



Approaching Two-House Controversies

In our day, a wide number of non-Jewish Believers, in significant numbers, have chosen to address what many throughout religious history have called, “the Ten Lost Tribes” of Israel issue. This has often 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. A loose sub-movement, commonly known by the descriptions “Judah and Ephraim” or “Two-House” or “Messianic Israel,” has gained wide adherence in various sectors of the broad, modern Messianic movement. *There is no doubting the fact that it has caused controversy, consternation, and even division among many Believers...*

Appearing along with the article “Decoding the Priesthood” by Peter Hirschberg,¹ from the 10 May, 1999 edition of *The Jerusalem Report*, the adjunct “Report Card” by Tibor Krausz stated how, “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.”² 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, and what are at least, some thought-provoking statements issued? How can we know what is fact, and what is fiction?

What is the “Two-House teaching,” which has gained a great deal of attention and controversy throughout the Messianic world since the late 1990s? What is it all about and what is its purpose? Does it actually advocate that all non-Jewish Believers are physical Israel? Or, could it be that there are elements of Israel’s restoration which have been overlooked by Bible readers, requiring further analysis and contemplation? What questions are being asked today about “Israel”

¹ This article largely summarizes an ongoing project of trying to test various groups within the Jewish community, as well as those in some remote locations of South Asia, Southeastern Asia, and Central Africa, for particular DNA strands, trying to conclude who might be descended from the priestly class within Ancient Israel.

² Tibor Krausz (1999). *Report Card*, 10 May, 1999. *The Jerusalem Report*. Retrieved 11 April, 2011 from <<http://jpost.com/JerusalemReport>>.

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that we must take note of, and attempt to reasonably answer? What are some of the over-statements and under-statements that we have to all sort through, from both the pro- and con- sides of this discussion? *How much data and noise have to actually be sifted through?*

Each of us needs to 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,” *b’heyot miqdashi b’tokam l’olam* (בְּהוֹיֹת מִקְדָּשִׁי בְּתוֹכְכֶם לְעוֹלָם). 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 anticipated point in human history.**

We begin our discussions by examining some of the important questions concerning the subject matter commonly known by the label of “the Two-House teaching.” We will consider the historical division and prophesied reunification of Israel from the Tanach or Old Testament. We will examine some of the objections that people commonly have associated with a larger restoration of Israel to come, involving those of the Northern and Southern Kingdoms. What are some things in the Bible concerning Israel and the Kingdom of God that readers may have overlooked or under-emphasized that can no longer be avoided? Is there a legitimate, larger restoration of Israel to take place before the return of the Messiah? If so, how many things have contemporary advocates of the “Two-House teaching” embellished and over-exaggerated, which need to be avoided?

The Commonwealth of Israel

In the Apostle Paul’s letter to a largely non-Jewish audience in Asia Minor,³ he makes a very intriguing statement. In Ephesians 2:11-13, he admonishes the non-Jewish Believers, “Therefore remember that formerly you, the Gentiles in the flesh, who are called ‘Uncircumcision’ by the so-called ‘Circumcision,’ *which is performed in the flesh by human hands—remember that you were at that time separate from Messiah, excluded from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. But now in Messiah Yeshua you who formerly were far off have been brought near by the blood of Messiah.*” The statement that Paul makes is that prior to their salvation in

³ Be aware of how “in Ephesus” (*en Ephesō, ἐν Ἐφέσῳ*) does not appear in the oldest manuscripts of Ephesians 1:1 (cf. Bruce M. Metzger, *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament* [London and New York: United Bible Societies, 1975], 601), and that in all likelihood the Epistle of Ephesians was originally a circular letter written by the Apostle Paul to assemblies within Asia Minor, eventually making its way to Ephesus. The RSV notably rendered Ephesians 1:1 with: “Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, to the saints who are also faithful in Christ Jesus.”

For a further discussion, consult C.E. Arnold, “Ephesians, Letter to the: Destination,” in Gerald F. Hawthorne, Ralph P. Martin, and Daniel G. Reid, eds., *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1993), pp 243-245, and the author’s entry for the Epistle of Ephesians in *A Survey of the Apostolic Scriptures for the Practical Messianic*.

Yeshua the Messiah, these people were “alienated⁴ from the commonwealth of Israel” (RSV). Now, having come to faith, they have been “brought near by the blood of Messiah.” In the view of Walter C. Kaiser, in his book *The Promise-Plan of God*,

“All Gentiles were Christless, stateless, promiseless, hopeless, and Godless (2:12)...But now in Christ’s salvation, the Gentiles ‘have been brought near’ (2:13b), just as Israel had been described as being ‘near’ to God in Deuteronomy 4:7 and Psalm 148:14.”⁵

When we review what Ephesians 2:11-12 communicates, what is Paul really saying? Is he saying that these non-Jewish Believers have become a part of “the Church,” something separate from Israel? No. This is the last thing on his mind, especially if non-Jewish Believers are “joint heirs, [part of] a joint body and joint sharers with the Jews” (Ephesians 3:6, CJB). Paul communicates to those in Asia Minor that they have become part of the community of Israel by their salvation in Israel’s Messiah—obviously a realm which has been expanded and enlarged, because of His work and the inclusive nature of the gospel. This is witnessed by the Greek word *politeia* (πολιτεία), often rendered as “commonwealth,”⁶ which means “**the right to be a member of a sociopolitical entity, citizenship**” (BDAG).⁷ Nowhere in Yeshua the Messiah’s mission did He ever come to establish “the Church” as a second group of elect. On the contrary, He came to restore and rebuild Israel (Jeremiah 33:7; cf. Matthew 16:18).⁸

All of the negative conditions of once being unredeemed were reversed for Ephesians’ non-Jewish audience. Being “brought near” to Israel is not just a kind of closeness; it is a statement of being integrated into the community of Israel, no

⁴ Grk. *apallotriōō* (ἀπαλλοτριώω), “to estrange, alienate” (H.G. Liddell and R. Scott, *An Intermediate Greek-English Lexicon* [Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994], 87).

⁵ Walter C. Kaiser, *The Promise-Plan of God: A Biblical Theology of the Old and New Testaments* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2008), 294.

⁶ “citizenship” (NIV); “community” (REB/Lattimore); “citizens” (Common English Bible).

⁷ 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), 845.

In some branches of today’s Messianic Judaism, notably those that advocate what they call a “bilateral ecclesiology,” non-Jewish Believers being a part of the Commonwealth of Israel is not quantitatively different from them being a part of a separate “Church” per dispensationalism. Such a Commonwealth of Israel is simply thought to compose two groups: the Jewish people and the Church. The Greek term *politeia* is approached from the perspective of it being “commonwealth” like the British Commonwealth of Nations, as Yeshua is King over the Jewish people and the Church much like Queen Elizabeth II is monarch of independent countries like the United Kingdom, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, etc.

The classical Greek meaning of *politeia* does not imply a kind of citizenship where a single monarch rules over a collection of separate states, but rather of either a single government or a way of conduct within a society (sometimes set within the context of a city). Cf. *LS*, 654; Plato *Republic* 10.619c; Aristotle *Politics* 3.6.1278b; 3.7.1279a; 2 Maccabees 8:17.

For a further discussion, consult the relevant sections of the author’s commentary *Ephesians for the Practical Messianic*.

⁸ Consult the author’s article “When Did ‘the Church’ Begin?” (appearing in *Introduction to Things Messianic*), for a further examination of how God has always had only *one* assembly of elect. Also consult the material in the author’s publication, *Are Non-Jewish Believers Really a Part of Israel?*

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different than how Ancient Israel in the wilderness was considered the people of God. The question of Deuteronomy 4:7 is, “For what great nation is there that has a god so near to it as is the LORD our God whenever we call on Him?” Psalm 148:14 further details, “And He has lifted up a horn for His people, praise for all His godly ones; *even* for the sons of Israel, a people near to Him. Praise the LORD!” Paul is certain to say, “So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints, and are of God’s household,” the assessment being, “the Gentiles are fellow heirs and fellow members of the body, and fellow partakers of the promise in Messiah Yeshua through the gospel” (Ephesians 2:19; 3:6). While by no means replacing the Jewish people in God’s salvation-historical plan, non-Jewish Believers do get to partake of the blessings and responsibilities of being a part of Israel’s Kingdom along with them. A non-Jewish Believer is to be regarded as *sumpolitēs* (συμπολίτης), a “*fellow-citizen/compatriot*” (BDAG)⁹ within the community of Israel. In fact, the reconciliation of Jewish people and those from the nations, together, is to be a testament to the greater reconciliation to come to the cosmos (Ephesians 3:10).

If we are to understand that non-Jewish Believers are a part of the community of Israel, an enlarged Kingdom realm, along with their fellow Jewish Believers, then questions will naturally be asked about what the Hebrew Scriptures or the Tanach tell us about Israel. Ultimately, it is safe to say that being a part of “the Israel of God” (Galatians 6:16), or being grafted into the olive tree (cf. Romans 11:17-18), is incumbent upon possessing faith in Israel’s Messiah. Very sadly, there will be Jewish people who are physical descendants of the Patriarchs, who will in the end be considered “cut off” (Romans 11:17, 20). (Yet, this is something that *only* a Creator God and Final Judge is responsible for determining, and *not* any of us as limited and biased human beings.)¹⁰ And, as Paul had to remind many of his non-Jewish readers in Rome, “Do not be conceited, but fear; for if God did not spare the natural branches, He will not spare you, either” (Romans 11:20b-21). Whenever the topic of who is, and who is not, a part of Israel comes up—each of us has to proceed very cautiously.

Focusing on Israel in Future Prophecy

The relatively young Two-House sub-movement today is broad, and as such it needs to be recognized how there are a wide array of proponents who teach about the subject matter. It is to be fairly observed, though, that after a decade or more of growth, expansion, and popular conference events from the late 1990s to early 2010s, that a significant number of Two-House proponents believe that the majority of non-Jewish Believers in today’s Messianic movement are descendants of the exiled Northern Kingdom of Israel/Ephraim, and as such, they feel it is appropriate

⁹ BDAG, 959; “possessing the same citizenship with others, a fellow-citizen” (Joseph H. Thayer, *Thayer’s Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament* [Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2003], 597).

¹⁰ For some further thoughts, consult the author’s exegesis paper on Romans 1:18-25, “Is Salvation Only Available for those who Profess Faith in Yeshua?”

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to refer to themselves as some sort of “Ephraimites.” While it has been important that they have raised the awareness level of various Biblical passages, which may have otherwise gone unaddressed or ignored by many Messianic people—the things that they have done with those Biblical passages have not always been good.

Alternatively to much of the rhetoric and populism which can be witnessed from the Two-House/Ephraimite sub-movement, more thought-conscious Bible readers do need to recognize how there is a larger restoration of Israel prophesied in the Tanach, which has been a significantly overlooked component of what is to transpire prior to the return of Yeshua. *This is not something that should overly-comprise someone’s personal identity in the Messiah.* A reasonable approach to the issue of the Northern and Southern Kingdoms of Israel being reunited, concerns eschatology, and should *not* manifest itself in promoting unwarranted speculations and/or Lost Tribes hunting. It should instead cause each of us to evaluate events that are foretold to transpire before the Messiah’s return (i.e., Isaiah 11:12-16; Jeremiah 31:6-10; Ezekiel 37:15-28; Zechariah 10:6-10), and how soon, or not so soon, the Second Coming will actually take place.

It is factual to report that many Orthodox Jews believe in the reunification of those of the Northern and Southern Kingdoms of Israel before the coming of the Messiah. A relatively mainline resource like the *Encyclopaedia Judaica* 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.”¹¹ While it is appropriate to consider the Jewish eschatological expectation, even more so we should force our evaluations to be placed within the world of the Biblical text, and a relatively conservative, evangelical theological framework, that places a high degree of integrity on the Biblical record and legitimate expectations of the Prophets of the Tanach (Old Testament). While it can be quite a chore, **focusing one’s attention on what is foretold in the Scriptures is imperative**, especially given the many problems associated with the destiny of the Northern Kingdom of Israel, and those others who have widely addressed this subject matter in the past, and their false teachings—varying from British-Israel to Christian Identity heresies.¹² Ultimately, our attention as readers needs to be focused on the Biblical text and the verses and passages of relevance.

As we sort through various Bible passages, and reflect on what is occurring in the broad, contemporary Messianic movement—we should also recognize that both the Christian Church and the Jewish 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

¹¹ Louis Isaac Rabinowitz, “Ten Lost Tribes,” in *Encyclopaedia Judaica*. MS Windows 9x. Brooklyn: Judaica Multimedia (Israel) Ltd, 1997.

¹² Consult 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; Josh McDowell & Don Stewart, *Handbook of Today’s Religions* (San Bernadino, CA: Here’s Life Publishers, 1983), pp 114-122.

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Hebraic Roots and are becoming Torah obedient? Is this happening just by circumstance? Or, is it happening because the final elements of the restoration of Israel's Kingdom are in the process of occurring, as the return of the Messiah draws near? What are some of the things which today's contemporary Messianic movement has properly evaluated, and what are some of the things which still require some fine-tuning and improvement?

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 human beings to be a part of this people—a redeemed, collective, composite Kingdom of Israel, which King Yeshua will rule and reign over! 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* those of the exiled Northern Kingdom (Isaiah 49:6). The larger restoration of Israel that we encounter in the Scriptures, is actually certainly something that will affect the entire world.¹³

These compelling ideas, as can and should be expected, create new questions that need to be examined. Even with previous abuses having been witnessed in past history regarding the subject matter of the Northern and Southern Kingdoms of Israel, it is a subject matter that will surely not go way—if it *indeed* involves future Biblical prophecies awaiting their completion.

The Northern and Southern Kingdoms of Israel

Surveying the Tanach, Bible readers should be able to fairly acknowledge how 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.¹⁴ These two Kingdoms are referred to as the Southern Kingdom of Judah and the Northern Kingdom of Israel throughout the Tanach (Old Testament), the latter also known as Joseph or Ephraim.

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 Kingdom of Israel

¹³ If you have not already, do consult the author's publication *Are Non-Jewish Believers Really a Part of Israel?*, which addresses many of the different components and debates within contemporary Messianic ecclesiology.

¹⁴ For a broad overview of the period, from the United Kingdom era to the Divided Kingdom era, and the exile and return, consult: C.F. Pfeiffer, "Israel, History of the People of," in *ISBE*, 2:913-922; A.E. Hill, "History of Israel 3: United Monarchy," in Bill T. Arnold and H.G.M. Williamson, eds., *Dictionary of the Old Testament Historical Books* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2005), pp 442-452; S.L. McKenzie, "History of Israel 4: Division of the Monarchy," in *Ibid.*, pp 452-458; B.E. Kelle and B.A. Strawn, "History of Israel 5: Assyrian Period," in *Ibid.*, pp 458-478; P.-A. Beaulieu, "History of Israel 6: Babylonian Period," in *Ibid.*, pp 478-485.

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would be divided after his death (1 Kings 11:7-11).¹⁵ 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 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)”’” (1 Kings 11:29-32).

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 men¹⁶ 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).

¹⁵ “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’” (1 Kings 11:7-11).

¹⁶ Note how the Septuagint says that there were “a hundred and twenty thousand young men” (LXE). Given the issue present in Biblical Studies over what *elef* (אֶלֶף) can mean, either as “thousand” or “troop,” it has been contested by some whether the army described here was really 180,000.

Cf. Simon J. DeVries, *Word Biblical Commentary: 1 Kings*, Vol 12 (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1985), 158.

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These two separate Kingdoms had two separate monarchies,¹⁷ 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). The Northern Kingdom's first ruler, Jeroboam, saw to it that idolatry was immediately established as the approved method of worship, as he did not want the people to go to Jerusalem and demand reunification with the Southern Kingdom (1 Kings 12:26-33).¹⁸ 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 encroached upon the region, conquering the Northern Kingdom in 722-721 B.C.E., and taking many of its people into captivity.¹⁹ When this happened, a great number of these Northern Kingdom exiles, over a series of several generations, were absorbed into the mass of Assyria through transplantation and cultural assimilation. Those of the Northern Kingdom were never corporately heard from again, as the Assyrians displaced and intermingled peoples that they conquered to reduce the likelihood of rebellion against them.²⁰ The testimony of 2 Kings 17:22-23 says,

"The sons of Israel walked in all the sins of Jeroboam which he did; they did not depart from them until the LORD removed Israel from His sight, as He spoke

¹⁷ The fact that the Northern Kingdom of Israel/Ephraim actually had numerous dynasties rule, contrasted to the Southern Kingdom of Judah which consistently retained the House of David, is a testament to its instability.

¹⁸ "Jeroboam said in his heart, 'Now the kingdom will return to the house of David. If this people go up to offer sacrifices in the house of the LORD at Jerusalem, then the heart of this people will return to their lord, even to Rehoboam king of Judah; and they will kill me and return to Rehoboam king of Judah.' So the king consulted, and made two golden calves, and he said to them, 'It is too much for you to go up to Jerusalem; behold your gods, O Israel, that brought you up from the land of Egypt.' He set one in Bethel, and the other he put in Dan. Now this thing became a sin, for the people went to *worship* before the one as far as Dan. And he made houses on high places, and made priests from among all the people who were not of the sons of Levi. Jeroboam instituted a feast in the eighth month on the fifteenth day of the month, like the feast which is in Judah, and he went up to the altar; thus he did in Bethel, sacrificing to the calves which he had made. And he stationed in Bethel the priests of the high places which he had made. Then he went up to the altar which he had made in Bethel on the fifteenth day in the eighth month, even in the month which he had devised in his own heart; and he instituted a feast for the sons of Israel and went up to the altar to burn incense'" (1 Kings 12:26-33).

¹⁹ Cf. Hosea 8:8; 9:17; Amos 9:9.

²⁰ "Assyria exiled many residents of the northern kingdom in 722 B.C.E." ("Israel, Land of," in Jacob Neusner and William Scott Green, eds., *Dictionary of Judaism in the Biblical Period* [Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2002], 322).

²⁰ 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 17:6 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).

through all His servants the prophets. So Israel was carried away into exile from their own land to Assyria until this day [or: and they are still there, NIV].”

At this same time, exiles from other parts of the Assyrian Empire were imported into the Land of Israel. They were forced to intermingle with many of the Northern Kingdom Israelites who had remained, resulting in the formation of the Samaritans (2 Kings 17:24-41). This group was greatly despised by the First Century Jewish community, as they practiced a hybrid religion based in God’s Torah as well as various pagan rituals and superstitions.

Corporately, the Northern Kingdom was deported away by Assyria. After besieging the area for three years (2 Kings 17:5), it is noted how “the king of Assyria captured Samaria and carried Israel away into exile to Assyria, and settled them in Halah and Habor, on the river of Gozan, and in the cities of the Medes” (2 Kings 17:6),²¹ displacing them eastward. The observation of the author/editors of Kings is that such displaced persons remained eastward *ad ha’yom ha’zeh* (הַיּוֹם הַזֶּה עַד) or “until this day” (2 Kings 17:23). This would presumably be the time when the Books of Samuel-Kings reached their final form, either during or after the Southern Kingdom’s exile to Babylon in the Sixth Century B.C.E. The later testimony of 2 Chronicles 10:19 says, “So Israel has been in rebellion against the house of David to this day,” *ad ha’yom ha’zeh*. Given the fact that the Books of Chronicles are a post-exilic work, this could definitely be an observation that the people of the Northern Kingdom, exiled by Assyria, were to be corporately regarded as still in rebellion in the late Fifth to Fourth Centuries B.C.E., when Chronicles reached its final form.²²

Enough people from the Northern Kingdom of Israel had to be dispersed by Assyria, being large enough for the Prophets to foresee a time in the future when they—whomever they would be *and* wherever they would be—would need to be reunited with those of the Southern Kingdom of Judah. One of the end-time expectations of the Prophets is undeniably the reunion of the scattered segments of the Northern Kingdom with those of the Southern Kingdom.

The Southern Kingdom of Judah also fell into gross idolatry and rebellion against God, being taken into exile by the Babylonian Empire in a series of dispersions from 597-587 B.C.E. (2 Kings chs. 24-25). 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 historical testimonies at the end of the Books of Chronicles and in Ezra-Nehemiah.

When we read in the Tanach 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 Kingdoms of Israel, from the Divided Kingdom era, 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

²¹ Cf. 1 Chronicles 5:26.

²² Consult the entries for the Books of Samuel, Kings, and Chronicles, in the author’s workbook *A Survey of the Tanach for the Practical Messianic*.

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“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 sometime before the Divided Kingdom era.

“All Israel” Escaped and Found, and Not Ignoring Future Prophecy

There are those who believe that the complete reunification of the Northern and Southern Kingdoms has already taken place in past history, and that treating this as a future event yet to occur is misplaced. Claims are often issued regarding post-exilic statements made in the Tanach that involve “all Israel.” But a careful reading of these passages, does not conclusively prove that Judah and those of exiled 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 reading of significant end-time prophecies that speak of Israel’s end-time restoration demonstrates that those of both the Northern and Southern Kingdoms have not at all been fully reunited. The *kol-Yisrael* (כָּל־יִשְׂרָאֵל) mentioned here in Ezra should be understood as all Israel, meaning the community present, available, or accessible for this event. This is confirmed by what we see earlier in Ezra 8:25, when gifts for the Second Temple had been collected:

“I weighed out to them the silver, the gold and the utensils, the offering for the house of our God which the king and his counselors and his princes and **all Israel present** there had offered.”

The *kol-Yisrael ha'nimtza'im* (כָּל־יִשְׂרָאֵל הַנִּמְצָאִים), “all the Israelites who were present” (NEB), could have been “all the Israelites of that region” (New American Bible) who were able to attend. The verb *matza* (מָצָא), appearing in the Nifal stem (simple action, passive voice), means “**be found**,” or possibly even “**be found incidentally, by chance, happen to be found**” (*CHALOT*).²³ The thought of the *Keil & Delitzsch Commentary on the Old Testament* is that it was actually, “all Israelites who were found, met with, in Babylon, and were not going with them to Jerusalem.”²⁴ The offerings presented were definitely presented on behalf of the *known* community of Israel, those who survived the challenges and difficulties of the exile, and who only by the sheer grace of God were able to be freed from

²³ William L. Holladay, ed., *A Concise Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament* (Leiden, the Netherlands: E.J. Brill, 1988), 209.

²⁴ E-Sword 8.0.8: Keil & Delitzsch Commentary on the Old Testament. MS Windows 9x. Franklin, TN: Equipping Ministries Foundation, 2008.

Babylonian oppression. Even though the returnees to the Land of Israel were largely those of the Southern Kingdom, there is no reason why they should never have referred to themselves as *kol Yisrael* or as *b'nei-Yisrael* (בְּנֵי־יִשְׂרָאֵל), the “sons/children of Israel” (cf. Ezra 6:21).

There is also no compelling reason, that when the Second Temple was dedicated to God, that there should not have been various twelve sets of animal sacrifices made for all twelve tribes (Ezra 6:17; 8:35). In the view of a Jewish commentator like Judah J. Slotki, “The number included those tribes who had not returned or of whom only very few came back. The oneness of Israel was always emphasized at national assemblies....The remnant who had returned made solemn confession of sin in the name of the whole scattered and despised race.”²⁵ There was certainly a hope, after all, that Israel would fully return to the Promised Land and be restored to right relationship with God. Those who issue a natural confession to the Lord, notably call themselves *pelei'tah* (פְּלִיטָה),²⁶ an “escaped remnant” (Ezra 9:13-15) or “surviving remnant” (CJB).

Those of Israel who were found, who presented material offerings, and then presented various animal sacrifices, surely did so with the hope that there would never again be a terrible calamity befall the people. The “all Israel”²⁷ represented likely included survivors from the Northern Kingdom who had not been fully assimilated into the Assyrian Empire, and who joined with the Jewish exiles when the Persian Empire conquered the Babylonian Empire, and freed all of the conquered peoples of the region.²⁸ Also not to be overlooked is how various Northern Kingdom families and individuals had migrated into the Southern Kingdom centuries earlier, had been integrated into the Southern Kingdom, and whose descendants were taken to Babylon and had subsequently returned.²⁹ Yet, while language such as “all Israel that were found” (Ezra 8:25, LXE)³⁰ is witnessed in the post-exilic scene,³¹ there is still **a significant, futuristic prophetic expectation**

²⁵ Judah J. Slotki, *Soncino Books of the Bible: Daniel, Ezra, Nehemiah* (London: Soncino Press, 1973), 147.

²⁶ Meaning either “a survivor, survival, someone or something remaining,” or “**escape, deliverance**” (Ludwig Koehler and Walter Baumgartner, eds., *The Hebrew & Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament*, 2 vols. [Leiden, the Netherlands: Brill, 2001], 2:932).

²⁷ *Context* should always determine who “all Israel” is, when being referred to. 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 refers largely to those of the Southern Kingdom.

²⁸ I.e., people possibly like Tobit of the tribe of Naphtali, exiled to Nineveh (Tobit 1:1-3).

²⁹ 2 Chronicles 11:16; 15:9; 30:11, 18; 34:9; cf. 35:16-19 and the *kol-Yehudah v'Yisrael ha'nimtza* (הַקּוֹלֵי־יְהוּדָה וְיִשְׂרָאֵל), “all Judah and Israel who are found” (35:18, YLT), who were participants in King Josiah's Passover.

³⁰ The Greek Septuagint of Ezra 8:25 has *pas Israēl hoi euriskomenoi* (πᾶς Ἰσραηλ οἱ εὐρισκόμενοι); the verb *euriskō* (εὐρίσκω) actually meaning, “**to come upon someth. either through purposeful search or accidentally, find**” (BDAG, 411).

³¹ Commenting on King Cyrus' decree made in Ezra 1:3, “Whoever there is among you of all His people...,” *m'kol-amo* (מִכָּל־עַמּוֹ), H.G.M. Williamson, *Word Biblical Commentary: Ezra, Nehemiah*, Vol 16 (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1985), 13 notably says,

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that cannot be disregarded. And, “all Israel found,” after all, can be an admission that there was still some or a noticeable part of Israel still unaccounted for.

If the Northern and Southern Kingdoms of Israel have been fully reunited, then what do Bible readers do with the prophetic oracle of Ezekiel 37:25-28, which is clearly futuristic?

“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” (Ezekiel 37:25-28).

Has this prophecy been fulfilled? Is God’s Sanctuary presently 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,” we should rightly conclude, is a reference to the Messiah. If indeed the Northern and Southern Kingdoms were fully reunited in past history, then Yeshua the Messiah should surely 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 Israel and all of the mighty acts that it involves.

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. In restored Israel, all tribes are represented and the nation will be united, as the sign of the fused stick reveals.”³² 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.”³³ These two dispensationalists validly recognize some level of future fulfillment that cannot go unaddressed. If these two Christians—who think that much of Israel’s end-time restoration will be actually preceded by a pre-tribulation rapture—can recognize that more is on the horizon, then today’s Messianic Believers can certainly consider it as well.

“[I]t is highly unlikely, either historically or on the basis of the ideological outlook of the writer, that any reference is intended to the lost tribes of the old Northern Kingdom.”

³² Tim LaHaye, ed., *Tim LaHaye Prophecy Study Bible* (Chattanooga: AMG Publishers, 2000), 873.

³³ John F. Walvoord, *Every Prophecy of the Bible* (Colorado Springs: Chariot Victor Publishing, 1999), pp 186-187.

Approaching Two-House Controversies

Noting the contents of Haftarah *Va'yigash* (Genesis 44:18-47:27), Ezekiel 37:15-28, in the *JPS Bible Commentary: Haftorot*, Michael Fishbane rightly summarizes some of the main points of what the fulfillment of this oracle is to involve:

“The haftarah emphasizes the theme of national restoration, with specific focus on the promised reunification of the northern and southern tribes, the renewal of the Davidic royal lineage, and the reestablishment of the covenant between God and Israel....Another theme of the haftarah is that of stability, expressed as a permanent change from the past and as a vision of a permanent future....[T]he haftarah achieves an intensity of focus and emphasis. Indeed, through [the terms used] the dispersed nation is given hope in a new future—unsullied by the defilements of sin and restored to their Land of God, one people forever. This is the new covenant of *shalom* prophesied to the people. It is a promise without condition....In the haftarah, God prophesies the unification of the northern and southern tribes, symbolized respectively by Judah and Joseph, along with their ingathering to the ancestral homeland.”³⁴

Have all of these things, notably called by Fishbane to be “a vision of a permanent future,” **all come to pass?** Note how the descendants of the post-exilic community were eventually exiled again when the Romans destroyed Jerusalem in 70 C.E. Fulfillment of the Ezekiel 37:15-28 prophecy, subsequent to the Second Coming of Yeshua the Messiah, has to instead be on the horizon.³⁵ And not at all to be overlooked is Fishbane’s assessment, “In the haftarah, the initiation of redemption belongs to God alone, as does its consummation.”³⁶ This should draw our attention to the fact that even though there might be much abuse surrounding the issue, frequently found among those who address it and have popularized it, ultimately the sovereignty of our Creator as the One orchestrating events has to be supremely acknowledged.

In our day, given the significant growth and expansion of many diverse sectors of the Messianic movement, the Two-House sub-movement especially advocates that prophecies like Ezekiel 37:15-28 are in high gear. Many more people are just trying to honestly answer the question, “**Will you not show us what you mean by these?**” (Ezekiel 37:18, RSV). They do not know if they will be direct or indirect participants of what is to come, but they are certainly inquiring of the Heavenly Father to know what is going on and what He wants to do with all of His

³⁴ Michael Fishbane, *JPS Bible Commentary: Haftorot* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 2002), pp 71, 72, 74.

³⁵ Even the largely liberal *Jewish Study Bible*, remarking on the genealogy of Ezra 8:1-4, leaves open the possibility for future prophetic fulfillment between the Northern and Southern Kingdoms, noting:

“While...these [ten] tribes had assimilated due to the Assyrian policy of forced population exchanges, the tradition of their continued existence is found in, for instance, Tobit...Emphasis is placed on genealogical connections to the priesthood and the Davidic line. These links are necessary if the preexilic and exilic Israelite prophecies of return are to be fulfilled (See, e.g., Ezek. 37:24-28)” (Hindy Najman, “Ezra,” in Adele Berlin and Marc Zvi Brettler, eds., *The Jewish Study Bible*, NJPS [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004], 1682).

³⁶ Fishbane, 75.

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people. And perhaps most notably, regardless of how things actually play out, they do not want to be excluded from it.

There are many details regarding the exiled Northern Kingdom of Israel/Ephraim, that are only known to our Sovereign God. If, however, there are unfulfilled prophecies regarding the reunion of the Northern and Southern Kingdoms on the horizon, then He will be the One who Divinely brings all of His people together. And, it cannot go overlooked that within the prophecies of Israel's restoration, companions of Judah and Ephraim are definitively included as well. As Ezekiel 37:16 says,

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

If you noticed carefully, in this prophecy of the two sticks, with each stick representing a separate Kingdom of Israel, is a reference to “his comrades” (ATS) or “his companions.” There has definitely been a gross over-emphasis in the popular/populist Two-House literature given to Judah and Ephraim, when technically *three groups* are to be brought together according to prophecy: Judah, Israel/Ephraim, and companions from the nations. **There is no exclusion from those who are physically non-Israelites in what is to occur.**³⁷ On the contrary, the larger restoration of Israel that is to be anticipated, is to be a very *inclusive* process.³⁸ And, it is *most highly probable* that the significant majority of those involved in such a larger restoration of Israel are companions from the nations at large. It is important that we realize that the doors for membership in Israel have always been open to all, not those who are just physical Israelites. For, as the famed word of Isaiah 49:6 tells us,

“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.”

Key Prophecies of Israel's Restoration

Far too frequently, as has been encountered in the approach of many voices within the Two-House sub-movement, the issue of the reunion of Judah and Israel/Ephraim, is one of lost identity. Many non-Jewish Messianic Believers, reading various prophecies, and legitimately acknowledging them as futuristic and unfulfilled—have gone far beyond thinking that they might be “*to be determined...*” participants in them, but that they must absolutely be descendants, however

³⁷ This is further examined in Chapter 2, “What About ‘the Gentiles’?”

³⁸ 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 in its community than just native Israelites.

distant, of the exiled Northern Kingdom of Israel/Ephraim. **This is an inappropriate way to approach the subject matter of a larger restoration of Israel.**

Aside from some of the controversies that have been spurred on, the issue is undeniably intertwined with end-time prophecy. As such, as the Second Coming approaches, Tanach prophecies regarding a larger restoration of Israel, should come clearer into focus—no differently than with Bible readers trying to understand the rise of the antimesiah/antichrist, a one world government, a World War III type event or events, massive Earth changes and catastrophes, the arrival of a mark of the beast economic system, and a great apostasy of defectors away from Biblical faith and/or theism. Here is a selection of just four passages that need to be seriously considered by Bible readers:

“And He will lift up a standard for the nations and assemble the banished ones of Israel, and will gather the dispersed of Judah from the four corners of the earth. Then the jealousy of Ephraim will depart, and those who harass Judah will be cut off; Ephraim will not be jealous of Judah, and Judah will not harass Ephraim. They will swoop down on the slopes of the Philistines on the west; together they will plunder the sons of the east; they will possess Edom and Moab, and the sons of Ammon will be subject to them. And the LORD will utterly destroy the tongue of the Sea of Egypt; and He will wave His hand over the River with His scorching wind; and He will strike it into seven streams and make *men* walk over dry-shod. And there will be a highway from Assyria for the remnant of His people who will be left, just as there was for Israel in the day that they came up out of the land of Egypt” (Isaiah 11:12-16).

“For there will be a day when watchmen on the hills of Ephraim call out, ‘Arise, and let us go up to Zion, to the LORD our God.’ For thus says the LORD, ‘Sing aloud with gladness for Jacob, and shout among the chief of the nations; proclaim, give praise and say, “O LORD, save Your people, the remnant of Israel.” Behold, I am bringing them from the north country, and I will gather them from the remote parts of the earth, among them the blind and the lame, the woman with child and she who is in labor with child, together; a great company, they will return here. With weeping they will come, and by supplication I will lead them; I will make them walk by streams of waters, on a straight path in which they will not stumble; for I am a father to Israel, and Ephraim is My firstborn.’ Hear the word of the LORD, O nations, and declare in the coastlands afar off, and say, ‘He who scattered Israel will gather him and keep him as a shepherd keeps his flock’” (Jeremiah 31:6-10).

“Say to them, ‘Thus says the Lord GOD, “Behold, I will take the sons of Israel from among the nations where they have gone, and I will gather them from every side and bring them into their own land; and I will make them one nation in the land, on the mountains of Israel; and one king will be king for all of them; and they will no longer be two nations and no longer be divided into two kingdoms. They will no longer defile themselves with their idols, or with their detestable things, or with any of their transgressions; but I will deliver them from all their dwelling places in which they have sinned, and will cleanse them. And they will be My people, and I will be their God. My servant David will be

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king over them, and they will all have one shepherd; and they will walk in My ordinances and keep My statutes and observe them. They will live on the land that I gave to Jacob My servant, in which your fathers lived; and they will live on it, they, and their sons and their sons' sons, forever; and David My servant will be their prince forever. I will make a covenant of peace with them; it will be an everlasting covenant with them. And I will place them and multiply them, and will set My sanctuary in their midst forever. My dwelling place also will be with them; and I will be their God, and they will be My people. And the nations will know that I am the LORD who sanctifies Israel, when My sanctuary is in their midst forever"" (Ezekiel 37:21-28).

"I will strengthen the house of Judah, and I will save the house of Joseph, and I will bring them back, because I have had compassion on them; and they will be as though I had not rejected them, for I am the LORD their God and I will answer them. Ephraim will be like a mighty man, and their heart will be glad as if *from* wine; indeed, their children will see *it* and be glad, their heart will rejoice in the LORD. I will whistle for them to gather them together, for I have redeemed them; and they will be as numerous as they were before. When I scatter them among the peoples, they will remember Me in far countries, and they with their children will live and come back. I will bring them back from the land of Egypt and gather them from Assyria; and I will bring them into the land of Gilead and Lebanon until no *room* can be found for them" (Zechariah 10:6-10).

How some of these prophecies will transpire, are specifically unknown at this point in history. (Ezekiel 37:15-28 is examined in specific detail in **Chapter 6**.) Yet, we *really do* need to be carefully considering them as a part of our end-time scenarios. We must consider the fact that Yeshua **may have not presently returned**—as many have expected—because these prophecies have been overlooked, or at least under-emphasized. We must seek the Lord and through His Holy Spirit contemplate the prophecies before us and proceed carefully. Much will undoubtedly take place in a future time, when the global situation is much different than it is today. When one sees prophetic words that detail a great amount of people, presumably immigrating to the Land of Israel, for example—it may very well take place in a world environment and in circumstances that are much different than ours, presently in the early Twenty-First Century.

The Mission of Israel

By far, I would have to argue that the most important part of any person recognizing himself or herself as a part of the Commonwealth of Israel—especially if that person is a Jewish Believer or a non-Jewish Believer in Messiah Yeshua—is in trying to understand **the Divine mission that God gave Ancient Israel**.

In the scene of Genesis 32:28-29, as he was preparing himself for a confrontation with his estranged brother Esau, the Patriarch Jacob wrestles with the supernatural being all night, and is renamed "Israel." Part of his being renamed Israel has to do with the mission that the Lord had for both him and his

descendants after him. We can also safely assume that such a mission regards those who are joined into Israel via their faith in its God, and now the Messiah:

“He said, **‘Your name shall no longer be Jacob, but Israel; for you have striven with God and with men and have prevailed.’** Then Jacob asked him and said, ‘Please tell me your name.’ But he said, ‘Why is it that you ask my name? And he blessed him there.”

Prior to being renamed Israel, the Patriarch’s name was *Ya’akov* (יַעֲקֹב), which has been traditionally interpreted as meaning “supplanter,” although it more specifically means “heel holder,” as he grabbed his brother’s heel at the time of his birth (Genesis 25:26).³⁹ The Biblical story of Jacob reveals that he was very much a trickster and a swindler prior to this time. By being renamed *Yisrael* (יִשְׂרָאֵל), Jacob experienced a major status change. Jewish commentator J.H. Hertz observes in *Pentateuch & Haftorahs*, regarding the name Israel, that “The name is clearly a title of victory; probably ‘a champion of God’. The children of the Patriarch are *Israelites*, Champions of God, Contenders for the Divine, conquering by strength from Above.”⁴⁰ The thoughts of Joyce G. Baldwin, in her reflective commentary *The Message of Genesis 12-50*, are also rather useful to consider:

“In Jacob’s case it took God twenty years to bring Jacob to this point of surrender on the border of the promised land; the Lord is not in any hurry, crucial as the transaction is. But when his time comes the transformation is complete: it is a transition from life to death, from self-help to faith in the God who cripples Jacob in order to bless him....In the same way as Jacob had needed the transforming power of God, so in every generation did his successors. The name *Jacob* stood for the raw material taken by the Lord to achieve his purposes, while *Israel* called to mind the transforming power which made a new man of Jacob, and which could have done the same for his descendants...”⁴¹

The Hebrew name *Yisrael* “Means ‘he contends with God’” (*TWOT*), something which is surely intended to convey how “Jacob’s struggle was spiritual...as well as physical. And in it the patriarch ‘prevailed’” (*TWOT*).⁴² Jacob or *Ya’akov* (יַעֲקֹב) was renamed Israel or *Yisrael* (יִשְׂרָאֵל) because **he had remained steadfast** in wrestling with the supernatural being during the night. Jacob’s descendants, and/or those who consider themselves a part of the community that bears the name Israel, are likewise called to endure and strive through the power of God. It is sadly true that this has not always been the case, as evidenced by much of the Scriptural testimony of God’s people falling into sin and needing to be *sternly and firmly* admonished to return to loyalty and obedience to Him. Yet as Believers in Yeshua, we should wholeheartedly embrace a spiritual ethos and dynamic

³⁹ L. Hicks, “Jacob (Israel),” in George Buttrick, ed. et. al., *Interpreter’s Dictionary of the Bible*, 4 vols. (Nashville: Abingdon, 1962), 2:782-783.

⁴⁰ J.H. Hertz, ed., *Pentateuch & Haftorahs* (London: Soncino Press, 1960), *Pentateuch & Haftorahs*, 124.

⁴¹ Joyce G. Baldwin, *The Message of Genesis 12-15* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1986), 139.

⁴² J. Barton Payne, “יִשְׂרָאֵל; יַעֲקֹב,” in R. Laird Harris, Gleason L. Archer, Jr., and Bruce K. Waltke, eds., *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, 2 vols (Chicago: Moody Press, 1980), 2:883.

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deeply rooted within what it means to contend with God—the meaning of *Yisrael*. Such a call is witnessed in the Apostle Paul’s word of Philippians 3:14:

“I keep pursuing the goal in order to win the prize offered by God’s upward calling in the Messiah Yeshua” (Philippians 3:14, CJB).

As Believers in the Messiah of Israel, we are each called to press forward in our faith, the calling that the Lord has given us to achieve His mission, and never give up, no matter what the cost. We are called to endure for our God (cf. 2 Timothy 2:3-7). And as we need to perhaps remind ourselves, as it concerns the controversial subject matter of a larger restoration of Israel—indeed involving those of the Northern and Southern Kingdoms, *and* many more companions from the nations themselves—only those who are *persistently reasonable* and who *strive to be fair* are those who are going to be rewarded by the Lord in the long run. This subject matter absolutely does concern the restoration of His Kingdom on Earth via the return of the Messiah, which is *no trivial matter* in the least. Those who are going to haphazardly dismiss and fail to read and consider a large(r) scope of unfulfilled, Biblical prophecies regarding Israel in the eschaton, *and/or* various popular/populist teachers who go out on the road for speaking trips and conference appearances, making a “quick buck”—are *surely not* those who are prevailing with Him. They possess no ability to see the long term future, and commit themselves to the daily and weekly tasks of His Kingdom, reaching for the age to come.

I think we should all choose to be a part of the holy and set-apart people which our Heavenly Father desires in Deuteronomy 28:9: “The LORD will establish you as a holy people to Himself, as He swore to you, if you keep the commandments of the LORD your God and walk in His ways.” The Apostle Peter concurs, instructing how important it is that God’s people obey Him and demonstrate proper conduct: “[B]ut like the Holy One who called you, be holy yourselves also in all *your* behavior; because it is written, ‘YOU SHALL BE HOLY, FOR I AM HOLY’ [Leviticus 11:44-45; 19:2; 20:7]” (1 Peter 1:15-16). Moses originally said in the Torah that obedience to God’s commandments would naturally result in outsiders to Israel seeing the people blessed, and hence inquiring about Him as Creator:

“So keep and do *them*, for that is your wisdom and your understanding in the sight of the peoples who will hear all these statutes and say, ‘Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people.’ For what great nation is there that has a god so near to it as is the LORD our God whenever we call on Him?” (Deuteronomy 4:6-7).

Considering oneself as a part of the community of Israel, in obedience to the Lord, should manifest itself in demonstrating His character and goodness to *all* we encounter—especially as it concerns the good news of salvation in Messiah Yeshua! How any person, ministry, or organization in today’s broad Messianic world demonstrates such goodness, grace, and mercy to one another—has not typically been easy, and in a few cases, it has been quantitatively absent. Yet, it is those who are able to allow their hearts and minds to be transformed by the Messiah’s love

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and character, who will be able to approach the different issues and sub-issues with the intention to let the Lord lead and have His Word be heard.

There is too much of a good thing going on in today's Messianic community, with Jewish and non-Jewish Believers being brought together as the "one new humanity" (Ephesians 2:15, NRSV), for unnecessary division and rivalry to manifest itself over issues associated with a larger restoration of Israel—which when properly diagnosed, concerns eschatology, and will manifest steadily as we edge closer to the Messiah's return. By its very nature, any interpretation regarding the end-times and future prophecy, **is not a salvation issue**; it is *adiaphora*.⁴³ But, if there really is a futuristic, larger restoration of Israel to come, it does need to be subject to further refinement, examination, and reflection.

⁴³ *Adiaphora* is Greek term for "things indifferent," largely meaning "Elements of faith regarded as neither commanded nor forbidden in Scripture and thus on which liberty of conscience may be exercised" (Donald S. McKim, *Westminster Dictionary of Theological Terms* [Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1996], 4).