, saying, 'O sons of Israel, return to the LORD God of Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, that He may return to those of you who

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<sup>13</sup> Consult the editor's article "What About 'the Gentiles?'"

escaped *and* are left from the hand of the kings of Assyria. And do not be like your fathers and your brothers, who were unfaithful to the LORD God of their fathers, so that He made them a horror, as you see. Now do not stiffen your neck like your fathers, but yield to the LORD and enter His sanctuary which He has consecrated forever, and serve the LORD your God, that His burning anger may turn away from you. For if you return to the LORD, your brothers and your sons *will find* compassion before those who led them captive, and will return to this land. For the LORD your God is gracious and compassionate, and will not turn *His* face away from you if you return to Him.' So the couriers passed from city to city through the country of Ephraim and Manasseh, and as far as Zebulun, but they laughed them to scorn, and mocked them. Nevertheless some men of Asher, Manasseh, and Zebulun humbled themselves and came to Jerusalem. The hand of God was also on Judah to give them one heart to do what the king and the princes commanded by the word of the LORD. Now many people were gathered at Jerusalem to celebrate the Feast of Unleavened Bread in the second month, a very large assembly. And they arose and removed the altars which *were* in Jerusalem; they also removed all the incense altars and cast *them* into the brook Kidron. Then they slaughtered the Passover *lambs* on the fourteenth of the second month. And the priests and Levites were ashamed of themselves and consecrated themselves, and brought burnt offerings to the house of the LORD" (2 Chronicles 30:6-15).

In the Apocrypha, we see that one of the Northern Kingdom exiles, Tobit, remains faithful to the God of Israel while in Nineveh, and in fact remembers that he was of the tribe of Naphtali:

"I, Tobit, walked in the ways of truth and righteousness all the days of my life, and I performed many acts of charity to my brethren and countrymen who went with me into the land of the Assyrians, to Nineveh. Now when I was in my own country, in the land of Israel, while I was still a young man, the whole tribe of Naphtali my forefather deserted the house of Jerusalem. This was the place which had been chosen from among all the tribes of Israel, where all the tribes should sacrifice and where the temple of the dwelling of the Most High was consecrated and established for all generations for ever" (Tobit 1:3-4).

The example of a man such as Tobit may be the exception, but it cannot be overlooked. Assuming that his family remained faithful to the God of Israel while in Assyrian exile, they may have integrated themselves into the larger Jewish world that would take prominence after the Babylonian exile of the Southern Kingdom, as all exiles were emancipated by the Persian Empire. The standard view of many scholars is that when Babylon was engulfed by Persia, a major part of the exiles made their way back to the Land of Israel—including the so-called "Lost Tribes." To an extent this is true. Many of the Northern Kingdom exiles did not forget their Israelite heritage and integrated themselves into the Jewish communities returning to the Land of Israel from Babylon. This is why in Luke 2:36, for example, we see "Anna the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Asher."

Enough Northern Kingdom exiles had integrated themselves into the Jewish community so that there were indeed "Northern Kingdom Jews." This does not discount the reality that there was a dispersion of Northern Kingdom exiles beyond the borders of Assyria, as we detailed earlier how the Assyrians would frequently transplant conquered peoples. In the First Century, Josephus could say that there was an immense multitude beyond the Euphrates that could not be known. But by overlooking the fact that there were Northern Kingdom exiles who reintegrated themselves into the Jewish community, some have severely downplayed the role of Jewish authority in their theology and Torah observance—and many others have acted as if God is only concerned with "scattered Ephraim." This is not the case when we recognize that the Northern Kingdom is represented, at least sporadically, within Jewish-Israel.

### **Yeshua and the "Lost Sheep"**

A greater issue is how much emphasis we see in the teachings of the Apostles regarding scattered Israel and the spread of the gospel message. In the development of the Two-House teaching, some teach that the Lord is only concerned about the salvation of "the lost sheep of the

House of Israel,” meaning scattered Ephraim. A few even go to the extent that God is not concerned about the salvation of the nations, meaning those with no physical connection to the Patriarchs Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. While the Bible certainly teaches and emphasizes the end-time restoration of Israel—is it something that involves *only physical Israel*—or is it something that involves the whole world?

When Yeshua was traveling near the city of Tyre in Phoenicia, He encounters a woman who comes to Him, asking that her daughter might be healed from a demonic spirit. She is identified as being a Greek, specifically “a Syrophoenician by birth” (Mark 7:26, RSV). *ISBE* notes, “she was a non-Jewish native of the coastal region of Phoenicia...who possibly spoke Greek, though she may have been simply an inhabitant of the area.”<sup>14</sup> Matthew’s Gospel identifies her as a Canaanite (Matthew 15:22). The Lord says to her, “I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel” (Matthew 15:24), presumably a reference to the scattered Northern Kingdom of Israel/Ephraim. It is from this point where some Two-House advocates say that Yeshua is *only* concerned about the salvation of scattered Ephraim, and of course, His fellow Jews, but not necessarily the salvation of the nations. Is this truly the case? Is God being exclusivistic and making salvation something determined by one’s heredity?

If we review this encounter, this is anything but the case. After saying, “I was sent only to help the people of Israel—God’s lost sheep—not the Gentiles” (NLT), we see some important things take place, that should define for us what is really happening. This woman was not a Jewess, nor was she a member of the scattered Northern Kingdom. She was a complete Gentile, and identifies herself as a “dog” (Matthew 15:27). The Jews of the First Century did not always regard non-Jews as total outcasts, because many well-to-do Jews had dogs as pets. *IVPBBC* observes that “Jesus is making an illustration: the children must be fed before the pets.”<sup>15</sup> This would mean that the woman was in the “household of humanity,” so to speak, meaning among those who could be saved, but the first claim to the good news was to the Jews and to those of exiled Israel. However, she does not give up in her persistence, and Yeshua tells her, “O woman, your faith is great!” (Matthew 15:28). **This is definitive prove against the claim that only physical Israelites can be saved**, because the Syrophoenician woman had her request graciously granted by the Messiah.

In the Biblical context of Yeshua saying that He came to save the lost sheep of the House of Israel, He says that the Syrophoenician woman’s faith was great. This is not an indication in the least that salvation is only available to physical descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, but does place salvation going to those of Israel as being primary. Unfortunately, there are a few in the Two-House community who are reading Scripture selectively and believe that only physical descendants of Israel can be saved. If this is the case, then it would be gross theological error to believe in the Two Houses of Israel. **But thankfully, it is not.** The Scriptural truth of the matter is that Israel is God’s vessel *whereby the whole world might come to salvation*. What is interesting is that as the gospel message has gone forth—presumably to those “lost sheep”—many, many people of the nations have received it with great enthusiasm. Of course, this leaves us with the issue of who is of scattered Israel, and who is of the nations?

### How much did the Apostles emphasize scattered Israel?

Did the Apostles, who took the message from Yeshua to spread the good news to scattered Israel, make a distinction between “Ephraim” and “the Gentiles,” as some Two-House advocates do today? Or were they more concerned about people simply receiving the message, and that they be trained up as being a part of the community of Israel—*leaving the final distinctions for God to handle*? How much did the Apostles emphasize scattered Israel in their teachings?

<sup>14</sup> C.N. Jefford, “Syrophoenician,” in Geoffrey W. Bromiley, ed., et. al., *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, 4 vols. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988), 4:694.

<sup>15</sup> Craig S. Keener, *The IVP Bible Background Commentary: New Testament* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1993), 88.

The Apostle Paul writes in Romans 9:6, “For not all Israelites truly belong to Israel” (NRSV). In the end, those who are considered to be of “Israel” must have faith in Israel’s Messiah, Yeshua. If they do not have salvation in Yeshua, even if they are of physical Israel, of Judah or scattered Israel/Ephraim, **they will not be considered “Israel.”** This likewise means true “Gentiles” can be a part of Israel through faith in Yeshua.

In the teachings of the Apostles in the Messianic Scriptures, we see references to scattered Israel, *but they may not be as direct* as some Two-House advocates would like them to be. I fully believe that the Apostles recognized that there was a scattered Northern Kingdom out in the world, but they did not make it a prerequisite for preaching the gospel to a particular group. They recognized, however, that as the good news went forth, the God of Israel was in the process of restoring His people. They recognized the restoration of Israel indirectly in their writings—but it does not become primary to the restoration of the individual and his or her discipleship in the faith. Allow me to give you some examples of indirect references to where the Apostles allude to the restoration of Israel.

At the Jerusalem Council, James, the half-brother of Yeshua, gets up and explains how the Lord is going to receive from the nations a people for Himself. He says “With this the words of the Prophets agree, just as it is written” (Acts 15:15). He then proceeds to quote from Amos 9:11-12, which says in its entirety:

“In that day I will raise up the fallen booth of David, and wall up its breaches; I will also raise up its ruins and rebuild it as in the days of old; that they may possess the remnant of Edom and all the nations who are called by My name,” declares the LORD who does this.”

What is interesting is that in James’ quotation of Amos he actually says “AFTER THESE THINGS I will return, AND I WILL REBUILD THE TABERNACLE OF DAVID WHICH HAS FALLEN, AND I WILL REBUILD ITS RUINS, AND I WILL RESTORE IT, SO THAT THE REST OF MANKIND MAY SEEK THE LORD, AND ALL THE GENTILES WHO ARE CALLED BY MY NAME” (Acts 15:16-17).

The difference between what actually James says in Acts 15:13-18 and the Hebrew text in Amos is that James follows the Septuagint rendering which reads with *hoi kataloiptoi tōn anthrōpōn* (οἱ κατάλοιποι τῶν ἀνθρώπων) for the Hebrew *shearit Edom* (שְׂאִרֵית אֶדוֹם). The LXX Rabbis understood *Edom* (אֶדוֹם) to be connected to *adam* (אָדָם), also the Hebrew word for “**mankind, people**” (*HALOT*),<sup>16</sup> and rendered it in Greek as “the remnant of men” (Apostle’s Bible) referring to God’s faithful remnant that would come forth out of humanity’s masses.

James relates the nations coming to faith with the restoration of the Tabernacle of David, or Israel’s Kingdom. Those of us who know about the division of the Two Houses of Israel, and how scattered Ephraim was prophesied to become the “fullness of the nations,” know that when James was talking about God receiving for Himself a people from the nations, this is a reference to scattered Israel. This is most clearly evident by James’ attestation in Acts 19:15:

“[W]herefore I judge: not to trouble those who from the nations do turn back to God” (YLT).

James emphasizes that since the nations coming to faith is something prophesied in the Tanach (Old Testament), those who were *turning back* to the God of Israel need not be troubled. Specifically, the Greek verb *epistrephō* (ἐπιστρέφω) means “**to return to a point where one has been, turn around, go back**” (*BDAG*).<sup>17</sup> It indicates that the Apostles at the Jerusalem Council recognized that the salvation of the nations was a critical part in Israel’s national redemption, but one of the things they *do not do* is attempt to identify anyone as “this tribe” or “that tribe.” They simply go outside their comfort zones in the Land of Israel and preach the good news of salvation to all who would hear.

James himself writes his Epistle “To the twelve tribes who are dispersed abroad” (James 1:1). But what is important to note is that while James recognizes dispersed Israel, which includes his Jewish brethren in the Diaspora, as being part of his audience—this is the only reference we

<sup>16</sup> Ludwig Koehler and Walter Baumgartner, eds., *The Hebrew & Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament*, 2 vols. (Leiden, the Netherlands: Brill, 2001), 1:14.

<sup>17</sup> *BDAG*, 382.

see to “Israel” in his letter. The Epistle of James deals almost exclusively with an individual’s attitudes, ethics, and morality. Other than recognizing “Israel” as his audience, James has a universal message that is designed for one’s discipleship and training as a part of the community of faith.<sup>18</sup>

The Apostle Peter’s teachings are similar to James.’ He directs his first letter to a broad geographical area, “To those who reside as aliens, scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia, who are chosen” (1 Peter 1:1). Writing to relatively new Believers, both Jewish and non-Jewish, he applies Hosea’s prophecy of scattered Israel to their salvation experience: “Yet the number of the sons of Israel will be like the sand of the sea, which cannot be measured or numbered; and in the place where it is said to them, ‘You are not My people,’ it will be said to them, ‘*You are* the sons of the living God” (Hosea 1:10). This was a prophecy that was given to the Northern Kingdom of Israel/Ephraim regarding their dispersion. Peter writes his audience, “for you once were NOT A PEOPLE, but now you are THE PEOPLE OF GOD; you had NOT RECEIVED MERCY, but now you have RECEIVED MERCY” (1 Peter 2:10).

Peter likewise recognizes that the restoration of Israel was at hand as people were receiving the good news. But likewise, this is the furthest extent that Peter goes in addressing the “Two Houses of Israel.” He does not identify any Believer with a particular tribe, but instead focuses on individuals’ spiritual well-being and discipleship in the faith. This would fit well with his words proclaimed at *Shavuot*/Pentecost: “For the promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off, as **many as the Lord our God will call to Himself**” (Acts 2:39). Peter’s vision is a global vision, as he wants “all whom the Lord our God will call” (NIV) to know Yeshua—not just his fellow Jews or scattered Israel in the nations. Our vision should likewise be the same.

The Apostle Paul, just like James and Peter, recognizes that the restoration of Israel is at work in his assignments among the nations. In his letter to the Romans, Paul writes that God has called a chosen people forth “not from among Jews only, but also from among Gentiles” (Romans 9:24). He then appropriates Hosea 1:10, applying it to the salvation of the nations:

“As He says also in Hosea, ‘I WILL CALL THOSE WHO WERE NOT MY PEOPLE, “MY PEOPLE,” AND HER WHO WAS NOT BELOVED, “BELOVED.” AND IT SHALL BE THAT IN THE PLACE WHERE IT WAS SAID TO THEM, “YOU ARE NOT MY PEOPLE,” THERE THEY SHALL BE CALLED SONS OF THE LIVING GOD.’ Isaiah cries out concerning Israel, ‘THOUGH THE NUMBER OF THE SONS OF ISRAEL BE LIKE THE SAND OF THE SEA, IT IS THE REMNANT THAT WILL BE SAVED; FOR THE LORD WILL EXECUTE HIS WORD ON THE EARTH, THOROUGHLY AND QUICKLY.’” (Romans 9:25-28).

Further in Paul’s treatise on Israel, he also writes, “For I do not want you, brethren, to be uninformed of this mystery—so that you will not be wise in your own estimation—that a partial hardening has happened to Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in” (Romans 11:25). His reference to “the fullness of the nations” (LITV) connects us back to the Patriarch Jacob blessing the two sons of Joseph, Ephraim and Manasseh. Jacob prophesied concerning their descendants and what would happen to them in regard to the greater community of Israel. The account in Genesis indicates that Joseph was at first disturbed by his father’s blessing of Ephraim, before blessing the older Manasseh, but Jacob indicates that Ephraim’s descendants would be very great. In fact, we know that in later books of the Tanach, the term “Ephraim” would be applied to the entire Northern Kingdom of Israel:

“Joseph said to his father, ‘Not so, my father, for this one is the firstborn. Place your right hand on his head.’ But his father refused and said, ‘I know, my son, I know; he also will become a people and he also will be great. However, his younger brother shall be greater than he, and his descendants shall become a multitude of nations.’ He blessed them that day, saying, ‘By you Israel will pronounce blessing, saying, “May God make you like Ephraim and Manasseh!”’ Thus he put Ephraim before Manasseh” (Genesis 48:18-20).

The “multitude of nations” or “fulness of the nations” (YLT) that is being spoken of here appears as *melo ha'goyim* (מְלֵאֵת הַגּוֹיִם) in the Hebrew text. It is speaking of God’s promise to

<sup>18</sup> Consult the editor’s commentary *James for the Practical Messianic*.

radically multiply Israel's seed into "a group of nations" (NIV), and seemingly bring His promise to Abraham—that his seed would bless all mankind—to pass (Genesis 12:2-3).<sup>19</sup>

The Apostle Paul equates the salvation of all Israel with the ingathering of the nations, recognizing that as the gospel message went forth, all Israel was being unified. He does not attempt to prove the ancestry of anyone who is saved, but he does recognize that salvation going out to the world—where scattered Israel was—was a critical part of Israel's restoration and **the salvation message going out to all nations**. He indirectly recognizes that non-Jews coming to faith in Yeshua included members of scattered Israel, but as the redemption of the individual was more important to him than the corporate salvation of Israel, *as it should be*, Paul does not attempt to sort out the details. In fact, quoting Isaiah he says very clearly that "Though the number of the children of Israel were like the sand of the sea, only a remnant of them will be saved" (Romans 9:27, RSV). Likewise, he writes Timothy to not "pay attention to myths and endless genealogies, which give rise to mere speculation rather than *furthering* the administration of God which is by faith" (1 Timothy 1:4).

In his comments to the Corinthians, Paul summarizes quite well what we need to be emphasizing today in the Messianic community. He writes, "For I do not want you to be unaware, brethren, that our fathers were all under the cloud and all passed through the sea; and all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea; and all ate the same spiritual food; and all drank the same spiritual drink, for they were drinking from a spiritual rock which followed them; and the rock was Messiah" (1 Corinthians 10:1-4). Among the non-Jewish Corinthians may have been members of the scattered Northern Kingdom. But regardless, the key concept that Paul is emphasizing is that "brothers and sisters...our ancestors were all under the cloud, and all passed through the sea" (NRSV). Paul wanted the Corinthians to understand that all are part of the same community of faith, and we all partake of the same spiritual heritage. This is true if one is a physical descendant of the Patriarchs or not. **In the Messiah Yeshua, all are a part of the community of Israel.**

The way he communicates this to the Galatians is that "if you belong to Christ, you are the 'issue' of Abraham and heirs by virtue of the promise" (Galatians 3:29, REB). Many Two-House advocates have overstated Paul's words "you are Abraham's seed" (NIV; Grk. *sperma*, σπέρμα) to the point that only physical descendants of Abraham can be saved. But this does not align with Paul's theology of wanting the good news to go to all people. While Paul never uses the term "spiritual seed," we are descendants of Abraham certainly through our union with the Messiah; we are descendants of Abraham if we live like Abraham; we are descendants of Abraham if we partake of Abraham's covenant promises.<sup>20</sup> Keep in mind that even Abraham had the good news proclaimed to him as Paul testifies: "The Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel beforehand to Abraham, *saying*, 'ALL THE NATIONS WILL BE BLESSED IN YOU'" (Galatians 3:8). If we forget that by restoring Israel God will bring salvation to the whole world, then we forget the mission that God has for Israel to make Israel a light to all mankind.

Interestingly enough, one of the most direct statements in the Apostolic Scriptures regarding the Two Houses of Israel is in the anonymous Epistle to the Hebrews, where the author quotes directly from Jeremiah 31:31-34 (in its Septuagint translation) applying it to the New Covenant that God has brought to His people. While his audience is primarily Jews in the Diaspora in the mid-First Century, we cannot disclude or discount non-Jewish Believers also reading it. He writes about the Levitical priesthood, which could only serve the people of Israel, now being replaced by the universal priesthood of Melchizedek, of which all can participate in. This priesthood has been inaugurated by the work of the Messiah. What he writes is very important for us to understand:

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<sup>19</sup> Cf. Romans 4:11, 16; 9:8; Galatians 3:29.

<sup>20</sup> Cf. David H. Stern, *New Testament Commentary* (Clarksville, MD: Jewish New Testament Publications, 1995), 549.

“But now He has obtained a more excellent ministry, by as much as He is also the mediator of a better covenant, which has been enacted on better promises. For if that first [*priesthood*] had been faultless, there would have been no occasion sought for a second. For finding fault with them, He says, ‘BEHOLD, DAYS ARE COMING, SAYS THE LORD, WHEN I WILL EFFECT A NEW COVENANT WITH THE HOUSE OF ISRAEL AND WITH THE HOUSE OF JUDAH; NOT LIKE THE COVENANT WHICH I MADE WITH THEIR FATHERS ON THE DAY WHEN I TOOK THEM BY THE HAND TO LEAD THEM OUT OF THE LAND OF EGYPT; FOR THEY DID NOT CONTINUE IN MY COVENANT, AND I DID NOT CARE FOR THEM, SAYS THE LORD. FOR THIS IS THE COVENANT THAT I WILL MAKE WITH THE HOUSE OF ISRAEL AFTER THOSE DAYS, SAYS THE LORD: I WILL PUT MY LAWS INTO THEIR MINDS, AND I WILL WRITE THEM ON THEIR HEARTS. AND I WILL BE THEIR GOD, AND THEY SHALL BE MY PEOPLE. AND THEY SHALL NOT TEACH EVERYONE HIS FELLOW CITIZEN, AND EVERYONE HIS BROTHER, SAYING, ‘KNOW THE LORD,’ FOR ALL WILL KNOW ME, FROM THE LEAST TO THE GREATEST OF THEM. FOR I WILL BE MERCIFUL TO THEIR INIQUITIES, AND I WILL REMEMBER THEIR SINS NO MORE’ (Hebrews 8:6-12).<sup>21</sup>

Finally, in the Book of Revelation, we see twelve tribes of Israel mentioned. When the 144,000 sealed witnesses are commissioned by the Lord to perform their work, John records that 12,000 are sealed from each tribe:

“And I heard the number of those who were sealed, one hundred and forty-four thousand sealed from every tribe of the sons of Israel: from the tribe of Judah, twelve thousand *were* sealed, from the tribe of Reuben twelve thousand, from the tribe of Gad twelve thousand, from the tribe of Asher twelve thousand, from the tribe of Naphtali twelve thousand, from the tribe of Manasseh twelve thousand, from the tribe of Simeon twelve thousand, from the tribe of Levi twelve thousand, from the tribe of Issachar twelve thousand, from the tribe of Zebulun twelve thousand, from the tribe of Joseph twelve thousand, from the tribe of Benjamin, twelve thousand *were* sealed” (Revelation 7:4-8).

These individuals who are sealed know what tribe of Israel they are from, because God Himself is the one who performs the sealing. All that John records is that 12,000 from every tribe are sealed. He indicates *nowhere* in the text that those sealed are to try to attempt to figure out who they are—and certainly not what tribe they are from. This is something that only God knows. What he emphasizes is that the 144,000 come from twelve tribes of Israel. Notably missing is the Tribe of Dan, because for whatever reason, Dan is incapable of performing the functions that God would assign to it. Instead, it is replaced with “Joseph.”

There are references to the Two Houses of Israel in the Apostolic Scriptures, but they are all given in the context of the restoration of Israel and the spread of the good news among the nations. What is important to keep in mind is that *none of the Apostles* label the non-Jews coming to faith as “Ephraimites,” a common term used in the Two-House Messianic community today that has quickly become anachronistic. The Apostles *never identify a particular nationality* with a certain “tribe,” nor do they identify all non-Jews as “Ephraim.” They recognize that scattered Israel is among the nations, and that by receiving the gospel message and salvation in Messiah Yeshua, a person partakes of the spiritual heritage of Israel. They recognize that a non-Jewish Believer is every bit a part of the community of Israel as the Jewish person. But if some of the non-Jewish Believers were indeed part of the scattered House of Israel/Ephraim—the Apostles only recognize it indirectly. **They are more concerned about the salvation of a person, and make hereditary something entirely secondary, if not tertiary.**

The challenge in the Two-House community today is that some advocates overemphasize the message of scattered Israel being brought back *at the expense of the gospel!* Just like many Christians understand the fact that God’s Kingdom is to be restored on Earth via the return of Jesus, and that as Believers we are to work toward that end through the proclamation of the good news—many of the same forget that God’s Kingdom happens to be the Kingdom of Israel. Many Messianics have made the reverse mistake of forgetting that the Kingdom of Israel being restored

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<sup>21</sup> Please note that our ministry is fully aware of the effort among some in the Messianic community to “de-canonize” the Epistle to the Hebrews. Consult the editor’s commentary *Hebrews for the Practical Messianic*.

is the Kingdom of God being brought to Earth. The only way God's Kingdom can be restored is by the restoration of individuals by knowing Yeshua the Messiah as their Personal Savior, and then having them properly disciplined in their relationship with Him. If this does not happen, it does not matter if one is of Judah, Ephraim, or the nations. Likewise, if individuals are in Messiah, the details of who-is-who should be left to the Lord. He will sort it all out when He returns. What matters is that we all treat one another as equal members of the Commonwealth of Israel, the Body of Messiah.

### Spiritual Bi-Polarity in the Two-House Movement Today

Overstating the Two Houses of Israel at the expense of the gospel is a symptom of what we can easily describe as a case of a spiritual bi-polarity that has been manifesting itself in the independent Messianic community over the past few years. While this is not often directly connected to the Two-House teaching of Israel's restoration, how it manifests itself often deters many people from even considering what the Two-House teaching is. The old adage "a tree is known by its fruit" keeps some people away, because the Two-House teaching is taught, in some circles, in close connection with some grossly unbiblical teachings and understandings.

What we often find is that there are non-Jewish Believers, who believe that they are a part of Israel, who want unity with their Jewish brothers and sisters. But many of them are actually *doing more to keep Israel divided*, than to see it united. Some, asserting a role as "Ephraimites," will not even use the terms "Jewish" or "Judaism," and instead will only use "Judah" or the Hebrew *Yehudah*. What does this signal? Some, likewise, claiming that they want to be Bible Believers *only*, divorce the Scriptures from their legitimate historical and cultural context, and assert interpretations of the Torah that are totally independent and devoid of Jewish custom, tradition, and history. Is this good? Do many suddenly forget that Yeshua is the Lion of the Tribe of Judah—and is indeed Jewish? What does this do?

In the past several years there has been a strong downplay of the role of mainline Jewish tradition regarding Torah observance in the independent Messianic community. It is rife in many sectors of the Two-House community. Many have embraced the so-called "Scripturalist" views of the Karaites, asserting that we are to follow the Written Torah only and their interpretations of it. This means that just as the Karaites reject mainline Jewish traditions regarding the Sabbath, the appointed times, the kosher dietary laws, and they have their own calendar system of when to keep the Biblical holidays—so must we. The Karaites actually follow an hermeneutic very similar to that of the Sadducees, who only followed the Written Torah of Genesis-Deuteronomy, even though they did consider the remainder of the Tanach as being authoritative.

These views are often based in misunderstandings of Biblical history, and the traditional Christian view of believing that all of the Pharisees were antagonists of Yeshua the Messiah (which notably has been changing in the past twenty years).<sup>22</sup> Some in the Messianic community—who are not engaged in detailed study of the Apostolic Scriptures—are unaware that this is a gross misunderstanding. The growing field of Jewish New Testament studies is revealing more and more that Yeshua and His Disciples followed much of the Oral Torah. The Apostle Paul, a Pharisee, uses the term law or *nomos* (νόμος) in a much more loose context than we often think—because when he refers to "law" he may be including much of the Oral Torah. (Of course, much of this must be determined on a case-by-case basis, and requires that we be engaged in continual studies of the Bible.) Furthermore, when we can accurately determine how Yeshua and the Apostles lived out the Torah in the First Century, *only then* can we ask what they would do. Would the Apostles wear a *yarmulke* in a worship service? Would they separate meat and dairy? Would they speak the Divine Name of God? These are all things we see hints about in the Apostolic Writings and its contemporary history—and I believe that their *halachah* today would be concurrent with many Rabbinical norms.

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<sup>22</sup> Consult the editor's article "You Want to be a Pharisee" for an examination of Pharisaical theology compared to that of Yeshua and the Apostles.

But on the flip side, revealing a strong bi-polarity, while Karaite views have become commonplace in sectors of the Two-House community, so has the widescale acceptance of Jewish mysticism taken root. Many people are trying to find “hidden messages” behind the Scriptures, at the expense of the straightforward and exegetically accurate meaning of the text. Many people cannot interpret the Hebrew language of the Tanach, for example, from the basis of definitions of Hebrew words and Hebrew parts of speech—and instead they must use so-called “Hebrew letter pictures” to interpret words—a *technique employed by no reputable scholars or theologians*. Many will use concepts like the so-called “Sefirotic Tree” to define the Godhead, or PaRDeS to interpret the Bible—which directly come from Medieval Jewish mysticism—as opposed to the mainline Judaism of the First Century. While many reject mainline Jewish traditions that we see mentioned in First Century literature such as the Apocrypha, the Pseudepigrapha, Josephus, Philo, and later in the Mishnah and Talmud—they are nevertheless content with writings that came much later in the form of the Zohar and Sefer Yitzirah in the Thirteenth Century. They embrace Kabbalah with open arms, not realizing the poison that it is. What is ironic, of course, is that the Jewish Rabbis who teach Kabbalah also teach that one must be fully grounded in the Torah and Talmud before studying it. One who rejects the validity of any of the Oral Torah, and then thinks that there is “truth” in Kabbalah, is fooling himself.<sup>23</sup> **The individual suffers from a strong case of spiritual bi-polarity.**

These are some of the spiritual states of those you may encounter in the Two-House community, and they need to be remedied. Some teachers who advocate the reunion of Judah and Ephraim are spiritually bi-polar. On the one hand, they often reject mainline Jewish traditions and customs in favor of their “new interpretations,” but on the other widely embrace mystical views and beliefs—that by no means represent mainline Judaism. The strongest way this manifests itself is in the practice of eisegesis in Biblical teaching. In some sectors, a commonly flawed hermeneutic practiced is where every instance referring to the number “two” in Scripture, is automatically assumed to be references to the Two Houses of Israel.

Some also believe that they can Scripturally prove the countries where scattered Israel has gone to—when the Bible itself says that only God knows where scattered Israel is. The Lord says, “I will shake the house of Israel among all nations as *grain* is shaken in a sieve, but not a kernel will fall to the ground” (Amos 9:9). Our Heavenly Father knows where scattered Israel is, and He will be faithful to regather them. Still, even knowing this does not stop people from unwarranted speculation, and even considering that there might be an “Acts chapter 29” out there that details Paul going to the British Isles to proclaim the gospel to so-called “lost Israelites” that needs to be “restored” to our Bibles.

What all this does—more than anything else—is it gets us away from our primary goal of seeing people receiving salvation in Yeshua and being born again, and making sure that they are trained up in the essentials of the faith. And, it discredits us in the larger theological world of ideas.<sup>24</sup> Our remedy for any bi-polarity in the Two-House community is simple: we must subject ourselves to consistent, detailed, and above all realistic studies of God’s Word. But the problem for many is that this takes time, and they are often not patient. **But this is certainly not the case with everyone—because there are many, many more who want a balanced spiritual diet and want to feed on the real food of the Scriptures—not just “junk food.”**

## What do we need to emphasize?

I believe in the Two-House teaching of Judah and Ephraim. But what I believe *does differ* (and sometimes substantially differ) from a few others who advocate it. I believe that the teaching is ultimately the understanding that if you have faith in Yeshua, you will be part of the end-time restoration of Israel. It just so happens that a major part—and frequently overlooked part—of

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<sup>23</sup> Consult the editor’s article “The Effect of Mysticism and Gnosticism on the Messianic Movement,” detailing some of the direct problems caused by Kabbalah in the Messianic community today.

<sup>24</sup> Consult the editor’s article “The Quest for Credibility.”

Israel's end-time restoration is the reunion of the Two Houses of Israel. But this needs to be emphasized in light of our Heavenly Father's bigger purpose: the gospel message going out to the entire world. If we forget this, then the restoration that we desire to be established will take more time, and will only be delayed.

There are many lessons that the Scriptures have in store for us in the days ahead. Each one of us should be enthusiastic and excited about what God is doing in this hour. His Kingdom is coming to Earth! The Lord is going to return and set everything straight! I would pray that each and every one of us, as we consider the restoration of all Israel, leave some of the details to Him. We need to recognize that all Believers are a part of the Commonwealth of Israel, and that what is applicable to Israel is applicable to all who have faith in Yeshua. This means that we need to keep the Torah, and that prophecies that apply to Israel apply to us. But the interesting thing about prophecy is that many of the participants do not know they are participating until the end. When we enter into His Kingdom, and Yeshua finally tells us about its great mysteries, He will finally sort out the details of who are Judah, Ephraim, and the nations. In the meantime, all of us get to wait with great anticipation.

J.K. McKee (B.A., University of Oklahoma; M.A., Asbury Theological Seminary) is the editor of TNN Online ([www.tnnonline.net](http://www.tnnonline.net)) and is a Messianic apologist. He is author of several books, including: *The New Testament Validates Torah*, *Torah In the Balance, Volume I*, and *When Will the Messiah Return?* He has also written many articles on the Two Houses of Israel and Biblical theology, and is presently focusing on Messianic commentaries on various books of the Bible.

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