

THE WILD AND WONDERFUL WORLD OF THE BROAD MESSIANIC MOVEMENT

by J.K. McKee

Any one of us, who has read the Gospels and Acts, is undeniably struck by the fact that the message of the arrival of Israel's Messiah, was first proclaimed to the Jewish people—and the necessity of proclaiming the good news to today's Jewish people is hardly on the spiritual radar of contemporary evangelicalism. With a handful of exceptions (i.e., Matthew 8:9; Luke 7:8), the quantitative declaration of the good news, to those of the nations, did not take place until after Peter's vision in Acts ch. 10. Of course, as a Tanach prophecy like Isaiah 49:6 would declare, "It is too trifling a thing that You should be My servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob and restore the preserved ones of Israel. So I will give You as a light for the nations, that You should be My salvation to the end of the earth" (TLV). However, given some of the controversies regarding the inclusion of Greek and Roman Believers in the First Century Body of Messiah—particularly as seen in parts of Galatians and Romans—many of the Jewish Believers did not consider the anticipated restoration of Israel's Kingdom (Acts 1:6) to be intertwined with the salvation of people from the masses of humanity.

History has borne out that by the mid-First Century, more people from the nations at large were receiving Israel's Messiah, than the Messiah's own Jewish people. In Romans chs. 9-11, the Apostle Paul was distraught over the widescale dismissal of Yeshua by his fellow Jews, but did recognize that it had to be a part of God's plan. Non-Jewish Believers would have a responsibility, though, of provoking Jewish people to jealousy for faith in Yeshua (Romans 11:11), not be arrogant against the natural branches (Romans 11:18), and be vessels of grace and mercy to the Jewish people (Romans 11:30-31). Unfortunately, Paul's direction has not been implemented over the centuries—and rather than seeing non-Jewish Believers in Israel's Messiah demonstrate His love to the Jewish people, instead discrimination, persecution, and atrocities have taken place. Only in our generation, perhaps, have some of the directions of Romans chs. 9-11 been taken more seriously by non-Jewish Messiah followers.

The Messianic Jewish Movement

The development of today's modern Messianic Jewish movement goes back to the late 1960s and early 1970s, as Jewish Believers in Israel's Messiah established congregations, synagogues, and assemblies with the mission of facilitating **Jewish outreach, Jewish evangelism, and solidarity with the State of Israel**. This is a mission which continues to our present day, and should ever be on the hearts and minds of those involved with today's Messianic congregations. A major reason, for the establishment of Messianic Jewish congregations, was to combat the errant idea that Jewish people, who come to faith in Israel's Messiah, stop being Jewish, start being "Christian," and should readily assimilate into a non-Jewish Christian Church system and culture. In stark contrast to this, Jewish people coming to faith in Israel's Messiah, hardly stop being Jewish; some would say that being a Believer in Israel's Messiah is one of the most Jewish things that one can do. The Messianic Jewish movement is present, to particularly communicate to the wider non-believing Jewish community, that expressing faith in Yeshua of Nazareth does not mean an abandonment of one's Jewish heritage and traditions. For much of Messianic Judaism's modern history, these convictions have put it at odds with a great deal of traditional Christianity.

Throughout much of the 1980s and into the 1990s, Messianic Judaism grew, primarily in North America, with the establishment of congregations to reach out to the local Jewish community in their immediate vicinity. This mission continues to our present day. However, while the original vision and purpose of the Messianic Jewish movement innately involved Jewish outreach, evangelism, and Israel solidarity—Messianic Jewish rabbis and congregational leaders frequently do get invited to speak at evangelical churches, and in particular speak not only on the Messiah in the Biblical festivals, but frequently host Passover *seder* presentations. The late 1990s saw a wide number of non-Jewish Believers being called into the Messianic community, for a variety of reasons. Many of these reasons involved evangelical Believers wanting to partake of their Jewish Roots in tangible ways, learning about the Tanach or Old Testament on a more regular basis, and participating in things that Yeshua and His first followers did. Some Messianic Jewish congregations were very welcoming of such non-Jewish Believers as their fellow brothers and sisters, actually concluding that as the Messiah's return was steadily approaching, that the Messianic movement would probably start looking more and more like the First Century *ekklēsia*. Others, however, did not act so positively toward the large numbers of non-Jewish Believers coming into their ranks. Were these people going to help aid Jewish outreach and evangelism, or bring an all new series of issues (and problems) into the assembly?

Following the turn of the Millennium in the early 2000s, there were varied Messianic Jewish reactions to the many non-Jewish Believers coming into the Messianic movement. Some of these reactions were positive, and others were negative. Messianic Jewish leaders have properly emphasized that non-Jewish Believers need to be supernaturally called into the Messianic movement (certainly at this phase of its development), and committed to Jewish ministry, even though it will obviously involve some significant investigation and study of their own faith heritage in Israel's Scriptures. *This would also necessarily include being sensitive to Jewish concerns and historical resistance to Yeshua the Messiah.* Many Messianic Jewish leaders have eagerly embraced non-Jewish participation in the Messianic Jewish movement, with an emphasis on congregations representing the "one new man" or "one new humanity" of Ephesians 2:15, where all can confess sins of prejudice and misunderstanding to each other, and we can pool our talents and resources for the salvation and restoration of Israel (cf. Romans 11:26). Other sectors of the Messianic Jewish movement have not been so welcoming of non-Jewish Believers in its ranks. And, because of this, a number of movements or sub-movements spun off of the Messianic Jewish movement, from the 1980s to the 2000s.

It is safe to say, that just as many of the First Century Jewish Believers did not anticipate many Greeks and Romans embracing faith in Israel's Messiah—so did a number of Messianic Judaism's early pioneers not prepare themselves sufficiently for non-Jewish Believers coming into the Messianic movement. The salvation of the nations at large was anticipated in the Tanach, and in the case of non-Jewish Believers being drawn into the Messianic movement in significant numbers, in modern times, it is also prophesied that the nations will stream to Zion to be taught God's Instruction, resulting in worldwide peace (Isaiah 2:2-4; Micah 4:1-3). These prophecies are taking place in our day, just as in our day more Jewish people have come to Messiah faith than since the times of the Messiah. Yet, a holy message of seeing all of God's people with a faith grounded in all of God's Word, has been frequently used in an inappropriate manner to promote division, rather than to better understand the ways of God, so that we can better and more genuinely understand the two critical commands of loving Him and neighbor (Deuteronomy 6:5; Leviticus 19:18).

The One Law/One Torah Sub-Movement

In the early 2000s, a prominent movement that broke off of Messianic Judaism, is frequently known by the label of **One Law/One Torah**. To its credit, it honestly sought an answer for the place of non-Jewish Believers

within the Commonwealth of Israel (Ephesians 2:11-13) as co-heirs with Jewish Believers (Ephesians 3:6). It usefully decided that non-Jewish Believers in the Messianic movement are like the sojourners or *gerim* (גֵּרִים) who entered into Ancient Israel, professing belief in Israel's God, and entering into the community. Because sojourners or *gerim* could be among those easily taken advantage of, the Torah includes explicit instruction to the Israelites that they were to be shown hospitality. The sojourner in Ancient Israel, was to actually be treated by the native born as though he were native born: "When a stranger resides with you in your land, you shall not do him wrong. The stranger who resides with you shall be to you as the native among you, and you shall love him as yourself, for you were aliens in the land of Egypt; I am the LORD your God" (Leviticus 19:33-34, NASU). It was hardly unreasonable or unfair to suggest that non-Jewish Believers, in today's Messianic movement, be shown the same welcome that sojourners in Ancient Israel were to be demonstrated.

Much of the One Law/One Torah sub-movement's ideology is focused around a number of Torah passages which stress either "one law" or "one statute" to be followed by those within the community of Ancient Israel (i.e., Exodus 12:48-49; Leviticus 24:22; Numbers 9:14; 15:15-16). A statement such as "There shall be one standard for you; it shall be for the stranger as well as the native, for I am the LORD your God" (Leviticus 24:22, NASU), would be applied by proponents of a One Torah theology as a universal statement for all in the community of Ancient Israel following the same Torah. While passages that use terminology such as "one law" or "one statute" should be able to be examined for what they mean within Torah jurisprudence—are such remarks involving "one law" or "one statute" universal statements, or principally statements regarding the legislation immediately detailed?

Leviticus 24:22, for example, is immediately preceded by how natives and sojourners, equally within Ancient Israel, were to be stoned to death for blasphemy: "Moreover, the one who blasphemes the name of the LORD shall surely be put to death; all the congregation shall certainly stone him. The alien as well as the native, when he blasphemes the Name, shall be put to death" (Leviticus 24:16, NASU). When an act of blasphemy was committed within Ancient Israel, by either a native or a sojourner, the uniform penalty of capital punishment was to be enacted. It was not as though a native born could be issued a corporal punishment such as a flogging, or have to pay a heavy fine—with the sojourner only subject to capital punishment. In high legal matters where the native born of Israel might have been shown preferential treatment or special favors, there was to be a uniform standard.

The Torah's instruction includes a number of significant areas detailing both the native born Israelite's, and well as the sojourner's, obedience and standing (Exodus 12:10; Leviticus 16:29; 17:15; 18:26; Numbers 35:15; Deuteronomy 1:16). And frequently, sojourners were to be regarded as a part of the broad community of Israel. However, it is hardly as though there were no differences of any kind between the two. Sojourners, unless being circumcised and intermarrying into one of the Twelve Tribes of Israel, did not have any sort of ancestral claim on the Promised Land. Likewise, due to their frequently low economic status, sojourners in Ancient Israel were often recipients of welfare (Leviticus 19:10; 23:22; Deuteronomy 10:18; 14:21). While sojourners and natives in the community of Ancient Israel had a great deal in common, there were also differences as well. Advocates of a One Law/One Torah theology, do not tend to be willing to discuss those differences.

While there are well-meaning and sincere advocates of a One Law/One Torah theology, who have made useful theological contributions, there is a deep ideological problem with emphasizing Bible passages that use the terminology "one law" or "one statute" as a credo. Each one of these passages involves an original setting in Ancient Israel that has been *directly affected* by the death, burial, and resurrection of Yeshua the Messiah—and the post-resurrection era in which we live. A frequent criticism of those who identify as One Law/One Torah, is that they are very legalistic and rigid in their approach to Moses' Teaching. This is hardly a surprise if "one law" originally involved settings such as uniform capital punishment for those in Ancient Israel! Yeshua the Messiah, via His sacrifice on the tree, absorbed the capital penalties of the Torah onto Himself (Colossians 2:14).

Rather than emphasize passages that employ "one law" terminology, it is far better to stress education and training in Moses' Teaching, for the Jewish and non-Jewish Believers who make up today's Messianic movement: "Assemble the people, the men and the women and children and the alien who is in your town, so that they may hear and learn and fear the LORD your God, and be careful to observe all the words of this law" (Deuteronomy 31:12, NASU). An educational model, of receiving Torah instruction, will facilitate the work of the Holy Spirit via the power of the New Covenant, which is to supernaturally transcribe God's commandments onto a redeemed heart and mind (Jeremiah 31:31-34; Ezekiel 36:25-27). A redeemed heart and mind are not rigid and inflexible when it comes to implementing God's Instruction in complicated Twenty-First Century circumstances.

The Two-House Sub-Movement

Around the turn of the Millennium, and extending into the early 2000s, another major sect that spun off of Messianic Judaism was the **Two-House** movement. Many of the people, who were initially involved in the Two-House sub-movement, had been non-Jewish Believers who had felt unwelcomed or dismissed from Messianic Judaism. In feeling spurned or marginalized in Messianic Jewish settings, and also concluding that they could not return to their previous Christian experience, a wide array of questions about *why* they had been drawn toward the Messianic movement and their faith heritage in Israel's Scriptures were being asked. A number of today's Messianic Jews are of the opinion that various non-Jewish Believers in the Messianic movement are indeed here because they have distant Jewish ancestry which has asserted itself in some way, as the Messiah's return draws closer. People, who identify as being Two-House, think that most of today's non-Jewish Believers, involved in today's "things Messianic," are here, in slight contrast, because they are most probably descendants of the Ten Lost Tribes.

Anyone who studies the Tanach Scriptures should very much be aware of how following the death of King Solomon, the Kingdom of Israel split into the Northern Kingdom of Israel or Ephraim, and the Southern Kingdom of Judah. The Divided Kingdom era is a part of legitimate Biblical history, recorded in the Books of Kings and Books of Chronicles, and reflected in the Prophets. As a matter of Biblical history, it also has to be recognized that when the Northern Kingdom of Israel/Ephraim fell to the expanding Assyrian Empire in 722-721 B.C.E., that a sizeable enough part of its population was deported. Many of these people, in being forcibly transversed to other parts of the Assyrian Empire, in the Middle East, were forced to intermarry with other conquered peoples. Anyone involved in Biblical Studies has to acknowledge that the exact whereabouts, of what are commonly called the Ten Lost Tribes, has been a matter of much speculation—as well as myth—throughout history.

There are Tanach prophecies, detailing the final restoration of Israel's Kingdom, which surely involve the reunion of people from both the Northern and Southern Kingdoms (i.e., Isaiah 11:12-16; Jeremiah 31:6-10; Ezekiel 37:15-28; Zechariah 10:6-10). The famed two-stick oracle of Ezekiel 37:15-28, for example, is recognized as being a futuristic, yet-to-be fulfilled prophecy, by both Jewish and Christian commentators alike—and for many of the latter, as something which will be directly involved with the Messiah's Second Coming. Certainly as a matter of Bible study and eschatology, considering prophetic passages of the Tanach which involve the Northern and Southern Kingdoms as participants, should not be a huge issue. If, for example,

there are people who are descendants of the exiled Northern Kingdom, to be reunited with those of the Southern Kingdom, *before the Messiah's return*, then it is something for us to contemplate in regard to how soon, or how not so soon, Yeshua will come back.

Among both Jewish and Christian Bible scholars today, it is recognized that in spite of some of the unwarranted speculation and mythology that has been witnessed in history regarding the Ten Lost Tribes—that there are pockets of people groups on Earth today, who are separate from the Jewish community, but nevertheless have some oral traditions or customs going back to Ancient Israel. There are pockets of people in remote corners of places like Southeast Asia, South Asia, the Middle East, the Eastern Mediterranean basin, and the environs of Central Africa, who claim to be descendants of the exiled Northern Kingdom—and have been confirmed as likely members of the Ten Lost Tribes by Jewish authorities in Israel, usually enjoined by DNA analysis. These are the areas which generally fall within the sphere of influence of the old Assyrian, Babylonian, and Persian Empires, and where the exiles of the Northern Kingdom could have been legitimately deported, scattered, and/or assimilated (cf. Jeremiah 31:10; Hosea 8:8-9; Amos 9:8-9).

The Two-House sub-movement, in originally seeking an answer for the place of many non-Jewish Believers in today's Messianic movement, drew the assumption that they are most probably descendants of the Ten Lost Tribes—even though such people had no quantitative evidence for Semitic ancestry. The Two-House sub-movement widely believes that there are hundreds of millions, or even billions, of physical descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob on Planet Earth today, in spite of the Torah word that the numbers of Israel will not be so numerous (Deuteronomy 28:62).

In spite of the non-Jews who make up the Two-House sub-movement, self-identifying as "Ephraim"—and wanting some kind of reunion with "Judah"—the Two-House sub-movement is broadly hostile to a great deal of mainline Jewish traditions and customs. This is most frequently evident by Two-House people often following a different calendar for the appointed times than the mainstream Jewish calendar, affluent use of the Divine Name YHWH/YHVH rather than acceptable titles such as God or Lord, and even a tacit acceptance of polygamy by some of its leaders. (A few of those within the Two-House sub-movement do not believe that today's Ashkenazic Jews are legitimate Semites, they think that the State of Israel is a Luciferian counterfeit, and they are even Holocaust deniers.) **Messianic Judaism has had every reason to at least be concerned, when people identifying as "Two-House" visit its assemblies.**

The place of non-Jewish Believers within Messianic congregations, definitely needs to be one where they are welcomed as equal brothers and sisters in the Lord, with gifts and talents and skills which need to be appreciated and used. One does not have to be of physical Israel in order to be accepted into the Kingdom of God—because physical ancestry *of any kind* hardly merits someone eternal salvation (cf. Romans 2:9). As a matter of our Biblical Studies, we do need to carefully and reasonably be able to discuss the Divided Kingdom era of Ancient Israel's history, and be able to sort through much of the fact and fiction involved with the deportation of exiles from the Northern Kingdom by Assyria. Various Messianic Jewish ministries of today have recognized legitimate people groups from Asia and Africa descended from the Ten Lost Tribes, and it is likely these people who will be among the participants in prophecies like Ezekiel 37:15-28.

The Hebrew Roots Movement

There are many non-Jewish Believers, who in the 2000s felt unwelcome in various Messianic Jewish congregations, felt welcomed in the Two-House sub-movement, identified as some sort of "Israelite" for a season—but then who thankfully saw some of the extremism present in the Two-House sub-movement regarding the Lost Tribes and physical identity. By the late 2000s and into the 2010s, many who had been involved in the Two-House sub-movement, legitimately tried to shed some of the tall tales involving the Lost Tribes, and instead attempted to focus more on what it meant for non-Jewish Believers to be grafted-in to the olive tree of Israel (Romans 11:16-17ff), and more consciously associating with their faith heritage in the Tanach Scriptures. Many non-Jews had been a part of the Two-House sub-movement, for a season—not necessarily because they thought they were members of the Ten Lost Tribes—but instead because they felt more welcomed and included than they would be in various Messianic Jewish venues.

In the 1990s, when one encountered the term "Hebrew Roots" being used, it was most probably employed by various evangelical Christian teachers trying to stress how Christian people have a faith heritage in the Old Testament, the Bible of Jesus, and that it is important for people to understand the richness of the Hebrew language and how the Tanach points to the Messiah. The term "Hebrew Roots," for many, was a synonym for "Jewish Roots," or the term "Hebrew Roots" was used as a compliment to the term "Jewish Roots." The term "Hebrew Roots" was a term which could be employed to specifically emphasize the foundational importance of the Hebrew Scriptures, the importance of Hebrew language study, and getting Christian people plugged into more detailed examination of the Old Testa-

ment. The term “Jewish Roots” could be used to emphasize study of the Second Temple Judaism of Yeshua and His first disciples, the necessary examination of the broad history of this period and immediately thereafter, as well as a review of significant bodies of extra-Biblical and Rabbinical literature germane to this time. Certainly in many of my own writings, I have stressed how we all have Hebrew Roots in the Tanach Scriptures, and Jewish Roots in the Second Temple faith of Yeshua and His early disciples.

As various non-Jewish people sought to distance themselves from the label “Two-House” in the late 2000s and early 2010s, many of them instead began to use the term **Hebrew Roots**. For some of these people, this involved a sincere desire of wanting to study the Tanach Scriptures and live in a similar manner to Yeshua and His first followers. Many who have used the term “Hebrew Roots” have done so to legitimately stress a Biblical faith rooted in the Tanach Scriptures. For others, however, the term “Hebrew Roots” became a moniker to be sensationalized and abused, as in the late 2010s the term “Hebrew Roots” has become something largely associated with a non-Jewish movement, **not at all interested in Jewish outreach or evangelism**, widely dismissive of mainline Jewish traditions and customs, and at times with an even wider array of problems than those identifying as Two-House ever had. Many non-Jewish people who are involved in “Hebrew Roots” not only have a great deal of unfair disdain toward the Jewish Synagogue, but also the positive legacy of evangelical Protestantism. An entire host of sensationalistic hype is today connected to the label “Hebrew Roots,” not only involving a great deal of end-time paranoia and fear, but also conspiracy theories, postulations about the Nephilim of Genesis 6, and most recently Flat Earth—among other things. **It is an understatement to say that today, when the term “Hebrew Roots” is invoked, that many of today’s Messianic Jewish leaders and teachers get tense.**

Navigating Our Future

The emergence of today’s Messianic movement on the scene, represents the last final spiritual move of God, *before* the final stretch of history culminating in the return of Israel’s Messiah. At no time in history, since the First Century C.E., have more Jewish people come to faith in Yeshua of Nazareth. And, similar to the First Century Body of Messiah, many non-Jewish Believers are in close, regular communion with these Jewish Believers. In no uncertain terms, a number of the issues which arose in the First Century, are manifesting themselves today in various forms. But, unlike the past, we have the teacher of history to inform us about mistakes which do not have to be repeated!

A number of the early Messianic Jewish pioneers could not have foreseen how today, as the 2010s close, that there are additional sectors using the term "Messianic." Within the Tanach, it is legitimately anticipated how those from the nations will be involved in the restoration of Israel, contributing their various riches (Isaiah 45:14; 61:6; Micah 4:13). Because of the provision of the Messiah to those of the nations, non-Jewish Believers are to provide blessings to the Jewish people, and Jewish and non-Jewish followers of Israel's God are to be equal (2 Corinthians 8:13-14). All of us who have been chosen to be a part of the Messianic movement at this time in history, are to pool our gifts, talents, and resources for the work which sits directly in front of us. **This work directly concerns the salvation of Jewish people.** As Romans 11:16 should astutely remind each of us, "For if their rejection leads to the reconciliation of the world, what will their acceptance be but life from the dead?" (TLV).

How concerned are the non-Jewish sub-movements or spin-offs, we have just reviewed, with the original Messianic Jewish vision of Jewish outreach, Jewish evangelism, and Israel solidarity? As things stand today, with the 2020s on our doorstep, it is fair to say that the non-Jewish people identifying as One Law/One Torah, Two-House, or even Hebrew Roots, are not too concerned as they should be, with seeing their Jewish neighbors and friends come to Messiah faith. While these people have appreciably come to a knowledge of their spiritual heritage in the Scriptures of Israel, being better educated and informed to various degrees—are they able to take such knowledge and information, and contribute to developing relationships with Jewish people who need the salvation of Yeshua? Are they helping to facilitate a more stable and effective Messianic movement, or are they fracturing it further and further? When difficult times arise, and anti-Semitism increases—will these non-Jewish people, in these different sectors, truly stand with the Jewish people and with Messianic Jewish Believers? Or, similar to how Peter denied the Lord three times, will these non-Jewish people be seen to deny their involvement with anything "Messianic"?

The Messianic world of today is both wild and wonderful. Our faith community possesses a great deal of potential to make a difference, provided we do not forget its Romans 11:26 trajectory. Are there things involved in the Messianic experience that go beyond Jewish outreach and evangelism? Yes. But things involving non-Jewish Believers entering into the mix, are not solely so such people can be spiritually enriched, and then later leave, do their own thing, and become opportunists. All of us, in spite of some of the confusion that is out there, need to be committed to a future where we remain true to the original mission of the Messianic movement, while still being flexible enough to address the issues of the day.