

What Is the Two-House Teaching?

by J.K. McKee posted 01 January, 2004 www.tnnonline.net

One of the most intriguing phenomenon is occurring in our day: Believers in significant numbers have begun to address, what many in the past have called, “the Lost Tribes” of Israel issue.¹ This has taken place because of a strong interest by many Christians in the Hebraic Roots of our faith, and a renewed interest in Israel and their faith heritage in Judaism. It is important because many of those who have previously addressed scattered Israel, and expressed some belief in Messiah Yeshua (Christ Jesus), have often been a part of aberrant groups that have not believed in His Divinity, or have had unorthodox beliefs about salvation and other critical Biblical doctrines. Furthermore, some of these groups have been anti-Semitic and did not (or do not) consider the Jewish people of today to be a legitimate part of Israel and/or true descendants of the Patriarchs. Putting all of these things aside, a grassroots movement, now commonly known by the descriptions “Judah and Ephraim” or “Two-House,” is gaining adherence in the modern Messianic movement.

An article entitled “Decoding the Priesthood,” from the 10 May, 1999 edition of *The Jerusalem Report*, states, “An evolving doctrine in Christian Zionism and Messianic Judaism, based on a new interpretation of Scripture, holds that most true Christians are descendants of the Lost Tribes of Israel.” This is certainly interesting coming from a mainstream Jewish publication. What is going on, exactly? What might these sentiments mean? How do we properly approach the issues at hand?

Where does this leave the average Christian Believer, whose understanding of “Israel” is limited to what he or she has been taught in Church settings? What is this “Two-House teaching”? What is it all about and what is its purpose? Does it actually advocate that all non-Jewish Believers are physical Israel? Or, is the connection of non-Jewish Believers to Israel something *more involved* than what most consider? What questions are being asked today about “Israel” that we must take note of?

These are complex questions which have the capacity to change how you can view parts of the Scriptures, especially in light of current unrest in the Land of Israel which continually shows all Believers in the Messiah—regardless of what their position is on the scattered Northern Kingdom and the greater restoration of Israel—to stand by Israel and the Jewish people. But in light of the subject matter, let us take to serious heart the words of Ezekiel 37:28. God says that “the nations will know that I am the LORD who sanctifies Israel, when My sanctuary is in their midst forever.”² Notice that our Heavenly Father does not say He sanctifies a separate group of elect called “the Church,” and also notice that He does speak of a day coming when Israel is restored and His presence will be in the world forever. We have obviously not reached this expected point in history.

One of the keys to properly understanding the teaching of the Two Houses of Israel, Judah and Ephraim (the latter of whom constitute the scattered Northern Kingdom of Israel), is properly understanding who God’s elect is. Does the Lord have two groups of elect, Israel and the Church, as is commonly taught today? Or does He have but *one* assembly of chosen ones? If *all* of God’s people—regardless of bloodline—are a part of the community Israel (Galatians 6:16; Ephesians 2:11-12; 3:6), what are they to be involved in during the end-times?

We will examine some of the important questions concerning the teachings that relate to the restoration of all Israel. We will discuss how many get involved with this, some of its personal applications, and its eschatological significance. We will examine some of the objections that people have to the Two-House teaching from common evangelical Christian views of “Israel.” Most importantly, this article should get many of you who have heard *something* about the Two Houses of Israel, Judah and scattered Ephraim, **to think** and go and search the Scriptures for yourself. What are some things in the Bible concerning “Israel” that readers may have overlooked or underemphasized that can no longer be avoided?

¹ This article has been reproduced from the paperback edition of *Introduction to Things Messianic*, pp 99-122.

² Heb. *b'heyot miq'dashi b'tokham l'olam* (בְּהֵיוֹת מִקְדָּשִׁי בְּתוֹכְכֶם לְעוֹלָם).

What is the Two-House teaching?

The relatively young Two-House community today is broad, and as such there are a wide array of proponents that teach about the restoration of all Israel. Each proponent espouses his or her own version of the teaching about the Two Houses of Israel and the application of it to individuals' lives. **We are certainly no exception to this rule**, as our ministry has its own understanding of the Two Houses of Israel, and may present it differently than others (particularly, as an overlooked component of Israel's restoration in the eschaton.)³ However, the Two-House teaching, as it is commonly called, is challenging many Believers today and what they have been taught in the past, forcing them to search some forgotten passages of Scripture.

Many Christians are familiar with the Hebraic or Jewish Roots of our faith, and what has been termed Messianic Judaism or the Messianic Jewish movement. (My own family was first exposed to Messianic things via Messianic Judaism in 1995.) While there are many similarities between Messianic Judaism and the Two-House sub-movement that has been emerging, there are some differences. Considering the fact that many of you are probably familiar with Messianic beliefs because of Messianic Judaism, it is important that we briefly discuss some of the differences that exist.

The major contrast between Messianic Judaism and the Two-House community is the fact that *equality between all* Believers is something that is more clearly emphasized among Two-House proponents, but not necessarily among all in Messianic Judaism (cf. Galatians 3:28; Colossians 3:11). Messianic Judaism, by-and-large, adheres to the dispensational belief that God has two groups of elect: Israel and the Church. Messianic Judaism, comprised of Jewish Believers, largely advocates that these Jewish Believers can be a part of both groups, considering Israel to only be composed of the Jewish people.⁴ Messianic Judaism on the whole does not believe that non-Jews are required to consider themselves as "Israel," and for that same matter live as Israel in obedience to the Torah (cf. Numbers 15:16).

Contrary to this, the Two-House community holds to the idea that God has only *one* group of elect: the Commonwealth of Israel (Ephesians 2:11-12). This Israel is made up of Jewish Believers and non-Jewish Believers, constituting the "one new man" (Ephesians 2:15) or "one new humanity" (NRSV/CJB) brought forth in Messiah. We advocate that many, **but not all**, non-Jewish Believers entering into the Messianic movement *may* be descendants of the scattered Northern Kingdom of Israel/Ephraim that was taken into Assyrian captivity in 722-721 B.C.E., being assimilated into the nations. This is unlike the Southern Kingdom of Judah, which was taken into Babylonian captivity and returned to the Land of Israel, whose descendants are today's Jewish people. Many non-Jewish Believers have been drawn into Messianic congregations in recent days and have embraced their Hebraic Roots, joining with Jewish Believers who have recognized Yeshua as Messiah.

We believe that in our day the Father has started to reunite the House of Judah with the scattered House of Israel/Ephraim in fulfillment of some distinct end-time Bible prophecies.⁵ While many in Messianic Judaism do not accept this at present, it is factual nonetheless that many Orthodox Jews believe in the regathering of all Israel before the coming of the Messiah. *EJ* notes, "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."⁶ Our ministry tries its best to place the reunion of all Israel within the Jewish eschatological expectation,⁷ and we also strongly encourage non-Jewish Messianics to respect their Jewish spiritual and theological heritage.⁸

³ Consult the author's book *When Will the Messiah Return?*

⁴ Cf. David H. Stern, *Messianic Jewish Manifesto* (Clarksville, MD: Jewish New Testament Publications, 1991),

25.

⁵ Including, but not limited to: Isaiah 11:12-16; Jeremiah 10:6-10; Ezekiel 37:15-28; Zechariah 10:6-10.

⁶ Louis Isaac Rabinowitz, "Ten Lost Tribes," in *EJ*.

⁷ As Nahum M. Sarna observes for Haftarah *Va-Yiggash* (Genesis 44:18-47:27; Ezekiel 37:15-28),

"[This text] focuses on settlement in the Land, and the new sanctuary. The elements of ingathering, monarchy, repurification, and Temple building constitute the main configuration of messianic hope for ancient Israel and for subsequent Jewish generations...[A] recurrent theme is 'permanence,' expressed as a permanent change from the past

Controversial Issues that Exist

It is an understatement to say that the Two-House teaching (*or* a Two-House teaching) is controversial, especially in light of the many groups that have addressed this subject matter in the past, and their false teachings—varying from British-Israel to Christian Identity heresies.⁹ But the Two-House teaching should not be another manifestation of these groups, contrary to what some might say, because we are **not** exclusively a non-Jewish movement and are not all anti-Semites. Jewish people are involved every bit as much as non-Jews are, and this teaching is (often) rooted in the Jewish expectations of the Last Days.¹⁰ We recognize that both the Church and the Synagogue have had a part to play in God's eternal plan, and at the same time *both* the Church *and* the Synagogue have had their shortcomings as human institutions.

Is it merely a coincidence that in our day—unlike any other time in history—that many Jewish people are coming to faith in Messiah Yeshua, and non-Jewish Believers are turning toward their Hebraic Roots and are becoming Torah obedient? Is this happening just by circumstance? Or, is it happening because all of Israel is in the process of being gathered together as the return of Yeshua draws near? (At the very least, if one is a non-Jewish Believer in the Messianic community, we do know that the Torah is to go forth from Zion to the nations.)¹¹

The critical questions that many non-Jewish Believers who enter into the Messianic movement have had to ask are: **Does Israel exclusively make up the Jewish people? Can I be a part of Israel too?**

Our Heavenly Father is seeking only *one* people for His own possession (Deuteronomy 4:20; Titus 2:14; 1 Peter 2:9). He wants all to be a part of that people—the redeemed, collective nation of Israel! It is the high, holy calling of God's people to take actions that will result in the fulfillment of the Disciples' question of Acts 1:6: "Lord, is it at this time You are restoring the kingdom to Israel?" (cf. Matthew 6:10). What we do today affects tomorrow, and as we seek to please the Lord in how we practice our faith, it should hopefully be in the light of seeing Israel's Kingdom restored—something that *does involve* more than just the Jewish people, or even scattered Israel/Ephraim in the nations (Isaiah 49:6). If Israel will only find itself fully restored until the Messiah returns, then it is certainly a restoration that will affect the entire world!

These compelling ideas, as can and should be expected, create new questions that need to be examined. It is a subject matter that will not go away *if it indeed* involves Biblical prophecies awaiting their completion.

Who are the Two Houses of Israel?

Ancient Israel reached its zenith during the time of King David and King Solomon. But after Solomon's death and with the reign of his son Rehoboam, the Kingdom of Israel split into two separate Kingdoms, also referred to as Houses. These two Kingdoms are referred to as the Southern Kingdom of Judah and the Northern Kingdom of Israel throughout the Tanach (Old

and as a vision of a permanent future" (in David L. Lieber, ed., *Etz Hayim: Torah and Commentary* [New York: The Rabbinical Assembly, 2001], 290).

⁸ In contrast to this, there are various Two-House teachers who do not extend a great deal of respect to our Jewish spiritual and theological heritage. Consult the author's article "Anti-Semitism in the Two-House Movement."

⁹ Consult the FAQ on the TNN website "British, word of Hebrew origin"; Bruce Hoffman, *Inside Terrorism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998), 112; Walter R. Martin, *The Kingdom of the Cults* (Minneapolis: Bethany House, 1985), pp 303-337.

These references all summarize varied aberrant doctrines that today's Two-House sub-movement would do well to steer clear of. And, this would notably also include any kind of pseudo-history trying to trace where "this tribe" or "that tribe" was scattered, as the affirmation of the text of Scripture is only that Israel/Ephraim is "out there." **God alone** is responsible for identifying any non-Jewish person as being of scattered Israel in the eschaton (Amos 9:7; cf. Genesis 48:16, Heb.).

¹⁰ At least, this is true of the emphasis of our ministry. Sadly, there are some Two-House organizations, which early on spoke out against British-Israelism and other heresies, and later via flatteries allowed proponents of these false doctrines into their ranks and leadership to swell their numbers.

¹¹ Isaiah 2:3; Micah 4:2.

Testament), the latter also known as Joseph or Ephraim. For the sake of the Two-House teaching, they are usually just called Judah and Ephraim.

1 Kings 11:7-11¹² tells us that King Solomon sought after strange women and the worship of gods other than the Holy One of Israel. As a consequence of his idolatry, the Lord told Solomon, “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 11:12-13). We are further told in 1 Kings 11:29-32 that Jeroboam, at one time Solomon’s high servant, was the one to whom the Lord would give ten tribes, affecting a split in the Kingdom of Israel:

“It came about at that time, when Jeroboam went out of Jerusalem, that the prophet Ahijah the Shilonite found him on the road. Now Ahijah had clothed himself with a new cloak; and both of them were alone in the field. Then Ahijah took hold of the new cloak which was on him and tore it into twelve pieces. He said to Jeroboam, “Take for yourself ten pieces; for thus says the LORD, the God of Israel, “Behold, I will tear the kingdom out of the hand of Solomon and give you ten tribes (but he will have one tribe, for the sake of My servant David and for the sake of Jerusalem, the city which I have chosen from all the tribes of Israel).””

For the sake of King David, whom the Lord loved, the Southern Kingdom of Judah would remain sovereign and keep Jerusalem. This time in Ancient Israel, which began in approximately 922 B.C.E., is commonly called the Divided Kingdom period. The Israelites were split into Two Kingdoms of Israel: Israel/Ephraim in the North, and Judah in the South. This division was from God, and the Southern Kingdom Israelites were prevented by Him from attempting to reconquer the Northern Kingdom:

“It came about when all Israel [the Northern Kingdom] heard that Jeroboam had returned, that they sent and called him to the assembly and made him king over all Israel. None but the tribe of Judah followed the house of David. Now when Rehoboam had come to Jerusalem, he assembled all the house of Judah and the tribe of Benjamin, 180,000 chosen men who were warriors, to fight against the house of Israel to restore the kingdom to Rehoboam the son of Solomon” (1 Kings 12:20-21).

These two separate Kingdoms had two separate monarchies, they switched between worshipping the Holy One of Israel and false gods, and they frequently warred with one another (cf. 1 Kings 14:30; 15:16; 2 Kings 15:37; 16:5-6).¹³ In modern terms, both the Northern Kingdom of Israel/Ephraim and the Southern Kingdom of Judah were two separate “states” of Israel. This continued until the Assyrian Empire finally conquered the Northern Kingdom in 722-721 B.C.E., taking many of its people into captivity.¹⁴ When this happened, the Northern Kingdom exiles were absorbed into the mass of Assyria through displacement and forced intermarriage. It was never corporately heard from again, as the Assyrians intermingled peoples that they conquered to reduce the likelihood of rebellion against them.¹⁵ One the end-time expectations of the Prophets is the reunion of the scattered remnants of the Northern Kingdom with Judah.¹⁶

¹² “Then Solomon built a high place for Chemosh the detestable idol of Moab, on the mountain which is east of Jerusalem, and for Molech the detestable idol of the sons of Ammon. Thus also he did for all his foreign wives, who burned incense and sacrificed to their gods. Now the LORD was angry with Solomon because his heart was turned away from the LORD, the God of Israel, who had appeared to him twice, and had commanded him concerning this thing, that he should not go after other gods; but he did not observe what the LORD had commanded. 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.’”

¹³ Consult the author’s entry for the Books of Kings in *A Survey of the Tanach for the Practical Messianic* for a further summary.

¹⁴ “Assyria exiled many residents of the northern kingdom in 722 B.C.E.” (Jacob Neusner and William Scott Green, eds., *Dictionary of Judaism in the Biblical Period* [Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2002], 322), presumably large enough for the Prophets to foresee a time in the future when they (whomever they would be) would need to be reunited with Judah.

¹⁵ As Biblical archaeologist Siegfried H. Horn attests,

The Southern Kingdom of Judah similarly fell into idolatry and rebellion against God, being taken into exile by the Babylonian Empire in a series of dispersions from 597-587 B.C.E. But the exiles of Judah, unlike Ephraim, corporately returned to the Land of Israel in 539 B.C.E. after the Persian Empire conquered the Babylonians, as is recorded in the testimonies at the end of Chronicles and in Ezra-Nehemiah.

When we read in the Scriptures of “Judah and Israel” or “Judah and Ephraim” or some combination thereof, and sometimes we read just “Judah” or “Israel” by themselves (contingent on context), the Two Houses of Israel are often being referred to. It is very interesting that we be aware that even prior to King Saul ascending to power a division between “Judah and Israel” existed (cf. Joshua 11:21; Judges 10:9; 1 Samuel 11:8), implying that there was probably some kind of division or preferential groupings long before the Divided Kingdom era.

Let “All” the House of Israel Know

There are those who believe that the reunification of Judah and Ephraim has already taken place in past history, and that the basic Two-House view of this as a future event is misplaced. One of the contentions that “all Israel” has been reunited concerns statements made in the Tanach that regard “all Israel.” But a careful reading does not conclusively prove that Judah and scattered Israel/Ephraim have been fully reunited. This is a convenient way for those who do not wish to examine the subject matter in any detail to dismiss it.

Perhaps the most significant reference to be considered is seen at an oath taking ceremony, where the returned Jewish exiles were forbidden from intermarrying local pagans. Ezra 10:5 tells us, “Then Ezra rose and made the leading priests, the Levites and all Israel, take oath that they would do according to this proposal; so they took the oath.” According to some, because this event took place after the Babylonian exile, all Israel—both the Northern and Southern Kingdoms—were reunited because “all Israel” is mentioned. Yet a study of significant end-time prophecies that speak of the Two Houses of Israel demonstrates that the Two Houses have not been reunited. The *kol Yisrael* (כָּל־יִשְׂרָאֵל) mentioned here in Ezra is *all Israel present at this event*. This may have included some survivors from the Northern Kingdom who had not been assimilated into the Assyrian Empire, and joined with the Jewish exiles, but there is still a significant prophetic expectation that cannot now be disregarded.⁷

If the Two Houses of Israel have been reunited, then what of the prophecy of Ezekiel 37:25-28?

“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

“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)” (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).

⁶ Consult varied entries on the Prophets in the author’s workbook *A Survey of the Tanach for the Practical Messianic*.

⁷ Consider how 1 Kings 12:20 speaks of “all Israel,” and it is not “all Israel” in the sense of *both* the Northern and Southern Kingdoms: “It came about when all Israel heard that Jeroboam had returned, that they sent and called him to the assembly and made him king over all Israel. None but the tribe of Judah followed the house of David.” In this verse “all Israel” referred to is the Northern Kingdom of Israel/Ephraim. In a similar manner, Ezra 10:5 does not refer to “all Israel” but only those of the Southern Kingdom. Context should always determine when “all Israel” is being referred to.

My people. And the nations will know that I am the LORD who sanctifies Israel, when My sanctuary is in their midst forever.”

Has this prophecy been fulfilled? Is God’s Sanctuary established in the Land of Israel for all the nations of the world to see? Also consider the fact that Ezekiel 37:24 plainly states, “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.” “David” is a reference to the Messiah. If indeed the Two Houses of Israel were reunited in past history, then Messiah Yeshua would be present in Jerusalem *right now* ruling and reigning over the world. (At the very least, we would see Israel in a position of significant prominence and respect in the world.) But He has not yet returned, and we are still waiting for the complete reunion of all Israel and the mighty acts that it involves.¹⁸

Popular author Tim LaHaye tells us, in regard to Bible prophecy, “The Kingdom of David and Solomon split in 931 B.C., becoming Israel and Judah, all tribes are represented and the nation will be united.”¹⁹ John F. Walvoord observes in his *Every Prophecy of the Bible*, “The situation where these two kingdoms were divided will end, and as this and other prophecies predict, the two kingdoms will become one nation (cf. Jer. 3:18; 23:5-6; 30:3; Hosea 1:11; Amos 9:11). No fulfillment has ever been recorded in history, and the future regathering of Israel will occur in the Millennium.”²⁰ These two dispensationalists recognize some level of future fulfillment that cannot go unaddressed.²¹

In our day many of us believe the Two Houses of Israel are in the process of being reunited in fulfillment of critical end-time prophecies. They are being reunited as many Jewish people of the House of Judah turn to faith in Messiah Yeshua, and many non-Jewish Believers (perhaps of that scattered House of Israel/Ephraim?), turn toward their Hebraic Roots and embrace the truths of God’s Torah. Many of us are honestly trying to answer the question, “Will you not show us what you mean by these?” (Ezekiel 37:18, RSV). We do not know if we will be direct or indirect participants, but we are certainly inquiring of our Heavenly Father to know what is going on and what He wants us to do.²²

Where are the references in the New Testament about the Two Houses of Israel?

Many can come to the conclusion that the Apostolic Scriptures do not speak or allude in any way, shape, or form, to all Israel. There are, however, allusions to the Two Houses of Israel in the New Testament that can be found. Some of them are quite obvious via some intertextuality, and some of them you have to look for as they may be indirect. No theologian I have read ever claims that support for the evangelism of the Gentiles is *not*, at least in some way, rooted within the ancient Jewish expectation of Israel’s eschatological restoration in the Tanach. With that in mind, here are some examples to be considered:

¹⁸ Take important note of the fact that the Two-House reunification involves the companions of Judah and Ephraim. This means that more people than *solely* physical Israelites are involved—those who have joined themselves to either House are involved and are thus considered native of Israel. This means that *all* who are a part of the Commonwealth of Israel, regardless of ethnicity, are a part of the restoration process.

¹⁹ LaHaye, *Tim LaHaye Prophecy Study Bible*, 873.

²⁰ Walvoord, *Every Prophecy of the Bible*, pp 186-187.

²¹ Referring to Ezekiel 37:15-28, Tim Hegg, who is not an advocate of “the” or “a” Two-House teaching, still must observe how “the Scriptures make it clear that in the end times three groups, not two, are gathered to faith in the One true God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. These three groups are Judah, Israel, and the nations” (*The Two House Theory: Three Fatal Flaws. Torah Resource*. Retrieved 30 March, 2009, from <<http://torahresource.com>>), which at least acknowledges some level of future prophetic fulfillment to be completed.

I agree with his statement that the Two-House restoration is *not limited* to just Judah and scattered Israel/Ephraim, but also the nations—a **point requiring clarification among many proponents**.

²² For a further analysis of Ezekiel 37:15-28, consult the author’s exegetical paper “Have the Two Sticks Been Reunited?”

In both Acts 2:39 and Ephesians 2:13 we are told of those who are and were “far off,” a possible reference to the scattered tribes:

“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).

“But now in Messiah Yeshua you who formerly were **far off** have been brought near by the blood of Messiah” (Ephesians 2:13).²³

Those gathered for *Shavuot*/Pentecost composed Jews from all over the known world (Acts 2:5, 9-11). Peter refers to those gathered as “you,” their children not in attendance, *and* those “far off”—three categories of people. It is this third category of “far off” people which can include (but not exclusively) those of scattered Israel/Ephraim. Yeshua was challenged, “Where does this man intend to go that we will not find Him? He is not intending to go to the Dispersion among the Greeks, and teach the Greeks, is He?” (John 7:35). In the Second Century B.C.E. an Apocryphal quote indicates, “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), at least referring to a view that some of scattered Israel/Ephraim could have been in the immediate Mediterranean Diaspora. The salvation of the nations in the First Century may have included *just a little more* than just the redemption of “Gentiles,” recognized here or there in part by the Apostles.

We see this expressed within the deliberations of the Jerusalem Council, as the salvation of the nations is regarded as being a part of Israel’s restoration. In Acts 15:19, James the Just speaks of those who are “returning” (Grk. *epistrephō*, ἐπιστρέφω)²⁴ to God from “among the Gentiles,” quoting Amos 9:11-12 (LXX)²⁵ as his proof. He also addresses his epistle to the twelve tribes in the Diaspora:

“Therefore it is my judgment that we do not trouble those who are **turning** to God from among the Gentiles” (Acts 15:19).

“James, a bond-servant of God and of the Lord Yeshua the Messiah, **to the twelve tribes who are dispersed abroad**: Greetings” (James 1:1).

It would be a mistake for us to think that James’ comments on the nations’ reception of the gospel is only an unforeseen side-effect of Yeshua’s arrival, especially if the issue is indeed God’s rebuilding of the Tabernacle of David (Acts 15:16). The Tabernacle of David is surely representative of Israel in all its fullness, as “David” is to rule over Israel when the Two Houses are reunited (Ezekiel 37:25). In Matthew 16:18, when Yeshua says “upon this rock I will build My [assembly],” the future verb *oikodomēsō* (οἰκοδομήσω) is the same exact word that appears in the Septuagint translation of Jeremiah 33:7. This is where the Lord says, “I will restore the fortunes of Judah and the fortunes of Israel and will rebuild [בָּנֵה, *banah*] them as they were at first.” This is

²³ This reference is rightly more concerned with the nations’ lack of knowing the God of Israel (Ephesians 2:12b) and His salvation, than trying to determine the specific ethnicity of any person. Non-Jewish Believers, because of faith in Israel’s Messiah, do have membership within the Commonwealth of Israel (2:11, 19)—be they of scattered Israel/Ephraim or not (cf. Galatians 6:16).

Consult the author’s detailed examination of the larger context in his commentary *Ephesians for the Practical Messianic*.

²⁴ The verb *epistrephō* can mean “to return to a point where one has been, **turn around, go back**” (BDAG, 382).

²⁵ The most notable difference between the Hebrew MT and Greek LXX is how *Edom* (עֲדוֹם) is rendered as *anthrōpos* (ἄνθρωπος) or “mankind/humanity,” as *Edom* is closely related to *adam* (אָדָם), likewise meaning “mankind/humanity.”

“In that day I will raise up the tabernacle of David that is fallen, and will rebuild the ruins of it, and will set up the parts thereof that have been broken down, and will build it up as in the ancient days: that the remnant of men, and all the Gentiles upon whom my name is called, may earnestly seek *me*, saith the Lord who does all these things” (Amos 9:11-12, LXI).

the last thing that would indicate Yeshua's intention to create a separate "Church,"²⁶ but instead the Messiah bringing Israel into its fullness. The nations, either as welcome companions *or* including members of scattered Ephraim/Israel in their ranks, were expected to be involved in the restoration of Israel. For as Isaiah foretold,

"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" (Isaiah 49:6).

The restoration of Israel was to be something that was a very inclusive process, as the rebuilding of David's Tabernacle involves many different aspects. James' selection of Amos 9:11-12 was a very wise one as it would encompass a variety of interrelated concepts. And, if anyone is tempted to think that his reference "to the twelve tribes who are dispersed abroad" is *only* indicative of a Jewish audience, most conservative commentators are agreed that James' letter was heard by non-Jews as well. Whether of scattered Israel or not, James would have considered such people as a part of David's Tabernacle and of the "faith" of the twelve tribes.²⁷

The fullness of what Israel was to be is a theme picked up by Paul in his letter to the Romans, as he recognizes that the nations have been more receptive to the gospel than his own Jewish brethren. He says, "salvation *has come* to the Gentiles, to make them jealous" (Romans 11:11), and urges such non-Jewish Believers to not be arrogant against the natural branches that make up Israel's olive tree (Romans 11:17-18), further stating that his own Jewish people have an irrevocable calling (Romans 11:29). Non-Jewish people who partake of a salvation originating in Israel have a great deal of respect to show the Jewish people. In God's plan of salvation history, the Apostle Paul asserts that a mystery regarding Israel is at work:

"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).

The fact that Paul refers to this happening as a "mystery," is an important clue that a simplistic explanation will not work. The entering in of "the fullness of the Gentiles" must occur within the overall framework of Israel's salvation. Most of today's interpreters of Romans 11:25 assume that Paul refers only to "the full number of the Gentiles" (RSV/NIV), based in a Calvinistic view of this being a set number of individual non-Jews predetermined by God for salvation. The fault of this view is that within Romans (11:12; 13:10; 15:29) and elsewhere in Paul's letters (Ephesians 3:19; 4:13), *plērōma* (πλήρωμα) largely relates to "moral or spiritual consummation"²⁸—as opposed to it being the "full number" of anything.²⁹

Non-Jewish Believers are required by Paul to be conduits of God's mercy to Jews who have rejected the gospel (Romans 11:31), so "the fullness of the Gentiles" must involve some aspect of their spiritual character. Paul applies Tanach expectations regarding the salvation and forgiveness of Israel (Isaiah 59:20-21; Jeremiah 31:33) to the experience of these non-Jewish Believers in Romans 11:26-27, which would be odd if they were just non-Jewish Believers saved for no definite purpose. Could it be that once they have become the fullness of what Israel was called to be—namely a nation of priests that can be a light to the world (i.e., Exodus 19:5-6; Isaiah 42:6; cf. 1 Peter 2:9)—then the salvation of all Israel could finally be manifest? In order for this to happen, it would mean that non-Jewish Believers have to reach toward a trajectory of being "the

²⁶ Consult the author's previous remarks in Chapter 2, "When Did 'the Church' Begin?"

²⁷ For a further examination, consult the author's commentary *James for the Practical Messianic*, especially in terms of the parallels between some of his ethical teaching and those of the Greco-Roman moralists, and how they would have affected the makeup of his audience.

²⁸ D.S. Lim, "Fullness," in Gerald F. Hawthorne, Ralph P. Martin, and Daniel G. Reid, eds., *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1993), 319.

²⁹ BDAG provides the definition, "**that which is brought to fullness or completion**" (p 829).

Romans 11:25 is noted under the sub-heading of "**full number**" for the BDAG entry, although the second sub-heading offers the view of it being "**sum total, fullness**, even (super)abundance."

fullness,” thus making the Jewish people jealous for salvation in Yeshua! This is something yet to fully happen.

How this involves the Two Houses of Israel is rather unique, as the description *to plērōma tōn ethnōn* (τὸ πλήρωμα τῶν ἐθνῶν) only appears in Romans 11:25. The closest Tanach equivalent appears in the Patriarch Jacob’s prophecy to his son Ephraim, where he says “his descendants shall become a **multitude of nations**” (Genesis 48:19). Ephraim, this *melo ha’goyim* (מֵלֶךְ הַגּוֹיִם), would become a designation for the Northern Kingdom of Israel, being scattered into the nations via the punishment of Assyria. Because most of today’s Romans’ interpreters are so dominated by the common Reformed perspective of “the fullness of the Gentiles” involving some kind of predestination, it is almost impossible to find anyone who has explored this point of view. However, the great Methodist commentator Adam Clarke did once note,

“The words πλήρωμα τῶν ἐθνῶν may be borrowed from the מֵלֶךְ הַגּוֹיִם *melo haggoyim*, a multitude of nations, which the Septuagint translate by πλῆθος ἐθνῶν. By the πλήρωμα, or fullness, a great multitude may be intended, which should be so dilated on every hand as to fill various regions.”³⁰

The LXX did render *melo ha’goyim* with the slightly different *plēthos ethnōn* (πλῆθος ἐθνῶν) in Genesis 48:19, simply meaning a “multitude of nations” (LXE). The adaptation of Tanach quotations to make a theological point is not odd at all within the Pauline letters. His indication in Romans 11:25 that this is all a “mystery,” is a good clue as to why *ton plērōma tōn ethnōn* appears.³¹ It is not enough that a large scattered group of Israel out in the nations come back into the fold; they have a specific job to do that involves their maturation and being conduits of God’s mercy to the Jewish people. While “the fullness of the Gentiles” may first be a reference to the spiritual character of such people who will enter into the fold, a secondary reference to scattered Israel being involved in this can definitely be seen.

Paul also writes about God calling out a people “not from among Jews only, but also from among Gentiles” (Romans 9:24), the two groups of people that make up the “one new humanity” (Ephesians 2:15, NRSV/CJB). His substantiation for God’s calling of this unique people (Romans 9:25-26) is based in the prophecies of Hosea 2:23 and 1:10. God will say to them “You are My people!” (Hosea 2:23), in spite of them—“the sons of Israel”—being “like the sand of the sea” (Hosea 1:10) because of sin scattering them. This all concerns how “the sons of Judah and the sons of Israel will be gathered together” (Hosea 1:11) and restored by God. Paul goes on to say that “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’” (Romans 9:27; cf. Isaiah 10:22).

Here, we see Paul taking prophecies that involve the restoration of Israel, and applying them not only to Jewish Believers, but also to non-Jewish Believers. This only reinforces the fact that *more* was at work in the First Century than *just* the salvation of the nations. God’s bigger plan involved an in-process restoration of Israel—even if it is all a “mystery” that will have to be dissected in the eschaton and explained to us by the Lord Himself!

The Apostle Peter also saw no problems in quoting and applying Tanach prophecies that regarded the restoration of all Israel, to the salvation of the nations in his day. His first epistle was directed to a broad audience of Believers in Asia Minor (1 Peter 1:1), many of whom had specifically been involved in paganism: “As obedient children, do not be conformed to the former lusts *which were yours* in your ignorance” (1 Peter 1:14). This would be a definite indication of a large number of non-Jewish Believers as readers, as he further says, “Beloved, I urge you as aliens and strangers to abstain from fleshly lusts which wage war against the soul” (1 Peter 2:11). He neither wants the former pagans among his audience, nor any Jewish Believers, to fall into sin. They are only sojourners in the world that are to reflect a different way of living.

³⁰ Adam Clarke’s *Commentary on the Bible*. E-Sword 8.0.5. MS Windows 9x. Franklin, TN: Equipping Ministries Foundation, 2008.

³¹ It is notable that modern Hebrew New Testaments such as UBSHNT do not hesitate to render *ton plērōma tōn ethnōn* as *melo ha’goyim*.

The reason Peter did not wish his audience to fall into sin is not just because God said so, but 1 Peter 2:11 is instead prefaced with some very important words:

“you are A CHOSEN RACE, A royal PRIESTHOOD, A HOLY NATION, A PEOPLE FOR *God's* OWN POSSESSION, so that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light; for you 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 2:9-10).

In these two verses, we see an entire series of Tanach passages referred to, including in order: Deuteronomy 7:6; 10:15; Exodus 19:6; Isaiah 61:6; 43:21; Deuteronomy 4:20; 14:2; and Hosea 2:23.³² Peter's immediate concern is obviously for the spiritual character and proper lifestyle of his audience. They have a special calling upon them that is very serious for them to fulfill. Yet in explaining this, Peter does not hesitate to use prophecies that regard the Two Houses of Israel, applying them to groups of Believers that involved non-Jews.

One of the most direct references to the Two Houses of Israel in the Apostolic Scriptures is seen in Hebrews. The author of Hebrews affirms how the New Covenant is made “WITH THE HOUSE OF ISRAEL AND WITH THE HOUSE OF JUDAH” (Hebrews 8:8; cf. Jeremiah 31:31, LXX), one of the most direct statements regarding the restoration of all Israel in the Apostolic Scriptures. (This New Covenant also involves God writing His Law onto the hearts of His people, as opposed to the New Covenant somehow making the Torah obsolete.)³³

Finally, the Apostle John tells us in Revelation 7:4 that “I heard the number of those who were sealed, one hundred and forty-four thousand sealed from every tribe of the sons of Israel,” as the 144,000 sealed servants are from all twelve tribes of Israel, and not just the Jewish people.

It may be difficult for some to see at first, but there are indeed allusions to all Israel in the Apostolic Scriptures. Some of these may *only* be passing or indirect references, and some may be quite direct, but they nevertheless cannot be ignored. Understanding what these mean in a fuller Biblical context will be an important task as the Messianic community grows and as the Two-House teaching becomes more refined.³⁴

If all of God's people are a part of Israel, then have we all stumbled over the Messiah?

The Prophet Isaiah tells us concerning the Messiah, “Then He shall become a sanctuary; but to both the houses of Israel, a stone to strike and a rock to stumble over, *and* a snare and a trap for the inhabitants of Jerusalem” (Isaiah 8:14).

One of the roles that we all have as Messianic Believers is to not only participate in the reunion of all Israel—but we must see that Israel is reunited *in Messiah Yeshua!* Suffice it to say, from the groups of people that will be or are being reunited, primarily Jews and Christians, are diverse views and opinions about the One who throughout history has been known as Jesus Christ. A great deal of Judaism sees Yeshua the Messiah as a heretic, or a made up Greco-Roman “god man” of mythology, unworthy of their worship.³⁵ Much of today's Christianity, although seeing Him as the Savior of the world, also sees Yeshua as the person whose job it was to abolish

³² Kurt Aland, et. al., *The Greek New Testament, Fourth Revised Edition* (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft/United Bible Societies, 1998), pp 788-789.

³³ For a further discussion, consult the excursus on “the Two Houses of Israel in the Apostolic Scriptures,” in the author's commentary *Hebrews for the Practical Messianic*.

³⁴ This writer finds that he has a wide variety of exegetical papers in store as more detailed investigations of these, and other Scriptures, **are required**. Note that he is currently in the process of categorizing a number of Two-House related promises, prophecies, and Scriptures regarding Israel's mission. This will hopefully form the basis of a series of articles where the passages regarding Israel's restoration can be dissected and discussed more thoroughly.

³⁵ Do note that worship of Yeshua the Messiah, within the context of First Century Jewish monotheism as LORD, is something that has been thoroughly documented by today's theologians. Consult especially Larry W. Hurtado, *Lord Jesus Christ: Devotion to Jesus in Earliest Christianity* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003).

the Old Testament Law of Moses, something that the Jewish people cannot accept.³⁶ *These two errant viewpoints must be overcome.*

The Apostle Paul tells us that when the “the fullness of the nations” is brought in—a trajectory of great spiritual fullness—then the “partial hardening” (Romans 11:25) that all Israel has experienced will be removed. He also writes that the salvation of God has come to the nations or Gentiles—where scattered Israel/Ephraim had gone—to provoke the Jewish people, the remnant of Israel, to jealousy for Messiah:

“I say then, they did not stumble so as to fall, did they? May it never be! But by their transgression salvation *has come* to the Gentiles, to make them jealous” (Romans 11:11).

When we commonly hear of non-Jewish Believers provoking Jewish people to jealousy for faith in the Messiah, how is this supposed to occur? History proves that a great number of the methods historical Christianity has used to present Jewish people with the gospel have largely failed. Evangelical Christianity today has also not been that successful at presenting Jewish people with the gospel as well (unless they are non-religious Jews). So how must we do it?

Unfortunately, when many Jewish people think of “Christianity,” they think of the false practices (and outright idolatry) of much Roman Catholicism, and/or they think of a messiah that abrogated the Torah of Moses. Those of us from evangelical Protestant backgrounds readily know how much of Catholicism is non-Biblical, but sadly today’s Protestants, even while spurning the opulence of Catholicism, have largely not been in compliance with Yeshua’s words regarding God’s Torah. He made it quite clear that “until heaven and earth pass away, not the smallest letter or stroke shall pass from the Law until all is accomplished” (Matthew 5:18).

If we think all has been accomplished, then we have not taken His words very seriously as we are not in the restored Kingdom of God on Earth. Consider the fact that our Lord also 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). Sadly, there may be many in the Kingdom of Heaven who end up being least.³⁷

Certainly, we are not suggesting that non-Jewish Believers (who may be of the scattered House of Israel/Ephraim) adopt a strictly “Jewish” lifestyle that is more consistent with Orthodox Judaism than Holy Scripture to provoke Jews to jealousy.³⁸ However, a true restoration of all Israel will include a return to the Torah on the part of scattered Ephraim (Jeremiah 31:18-19), and the Law is to go forth to all nations (Isaiah 2:3; Micah 4:2). In order to provoke Jewish people to jealousy for faith in the Messiah, it is important for such non-Jewish Believers (1) to show Jews that we have something—notably Someone, Yeshua—that they need, and (2) identify with Biblical practices that most of Christianity has falsely considered to only be “Jewish.” These Biblical practices, at the very least, include keeping the seventh-day Sabbath, the appointed times of Leviticus 23, and eating kosher.³⁹ We must all live a Torah-obedient lifestyle like Messiah Yeshua and the early Believers, putting whatever our Christian contemporaries may say aside. And in so doing, we must demonstrate lives of great spiritual fulfillment and peace—*things that our Jewish brethren should see and desire!*

This form of “evangelism” will be accomplished not by standing on the streets of Tel Aviv handing out tracts, but instead as Yeshua taught, “Let your light shine before men in such a way that they may see your good works...” (Matthew 5:16). It is accomplished by recognizing that God created each of us for good works (Ephesians 2:10), our outward obedience to Him testifying to others of the transformation that He has enacted within us *via His Son*.

The Prophet Jeremiah tells us, concerning returning Ephraim, “‘There is hope for your future,’ declares the LORD, ‘And *your* children will return to their own territory. I have surely

³⁶ Note that not all Christian traditions accept the view that Jesus Christ came to “fulfill and thus abolish” the Law of Moses. Consult the comments of Kaiser, *Toward Old Testament Ethics*, pp 307-314.

³⁷ For a further discussion of this issue, consult the author’s book *The New Testament Validates Torah*.

³⁸ Consult the author’s article “An Identity Crisis.”

³⁹ These three areas are discussed in order in Chapters 10, 11, and 12.

heard Ephraim grieving, “You have chastised me, and I was chastised, like an untrained calf; bring me back that I may be restored, for You are the LORD my God” (Jeremiah 31:17-18). We are specifically told, “For after I turned back, I repented; and after I was instructed, I smote on *my* thigh; I was ashamed and also humiliated because I bore the reproach of my youth” (Jeremiah 31:19). When those of scattered Ephraim— *perhaps* among Christians today entering into the Messianic community—recognize that they are a part of the Commonwealth of Israel and return into the fold, there will be a return to the Torah and God’s commandments. This returning Israel will indeed be “instructed,” and God’s plan of restoring all Israel can be completed.

When the Torah is observed in a very Messiah-focused manner, it is **then and only then** that this returning Ephraim (or any one of us, regardless of who we are) will be able to provoke Jewish people to jealousy for faith in Messiah Yeshua. When we can all come to a fuller consciousness of the entirety of God’s Word, our Jewish brethren should begin to see the Messiah for who He truly is as the Living Word of God. It is then that the blindness that is presently on the whole House of Israel can be lifted! Israel can then be everything that God has called it to be!⁴⁰

Part of the House of Israel, but not Jewish or of one of the Ten Lost Tribes?

Some non-Jewish Believers who are new to all of this wonder, “If Christianity is predominantly found within the scattered tribes of the Northern Kingdom, how can one be part of the House of Ephraim when I am not totally sure that I am a physical Israelite?” This is a valid concern, as it is sometimes based on the teachings of those who believe that Christianity is the scattered House of Israel/Ephraim. Allow me to summarize what our ministry teaches, which is somewhat different than what has become popularized.

Christianity is *not* the scattered House of Ephraim/Israel. The term “Christianity” in and of itself is very broad and it denotes a specific religious persuasion. Many who identify as “Christians” today could make up a large, if not the main sector, of those from scattered Israel/Ephraim that will be returning to the fold of Israel. However, this does not disclude Israel’s scattered seed among those who are part of pagan religions such as Islam, Hinduism, or Buddhism (cf. Jeremiah 16:19-21). It is logical, though, to assume that most of the reuniting that will occur between the Two Houses of Israel will be between Jews and Christians, as both Jews and Christians believe in the One True God of Israel and hold to a belief in the Messiah (whether or not they have all fully acknowledged Him at present). They also share the Tanach or Old Testament as common canonical Scripture.

Secondly, it is important that we realize that the doors for membership in Israel are open to all, not those who are just physical Israelites (cf. Isaiah 56:3). Let us review some critical points:

1. Ancient Israel was made up of the Two Kingdoms or Houses: the House of Judah and the House of Israel/Ephraim. The fact that the Northern Kingdom is called both Israel and Ephraim is a cause of confusion for many, especially as “Israel” is used for the nation as a whole, and sometimes, contingent on context, for Judah or the Jewish people.
2. The Commonwealth of Israel (Ephesians 2:12) or the Israel of God (Galatians 6:16) is the Body of Messiah of which all Believers in Him are a part. This includes those of the Southern Kingdom, the scattered Northern Kingdom, and all those who are truly “Gentiles” of absolutely no physical Israelite descent.⁴¹

⁴⁰ The author’s motif of God’s desiring an “Israel maximized” for His service in the world is explored thoroughly in his commentary *Ephesians for the Practical Messianic*.

⁴¹ The Commonwealth of Israel, at least as envisioned by the Apostle Paul, is much more of a tossed salad than a melting pot. As Christopher J.H. Wright summarizes,

“The image we might prefer for the Bible’s portrait of the nations is not a melting pot (in which all differences are blended together into a single alloy) but a salad bowl (in which all ingredients preserve their distinctive color,

3. In the end, all who are considered to be “Israel” must have faith in Yeshua the Messiah, the Savior of Israel.

The real issue at hand, here, is very simply what to do about the non-Israelites. Are they excluded from the gathering together and reunification of Judah and Ephraim? What about those who are not physically descended from either House of Israel? This has been another cause of contention for Two-House advocates, as some believe that the teaching of Judah and Ephraim *excludes* true Gentiles. And, such a view is only reinforced by Two-House advocates who almost exclusively use terms like “Judah and Ephraim,” not complimenting it at times with “all Israel,” or even “God’s people.” But such an exclusion is not the case when we review the prophecy of Ezekiel 37:16:

“And you, son of man, take for yourself one stick and write on it, ‘For Judah and for the sons of Israel, **his companions** [*chaveru*, חֲבֵרוֹ]; then take another stick and write on it, ‘For Joseph, the stick of Ephraim and all the house of Israel, **his companions** [*chaveru*, חֲבֵרוֹ].”

If you noticed carefully, in this prophecy of the two sticks, with each stick representing a separate House of Israel, is a reference to “his comrades” (ATS) or “his companions.” Judah and Ephraim’s associates, physical non-Israelites, are involved in this restoration, and thus they are considered to join themselves to one of the Two Houses as this is fulfilled. There is **no exclusion** from those who are physically non-Israelites in what is to occur—and neither is this a claim that one must be a physical Israelite to “be saved.”⁴² On the contrary, the restoration of all Israel is to be a very *inclusive* process.⁴³

If you do not see yourself as a part of Israel, are you not saved?

Sadly, there have been those in the ranks of the Two-House sub-movement who have made the understanding of Judah and Ephraim into a salvation issue (among other things). They have communicated statements that if you do not believe in this message then you cannot be saved or a Believer. This is something *that is wrong* and makes us look extremely “exclusive,” because this is **not** a salvation issue. It is, rather, an issue of what Israel’s end-time restoration fully involves. *Eschatology is peripheral theology*, meaning that one’s salvation is not directly affected by any position or opinion one holds.

Of course, simply because the message of the Two Houses of Israel is not a salvation issue, does not mean that there does not exist misunderstandings among many Christians and Messianic Jews in regard to Israel. Many do not see themselves as being a part of Israel, or for that same matter, even related to Israel. Some see Israel as only composing the Jewish people. Some actually see Messianic Jews as being closer to God than non-Jewish Believers, just by virtue of them being Jewish. And still, others in the Church want to replace Israel, claiming Israel’s blessings but almost none of Israel’s responsibilities. *Confusing, indeed!*

A separation of Israel and “the Church” has been a root cause of many serious doctrinal problems, the foremost of which are Christian antinomianism or a denial of the Torah or Law of Moses, and the popular doctrine of the pre-tribulation rapture. The separation of “the Church” and Israel has widely created a double standard that people have applied to an Eternal God, where He treats one group of people different from another—when in actuality we are all part of the *same human family*.⁴⁴ Israel just happens to be the vehicle by which God’s goodness and mercy is to be communicated to the whole world!

texture and taste). The new creation will preserve the rich diversity of the original creation, but purged of the sin-laden affects of the Fall. Or, the mission of God is not merely the salvation of innumerable souls but specifically the healing of the nations” (*The Mission of God: Unlocking the Bible’s Grand Narrative* [Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2006], 456).

⁴² For a further discussion, consult the author’s article “What About ‘the Gentiles?’”

⁴³ The restoration of Israel is *no less* an inclusive process than the Sabbath was intended to be. As Exodus 20:10 indicates, “you shall not do any work, you or your son or your daughter, your male or your female servant or your cattle or your sojourner who stays with you,” a command that is quite egalitarian. Israel’s mission was to *always* include others than just native Israelites.

⁴⁴ Consult the author’s article “Dispensationalism: Root Cause of Antinomianism.”

If there is any one concept that makes the Two-House community different from evangelical Christianity and Messianic Judaism at large, it is that we do reject the idea that God has two groups of elect. We do not believe that our Father has a separate group of elect known as “the Church” apart from Israel. We believe that He has only one group of which all Believers are a part: **Israel**. While not a salvation issue, a proper understanding of His elect is important when determining theology, how much of the Scriptures we are to follow, and the mission that the Lord has for us.

The Aliyah

One of the most compelling and controversial issues that the Two-House movement must face in the future concerns the prophesied ingathering of those from both Houses of Israel to the Land of Israel in the Middle East. We are plainly told in Scripture, “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).

This is not difficult for many Messianic Jews to understand. Their children may one day immigrate to the Land of Israel, no different than how Jewish friends or various colleagues already have. Yet to non-Jewish Believers, this does likely mean that Christians who may be part of scattered Israel—who today may not recognize themselves as such—could one day (or possibly their grandchildren or great-grandchildren) make *aliyah* or immigrate to the Promised Land. Additional Scriptures that speak of this ingathering are: Isaiah 11:12; Jeremiah 23:8; and Zechariah 10:6-10.

The questions surrounding this event are too lengthy to be discussed in this article, especially as this movement is still very much in its infancy. They will be discussed (properly!) as time moves forward, though. There should be no doubt that this ingathering plays a critical *and greatly overlooked* role in end-time Bible prophecy. We must consider the fact that Yeshua **may have not presently returned**—as many have expected—because people have failed to consider these prophecies of *both Houses of Israel* returning to the Land of Israel in their end-time scenarios.⁴⁵

As we consider the prophesied future *aliyah* of both Judah and Ephraim, we must be very tactful and cautious as some may try to immigrate to Israel prematurely.⁴⁶ *Some do seek to accelerate the fulfillment of prophecy*, even though the Messianic movement still has a great deal of spiritual and theological maturation ahead of it. We must seek the Lord and through His Holy Spirit contemplate the prophecies before us and proceed carefully.

Two-House Theology in a Nutshell

The primary elements of the Two-House teaching may be compiled in three short points:

1. The descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob possibly number in the many millions (Genesis 22:17; 35:11; Deuteronomy 1:10-11), and there are many more physical Israelites on Planet Earth than are given credit.
2. Ancient Israel was divided into two separate Kingdoms or Houses: Judah and Israel/Ephraim, the latter’s descendants becoming the fullness of the Gentiles/nations (Genesis 48:19; Romans 11:25).
3. In the end, all who have faith in Messiah Yeshua are part of the Israel of God (Galatians 6:17; cf. Romans 9:6). God’s plan of regathering Israel is a part of His plan to take the message of salvation to the entire world as His Kingdom is restored (Isaiah 49:6).

⁴⁵ For a further examination, consult the author’s book *When Will the Messiah Return?*

⁴⁶ Consult the author’s article “Who Restores the Kingdom?”

Where do you go from here?

It is an understatement to say that the message of Israel's restoration changes lives, for once you consider yourself a part of Israel, it changes your outlook on the Bible, the end-times, and above all your relationship with the God of Israel. It gives a person a renewed focus and mission, as the Divine mandate of Israel being a blessing to all should be embodied in a person's actions of faith (Exodus 19:6; Deuteronomy 4:6). Although this has been in the Scriptures for millennia, it is only now being widely discussed. It plays a critical role in how you choose to deal with the issues that we as God's people will have to face, as the return of Yeshua draws closer.

Will we treat the Two-House phenomenon as yet another stage in our faith's continued reformation? Or will we fall into the trap of those who have gone before and have attempted to address this issue, but have denied core Biblical doctrines and have derided the Jewish people? How will we live as Israel? Will we stand with the Lord? Or will we leave the regathering of all Israel to another generation *or century*? Will we truly seek to accomplish the "restoration of all things" (Acts 3:21)? How much work is there to really do?

These questions and many more are only a few that we will have to answer if all Israel is to be reunited as one people in Messiah Yeshua. Being a part of Israel demands responsibility. Are you willing to accept it? What great things await His people as He empowers us to fulfill the mandate He originally gave to Ancient Israel? Will we place the *right* emphasis upon *all* being welcome members of Israel, or we will be sidetracked by other issues?

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