

# What Is the Two-House Teaching?

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

One of the most exciting phenomena is occurring in our day: Believers in significant numbers have begun to address “the Lost Tribes” of Israel issue. 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. 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 perhaps 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 issues 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?

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 your life and how you view 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—to stand by Israel. But in light of the subject matter at hand, 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.” Notice that our Heavenly Father does not say He sanctifies “the Church.”

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?

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 understanding, some of its personal applications, and its end-time 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 is the Two-House teaching?

The relatively young Two-House community today is broad, and 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 Believers’ lives. **We are certainly no exception to this rule**, as our ministry has its own understanding of Israel and may present it differently than others. However, the Two-House teaching, as it is commonly called, is challenging many Believers today and what they have been taught in the past.

Many Christians are familiar with the Hebraic Roots of our faith (some use the term “Jewish Roots”) and what has been termed Messianic Judaism or the Messianic Jewish movement. While there are many similarities between Messianic Judaism and the Two-House Messianic

community, there are some differences. Considering the fact that most 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 most clearly emphasized among Two-House proponents, but not necessarily among all in Messianic Judaism. 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 Jews.<sup>1</sup> Messianic Judaism does not believe that non-Jews are required to consider themselves as “Israel,” or necessarily live as Israel in obedience to the Torah.

Contrary to this, the Two-House Messianic community holds to the idea that God has only *one* group of elect: the people of Israel. This Israel is made up of Jewish Believers and non-Jewish Believers. We advocate that many, but not all, non-Jewish Believers *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.

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 end-time Bible prophecy. 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.”<sup>2</sup>

## Controversial Issues that Exist

It is an understatement to say that the Two-House understanding 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. But the Two-House teaching is not another manifestation of these groups, contrary to what some might say, because we are **not** exclusively a non-Jewish movement and are not anti-Semites. Jewish people are involved every bit as much as non-Jews are, and this teaching is (often) rooted in the Jewish eschatological expectation. 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?

The critical question that many non-Jewish Believers who enter into the Messianic movement have had to ask is: **Does Israel exclusively make up the Jewish people?**

Our Heavenly Father is seeking *one* people for His own possession and He wants you to be 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?” 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.

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. David H. Stern, *Messianic Jewish Manifesto* (Clarksville, MD: Jewish New Testament Publications, 1991), 25.

<sup>2</sup> Louis Isaac Rabinowitz, “Ten Lost Tribes,” in *Encyclopaedia Judaica. MS Windows .qx*. Brooklyn: Judaica Multimedia (Israel) Ltd, 1997.

These compelling ideas, as can and should be expected, create new questions that need to be examined.

## 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, 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 11:7-11<sup>3</sup> tells us that King Solomon sought after strange women and the worship of gods other than the Holy One of Israel. As a consequence, 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, effecting 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 what 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. 1 Kings 12:20-21 tells us,

"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."

These two separate Kingdoms had two separate monarchs, 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). 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 conquered the Northern Kingdom in 722-721 B.C.E., taking most of the Northern Kingdom Israelites into captivity. When this happened, the Northern Kingdom was absorbed into the mass of Assyria through displacement and forced intermarriage

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<sup>3</sup> "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.'"

and was never corporately heard from again, as the Assyrians intermingled peoples that they conquered to reduce the likelihood of rebellion against them.<sup>4</sup>

The Southern Kingdom of Judah similarly fell into idolatry and was 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, returned to the Land of Israel in 539 B.C.E. after the Persian Empire conquered the Babylonians, as is recorded in the testimonies of 1&2 Chronicles and 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 point out 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.

### Hebrew, Israel, Israelites, Jews, Judaism? Confused?

In order to come to a proper understanding of “Israel,” it is appropriate that we have accurate definitions of the terms that many consider to be interchangeable, but in actuality are usually not. We now offer “dictionary definitions” of these words, setting the record straight.<sup>5</sup>

**Hebrew:** 1. A member of a Semitic people claiming descent from Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. 2. The Semitic language of the ancient Hebrews.

For all intents and purposes, when we refer to things “Hebrew,” i.e., Hebrew Roots, this is an all-inclusive term of what encompasses both the Hebrew Scriptures or Tanach (Old Testament) and people.

**Israel:** 1.a. In the Bible, Jacob. b. The descendants of Jacob. 2. The Hebrew people, past, present and future.

We also note that Israel is a name appointed to the Servant Messiah in Isaiah 49:3, as Yeshua is the Root and Leader of all Israel.

**Israelite:** A native or inhabitant of ancient Israel.

**Jews:** 1. An adherent to Judaism. 2. A member of the people descended from the ancient Hebrews and marked by adherence to Judaism.

Within the context of the Two Houses of Israel, today’s Jewish people are primarily descended from the Southern Kingdom of Judah, making up the tribes of Judah, Benjamin, and some Levites, who were first called “Jews” or *Yehudim* (יהודים) after the Babylonian exile. In the Apostolic Scriptures (New Testament) the use of the Greek term *Ioudaios* (Ἰουδαίος) can also refer to Jews, but likewise is often associated with a “Judean” or an inhabitant of Judea.

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<sup>4</sup> As Biblical archaeologist Siegfried H. Horn attests, “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).

<sup>5</sup> These definitions are loosely based on those provided in the *American Heritage Dictionary*, third edition (New York: Dell Publishing, 1992).

**Judaism:** The monotheistic religion of the Jews, having its spiritual and ethical principles embodied chiefly in the Bible and Talmud.

As born again Believers who have an urge to be in compliance with Scripture, it should not necessarily be our desire to become “Jewish,” per se, as much of both ancient and modern-day Judaism stems from traditions totally foreign to the Bible. However, as the Lord reunites all Israel, it is important that we be familiar with the richness of Judaism and follow those customs that are edifying to the Body of Messiah and do not contradict the ethos of Scripture (cf. Philippians 4:8). It is notable that many Christians’ misunderstanding about the Torah and the Tanach often comes from knowing about extra-Biblical Jewish tradition, and a failure to read these Scriptures on a consistent basis. While some Jewish tradition is indeed spiritually inspired, we cannot blindly follow it as a few in the Messianic community do.

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

A major objection to the Two-House teaching of Judah and Ephraim coming together from many Christians is from the assertion that it is not directly spoken of in the Apostolic Writings (New Testament). There are, in fact, many references to the Two Houses of Israel in the New Testament. Like other doctrines of our faith, some of these references are quite obvious, and others you must carefully look for. Some of these references are *indirect*, and do not exclusively include scattered Israel, but by no means *exclude* it, either. The following are a handful of examples:

In Matthew 10:5-6, Yeshua instructs His Disciples, “Do not go in *the* way of *the* Gentiles, and do not enter *any* city of the Samaritans; but rather go to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.” With this in mind, Yeshua also tells us, “I have other sheep, which are not of this fold; I must bring them also, and they will hear My voice; and they will become one flock *with* one shepherd. For this reason the Father loves Me, because I lay down My life so that I may take it again” (John 10:16-17). This indicates that Yeshua has a sheepfold that was not of the Jewish sheepfold that He mostly ministered to in the Gospel accounts.

There is a reference to scattered Israel in Acts 2:39 and Ephesians 2:13, both to those who were considered “far off,” the latter being a reference to the nations (where scattered Israel had gone):

“Therefore let all the house of Israel know for certain that God has made Him both Lord and Messiah—this Yeshua whom you crucified. . . 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 2:36, 39).

“Therefore remember that formerly you, the Gentiles [nations] 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” (Ephesians 2:11-13).

In Acts 15:19 James the Just speaks of those who are “returning” to the God of Israel from the nations, as the Greek verb *epistrephō* (ἐπιστρέφω) can mean “**to return to a point where one has been, turn around, go back**” (BDAG).<sup>6</sup> James addresses his epistle to the twelve tribes in the Diaspora:

“Therefore it is my judgment that we do not trouble those who are turning [*epistrephō*] 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).

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<sup>6</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), 382.

The Apostle Paul talks about “the fullness of the Gentiles” coming back into the fold as a requirement for the salvation of all of Israel. The scattered Northern Kingdom of Israel/Ephraim was to become this “fullness of the nations”<sup>7</sup> according to the Patriarch Jacob’s words in Genesis 48:19:

“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).

Paul also writes, “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 9:27-28; cf. Isaiah 10:22-23).

The Apostle Peter writes some new non-Jewish Believers in 1 Peter 2:9-10, telling them that “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 once were NOT A PEOPLE, but now you are THE PEOPLE OF GOD; you had NOT RECEIVED MERCY, but now you have RECEIVED MERCY.” This admonition includes a direct quotation from Hosea 1:10, which reveals for us again that “the number of the sons of Israel will be like the sand of the sea,” a direct reference to the scattered Northern Kingdom of Israel/Ephraim.

Finally, the Apostle John tells us in Revelation 7:4, “I heard the number of those who were sealed, one hundred and forty-four thousand sealed from every tribe of the sons of Israel.” It is extremely important that we understand that the 144,000 are not all Jews, as is commonly taught in Christianity today. Although many will be Jews of the House of Judah, many others will be of the scattered House of Israel/Ephraim, as both Judah and Ephraim comprise all twelve tribes of Israel.

### **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 have as Messianic Believers is to not only be a part of 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. Most of Judaism sees Yeshua the Messiah as a heretic, or a made up Greco-Roman “god man” of mythology, unworthy of their worship. Most of Christianity, although seeing Him as the Savior of the world, also sees Yeshua as the person whose job it was to abolish the Old Testament Law of Moses, something that the Jewish people cannot accept.

The Apostle Paul tells us that when the “the fullness of the nations” is brought in, 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 speak of non-Jewish Believers provoking Judah to jealousy for faith in the Messiah, how is this supposed to occur? History proves that most of the methods Christianity has used to present Jewish people with the gospel have largely failed. Evangelical Christianity today

<sup>7</sup> Heb. *melo ha'goyim* (מלא-הגוים).

has also not been that successful at presenting Jewish people with the gospel as well. So how must we do it?

Unfortunately, when many Jewish people think of “Christianity,” they think of the false practices of Catholicism and they think of a messiah that abrogated the Torah of Moses. Those of us from evangelical Christian backgrounds readily know how utterly non-Biblical much of Catholicism is, but Christianity’s position in regard to the Torah has largely not been in compliance with Yeshua’s words. 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 are going to be many in the Kingdom of Heaven who are least.<sup>8</sup>

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. However, a true restoration of all Israel will include a return to the Torah on the part of scattered Ephraim. In order to provoke Judah to jealousy for the Messiah, it is important for 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 be only “Jewish.” These Biblical practices, at the very least, include keeping the seventh-day Sabbath, the appointed times of Leviticus 23, and eating kosher.<sup>9</sup> We must all live a Torah-obedient lifestyle like Messiah Yeshua and the early Believers, putting whatever our Christian contemporaries may say aside.

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 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. Returning Israel will indeed be “instructed.” When the Torah is observed in a very Messiah-focused manner, it is ***then and only then*** that this returning Ephraim will be able to provoke Judah to jealousy. When these people 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!

## 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. One of the contentions that “all Israel” has been reunited concerns statements made in both the Tanach (Old Testament) and Apostolic Writings (New Testament) that regard “all Israel.” However, a careful analysis of this does not conclusively prove that Judah and Ephraim have been fully reunited.

In the Apostle Peter’s riveting sermon on *Shavuot* or Pentecost he proclaimed, “Therefore let all the house of Israel know for certain that God has made Him both Lord and Messiah—this Yeshua whom you crucified” (Acts 2:36). This proclamation to “all Israel” was (1) to those

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<sup>8</sup> For a further discussion of this issue, consult the editor’s book *The New Testament Validates Torah*.

<sup>9</sup> Consult the Messianic Helper Series by TNN Press for teachings regarding how these aspects of the Torah can be observed today.

Israelites assembled in Jerusalem, and (2) to those clearly identifiable as Israel, Peter's own Jewish people. Notably, Peter also tells us that the good news is "the promise...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), with those "far off" likely being a reference to scattered Israel.

Evidence suggesting that members of both Houses of Israel were assembled in Jerusalem is also given in the text:

"Now there were staying in Jerusalem God-fearing Jews [adherents to Judaism] from every nation under heaven... Parthians, Medes and Elamites; residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya near Cyrene; visitors from Rome (both Jews and converts to Judaism); Cretans and Arabs—we hear them declaring the wonders of God in our own tongues!" (Acts 2:5; 9-11, NIV).

Many of the "converts to Judaism" likely included some of the scattered Northern Kingdom. Among many theologians it is believed that Luke the doctor, author of the Gospel of Luke and Acts, although probably not at this event, was one of many proselytes to First Century Judaism. If so, was he a member of scattered Israel?

But does this explain away the idea that "all Israel" has been reunited?

At the dedication ceremony before the Second Temple, 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 of this event after the Babylonian exile, all Israel—both the Northern and Southern Kingdoms—were reunified because "all Israel" is mentioned. However, a detailed study of the many end-time prophecies that speak of the Two Houses of Israel clearly prove that the Two Houses have not been reunited. The *kol Yisrael* (כָּל-יִשְׂרָאֵל) mentioned here in Ezra is *all Israel present at the dedication ceremony*.<sup>10</sup>

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 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. 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.<sup>11</sup>

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."<sup>12</sup> In our day many of us believe the Two Houses of Israel are being reunited in

<sup>10</sup> Consider the fact that 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.

<sup>11</sup> 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.

<sup>12</sup> Tim LaHaye, ed., *Tim LaHaye Prophecy Study Bible* (Chattanooga: AMG Publishers, 2000), 873.

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.

If we believe that the promises of physical multiplicity to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob are true, then we will believe that the Lord has fulfilled His Word and that there are probably many millions of physical Israelites scattered all over this planet. For when Jacob/Israel blessed Ephraim, he proclaimed "may [his descendants] proliferate abundantly like fish" (Genesis 48:16, ATS). Just as fish proliferate under the surface of the water, unknown to many, so has the scattered seed of the Northern Kingdom of Israel/Ephraim been proliferating—unknown to the world at large.<sup>13</sup>

### **Part of the House of Israel, but not of one of the Ten Lost Tribes?**

Some Believers who are new to 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.

**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 likely make up a large percentage of the scattered Northern Kingdom of 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. However, it is logical to assume that most of the reuniting that will be taking place 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 fully acknowledged Him).

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. 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.
3. In the end, all who are considered to be "Israel" must have faith in Yeshua the Messiah 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 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. But this 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**'; then take another stick and write on it, 'For Joseph, the stick of Ephraim and all the house of Israel, **his companions**.'"

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<sup>13</sup> Cf. Nosson Scherman, ed., *ArtScroll Chumash, Stone Edition* (Brooklyn: Mesorah Publications, Ltd., 2000), 273.

If you noticed carefully, this prophecy of the two sticks, each stick representing a separate House of Israel, speaks of “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. There is **no exclusion** from those who are physically non-Israelites in the Two-House community—and neither is this a claim that one must be a physical Israelite to “be saved.” On the contrary, the restoration of all Israel is to be a very *inclusive* process.<sup>14</sup>

### **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 community who have made the understanding of Judah and Ephraim into a salvation issue. 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.

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 a major misunderstanding 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. This is surprising since Christians claim the Messiah of Israel as their own! This has been the root cause of many serious doctrinal problems, the foremost of which are Christian antinomianism or the denial of the Torah or Law of Moses, and the doctrine of the pre-tribulation rapture. The separation of “the Church” and Israel has widely created a double standard that human men 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*. Israel just happens to be the vehicle by which God’s goodness and mercy is to be communicated to the whole world!

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).

To a Christian reader, this does mean that Christians who may be part of scattered Israel—who today may not recognize themselves as such—*may* one day (or more probably 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. However, there should be no doubt that this ingathering plays a critical *and greatly overlooked* role in end-time Bible prophecy. We

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<sup>14</sup> 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.

must consider the fact that Yeshua may have not presently returned—as many have expected—because they have failed to consider these prophecies of *both Houses of Israel* returning to the Land of Israel in their end-time scenarios.<sup>15</sup>

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. 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, 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.
3. In the end, all who have faith in Messiah Yeshua are part of the Commonwealth of Israel. 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.

## 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 of 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. Considering that this understanding—although having been in the Scriptures for millennia—is very new and is only now being widely discussed, plays a critical role in how you choose to deal with the issues that we as God's people 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? 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 do?

These questions and many more are only a few we 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?

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

<sup>15</sup> For a further discussion, consult the editor's book *When Will the Messiah Return?*

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