

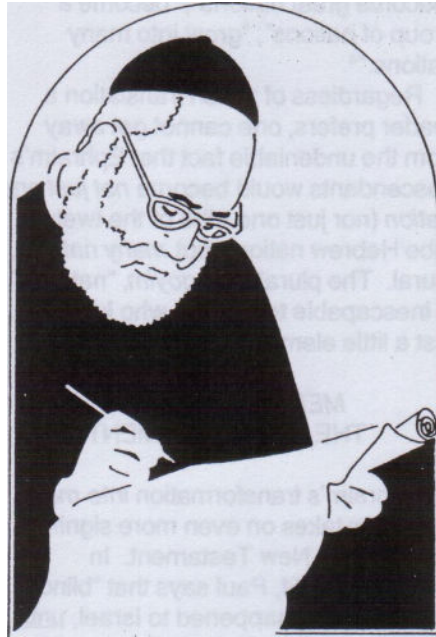
TWO-HOUSE TEACHING: Where Should Our Emphasis Be?

Dr. Daniel Botkin

In recent years, more and more Messianic believers have come to believe and teach some form of Two-House teaching (or Two-House theology). I wrote one article about this subject two years ago (*Gates of Eden* 6-3). In this second article I would like to address the question of where our emphasis should be when presenting this teaching. In other words, which aspect of the teaching is really the most important, and what is the best way to communicate that aspect? Before answering that question, let me present some of the major points of the teaching for the benefit of readers who may not be familiar with it. (The following three paragraphs are excerpted from my article that appeared two years ago.)

To understand Two-House teaching, a person has to be familiar with three significant events in the Old Testament: 1) Israel's division into two kingdoms (or "houses") after the death of King Solomon; 2) the exile of the ten tribes of the northern kingdom and their subsequent scattering and assimilation among the Gentiles; and 3) the Prophets' declaration that these two houses would someday be re-united and restored as one kingdom.

Because the ten northern tribes (known in Scripture collectively as "Ephraim" or "Israel") were scattered and assimilated among the Gentiles through intermarriage, a large percentage of the world's population today has to have some Israelite ancestry. There is no way to prove or disprove who has Israelite ancestry and who does not, but that is not the point. The point is that there are, of necessity, a great number of Gentiles who do have some Israelite ancestry somewhere in their family tree. Tens of thousands of Israelites intermarrying with Gentiles thousands of years ago would result in millions of offspring over the centuries. Theoretically, all of the world's population could eventually be genealogically linked to the tribes of Israel, and, theoretically, all the world's population could already be so linked, except among ethnic groups that have been geographically isolated and have not intermarried with outsiders.



The Prophets said that the House of Ephraim - the ten tribes who intermarried and lost their tribal identities - would eventually be re-united with the House of Judah. The Jewish people are obviously "the House of Judah," and because the Church is composed primarily of Gentiles, some of whom have Israelite ancestry somewhere in their genealogy, the Church is presented as the obvious candidate for "the House of Ephraim" of end-time prophecy. Two-House theology asserts that the Prophets' declaration of the two houses being re-united will come about through Christians and Jews who will be joined together as "one new man."

The Two-House view asserts that this began happening in the days of the Apostles, and is finally coming to its full fruition in this generation as more and more Jews are embracing Yeshua (Jesus) as Messiah, and more and more Christians are embracing Torah.

Now let us look at some of the Scriptures that are germane to this subject.

GENESIS: A PROPHETIC PREVIEW

A Bible teacher once wrote that "the roots of all subsequent revelation are planted deep in Genesis, and whoever

would truly comprehend that revelation must begin here."¹ So we will begin by looking at the roots of the Two-House teaching in Genesis, and proceed to the trunk and the branches that are revealed in later books of the Bible.

Of the fifty chapters that make up Genesis, all except the first eleven chapters are about the Patriarchs Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. The rabbis teach that the events in the lives of the Patriarchs can be seen as previews of significant events that would take place in the later history of the nation that descended from them.

A preview of the division of Israel into two separate houses can be seen in Genesis 32. Jacob was on his way home after twenty long years of exile (Gen. 31:41). "And Jacob went on his way, and the angels of God met him. And when Jacob saw them, he said, 'This is God's host [*machaneh*].' And he called the name of that place Machanaim ['two hosts']."

The "two hosts" here apparently refers to the visible human host, consisting of Jacob's camp, and the invisible angelic host, whose presence was made known to Jacob. This concept of two hosts (or groups) is then carried a step further in the division of Jacob's family into two separate groups: "Then Jacob was greatly afraid and distressed: and he divided the people that were with him, and the flocks, and herds, and the camels, into two bands." Here is a prophetic picture of the two-fold division of Jacob's descendants that would take place centuries later when the ten northern tribes separated from the tribe of Judah.

The next day, after Jacob's all-night wrestling match with the Angel of the Lord, the two groups were re-united, and together they all faced Esau. Here is a picture of the re-uniting of the two groups of Jacob's descendants that will take place in "the last days," a period of history that began at Pentecost (Acts 2:17) and extends to the end of the age.

Rachel and Joseph were the last of the family of Jacob (now known as Israel) to face Esau. There may be prophetic significance to Joseph's being

the last of Israel's sons to face Esau, depending on who the descendants of Joseph are today and what actions they will take in the final confrontation with Arab Muslims, who are descendants of Esau. See Obadiah, especially verse 18.²

After these events, the rest of Genesis focuses mostly on the story of Joseph, Jacob's favorite son. Joseph is sold into slavery by his brothers and carried away to Egypt. In Egypt, through a series of circumstances, Joseph is exalted and made ruler second only to Pharaoh. He marries and has two sons, Manasseh and Ephraim. During a time of severe famine, Joseph's brothers come to Egypt to buy grain, and there they meet Joseph. Joseph forgives them, they rejoin, and all seventy members of Israel's (Jacob's) extended family settle in Egypt.

A PROPHECY CONCERNING EPHRAIM

When Jacob was on his deathbed, Joseph brought his two sons to be blessed by Jacob. Because the right hand was regarded as a place of higher honor than the left hand, Joseph set his firstborn, Manasseh, in front of Jacob's right hand, and Ephraim, his younger son, in front of Jacob's left hand. But Jacob crossed his arms and placed his right hand on Ephraim's head and his left hand on Manasseh's. When Joseph objected, Jacob explained that the firstborn Manasseh would indeed become a great people, "but truly his younger brother [Ephraim] shall be greater than he, and his seed shall become a multitude of nations" (Gen. 48:19).

The part of this prophecy that is crucial to Two-House teaching is the statement that Ephraim would become "a multitude of nations [D^n-K^D, *melo ha-goyim*]" The meaning of *melo ha-goyim* is important, because Two-House proponents contend that this prophecy means that Ephraim's descendants, as one of the two houses, would eventually lose their Israelite identity through exile, intermarriage, and assimilation, and become, for all practical intents and purposes, Gentile nations (*goyim*).

I consulted ten English translations (seven Christian, three Jewish) to see

how *melo ha-goyim* has been translated. Six of those ten translations state that Ephraim will become "a multitude of nations."³ The other four translations say that Ephraim will "fill the nations"; "become great nations"; "become a group of nations"; "grow into many nations."⁴

Regardless of which translation a reader prefers, one cannot get away from the undeniable fact that Ephraim's descendants would become *not just one nation* (nor just one tribe of the twelve-tribe Hebrew nation), but *many nations*, plural. The plurality of *goyim*, "nations," is inescapable to anyone who knows just a little elementary Hebrew.

MELO HA-GOYIM IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

Ephraim's transformation into *melo ha-goyim* takes on even more significance in the New Testament. In Romans 11:25f, Paul says that "blindness in part is happened to Israel, until the fulness of the Gentiles be come in. And so all Israel shall be saved..."

Does Paul's reference to "the fulness of the Gentiles" have anything to do with Jacob's prophecy about Ephraim's descendants becoming "a multitude of nations," *melo ha-goyim*? It would seem so. I consulted two different Hebrew translations of the New Testament.⁵ Both of them render "fulness of the Gentiles" as *melo ha-goyim*, the exact same Hebrew phrase that Jacob used when prophesying about the destiny of Ephraim's descendants. Apparently Paul understood that there were descendants of Ephraim among the Gentiles who were coming to faith in Israel's Messiah, and through this faith they were being re-connected to the olive tree of Israel from which their fathers had been broken off centuries before. (See the previous verses in Romans 11 for Paul's analogy of the olive tree.)

THE DIVISION INTO TWO HOUSES: HOW IT HAPPENED

The details of how the division came about are written in 1 Kings 11 & 12. King Solomon's pagan wives turned his heart away from the Lord, and he fell into idolatry. Because of Solomon's sins, the Lord sent the prophet Ahijah to

Jeroboam, one of Solomon's servants. Ahijah tore a garment into twelve pieces and handed ten pieces to Jeroboam, saying, Take thee ten pieces: for thus saith Yahweh, the God of Israel, Behold, I will rend the kingdom out of the hand of Solomon, and will give ten tribes to thee."

After the death of Solomon, the ten northern tribes broke away from Judah and, as Ahijah had prophesied, Jeroboam reigned as king over these ten tribes. These ten tribes became collectively known as the house of Israel (as distinct from the house of Judah). Sometimes these ten tribes were called "Ephraim," because King Jeroboam was from the tribe of Ephraim and because Ephraim was the most dominant of the ten tribes. Sometimes the ten tribes are referred to as "Joseph," because Ephraim was the son of Joseph.

From 1 Kings chapter 12 to the end of the Old Testament Scriptures, there are continual references to "the house of Judah" and "the house of Israel" (or "Ephraim" or "Joseph") as two houses distinct from one another. If a reader is not familiar with the division of the original monarchy of King David into two houses, some passages can be confusing.

The rest of the Old Testament Scriptures records the reigns and the sins of the kings of Israel and the kings of Judah, and the Prophets' warnings, which usually went unheeded. The ten northern tribes, the house of Israel, were conquered by Assyria, and the Assyrians "carried Israel away into Assyria" (2 Ki. 17:6). When kings conquered nations in those days, it was customary to shift the conquered populations around. Transplanting conquered peoples onto foreign soil lessened the possibility of uprisings and revolts. "And the king of Assyria brought men from Babylon, and from Cuthah, and from Ava, and from Hamath, and from Sepharvaim, and placed them in the cities of Samaria [the capital of the northern house of Israel] instead of the children of Israel: and they possessed Samaria, and dwelt in the cities thereof (2 Ki. 17:24). These transplanted pagans were the ancestors of the Samaritans that we read about in the New Testament. They were also among the people who opposed the Jews in Nehemiah's day (Neh. 4:2).

About 135 years later, the house of Judah was conquered and carried away to Babylon (2 Ki. 25 & 2 Chron. 36). After seventy years in Babylon, the Jews were able to return to their homeland and rebuild Jerusalem. This is recorded in Ezra and Nehemiah. The house of Judah, the Jewish people, were able to retain their tribal identity. As for the ten northern tribes, they never returned to their tribal territories, though some still knew their tribal identity even as late as New Testament times. (Anna was of the tribe of Asher, and James made reference to "the twelve tribes which are scattered abroad." Notice, they are still scattered abroad, outside the land.) Nonetheless, many lost their tribal identity, and at some point in history the descendants of the ten tribes became so thoroughly assimilated that they totally lost their Israelite identity.

EZEKIEL'S TWO STICKS

Ezekiel was among the Jewish exiles of the house of Judah carried away to Babylon before the final fall of Jerusalem. Ezekiel is a very lengthy book, 48 chapters long. The first 36 chapters are addressed almost exclusively to the house of Judah and its capital, Jerusalem. The northern ten tribes of the house of Israel had already been carried into exile over a century before this, so any reference to the northern ten tribes was to point to their sad fate as a warning to the southern house of Judah (chapters 16 & 23, e.g.) - or, to speak about the future destiny of the ten tribes. Ezekiel begins to speak a little bit about the future of the house of Israel (as distinct from the house of Judah) about the middle of chapter 36. Then in chapter 37 he has the famous vision of the Valley of Dry Bones. The bones come together and are covered with flesh and skin, and God breathes life into this "exceeding great army."

Many people are familiar with Ezekiel's vision of the dry bones. Fewer people are familiar with the explanation God gave to Ezekiel about the meaning of the vision. "These bones are the whole house of Israel," God said. Not just the house of Judah, but both houses. And to make sure that Ezekiel understood that the vision concerned both houses, God told him to take two sticks. On one stick Ezekiel was to write

"For Judah, and for the children of Israel his companions." On the other stick he was to write "For Joseph, the stick of Ephraim, and for all the house of Israel his companions." Then Ezekiel was to join the two sticks together and they would be one in his hand and serve as a sign that God would someday re-unite the house of Ephraim/Joseph/Israel with the house of Judah, so that "they shall be no more two nations, neither shall they be divided into two kingdoms any more at all."

So even though the ten northern tribes were destined to lose their Israelite identity and become *melo ha-goyim*, a multitude of nations, they would someday, somehow, be re-united with the house of Judah, the Jewish people. The Book of Hosea gives us more information to help us understand how this reunion would come to pass.

HOSEA'S PROPHETIC ACTIONS AND WORDS

Some of Hosea's prophecies concern the house of Judah, but his message primarily concerns the northern ten tribes, the house of Israel or "Ephraim." This is evident by the appearance of the word "Ephraim" 37 times in Hosea.

The Lord told Hosea to marry a prostitute. Hosea's relationship with his wife was to serve as a prophetic picture of God's relationship with His whorish, unfaithful people. "And Yahweh said to Hosea, 'Go, take unto thee a wife of whoredoms and children of whoredoms: for the land hath committed great whoredom, departing from Yahweh.'"

Hosea's wife bore him three children. These three children were named by God Himself, therefore all three names carry tremendous prophetic significance. The firstborn was a son, Jezreel. The second was a daughter, Lo-ruhamah. The third was a son, Lo-ammi.

Jezreel (*Yiz'el*) means "God will scatter" or "scattered by God." The -el at the end of the name is "God." The *yi* at the beginning of the name is the third-person, masculine singular, future tense prefix (making the verb mean "he will"). The -*zr'*-, the central part of the name, means "scatter" when used as a verb and "seed" when used as a noun. The prophetic significance of this name is that God was warning the ten tribes that

He was going to send them into exile for their sins and scatter them like seed among the nations. The similarity of *Vfer'e/to Yisra'el* (Israel) is also significant. God was telling the ten tribes that they were going to lose their identity as *Yisra'el* and become instead *Yiz'el*, scattered by God among the nations.

When Hosea's second child was born, God said, "Call her name Lo-ruhamah ['no mercy; not pitied']: for I will no more have mercy upon the house of Israel; but I will utterly take them away." This is in reference to the fact that these ten tribes, unlike the tribe of Judah, would not return to their tribal territory. In the very next verse, God makes it clear that unlike Israel's fate, Judah's destiny will be to survive and retain their tribal identity: "But I will have mercy upon the house of Judah, and will save them..."

When the third child was born, God said, "Call his name Lo-ammi ['not my people']: for ye are not my people, and I will not be your God." Here is the prophecy that the northern ten tribes would lose their identity as the people of God.

So these three children of Hosea, by means of their names, served as a living testimony that the ten tribes would be: 1) scattered like seed among the nations, 2) unpitied, and 3) disowned by God. "Yet," Hosea says...

"Yet the number of the children of Israel shall be as the sand of the sea, which cannot be measured nor numbered..." (1:10).

Israel was scattered like seed among the nations, but scattered seed does not all die. Much of it reproduces, and that new seed reproduces more, and so it goes on, generation after generation, until the physical descendants of Israel are "a multitude of nations," innumerable, as described above.

The next thing Hosea says about this innumerable host of Israelite descendants is very, very significant. Carefully read the entire verse, noting the pronouns "them" and "ye":

"Yet the number of the children of Israel shall be as the sand of the sea, which cannot be measured nor numbered; and it shall come to pass, that in the place where it was said unto them, 'Ye are not my people [*lo-ammi*],' there it shall be said unto them. 'Ye are the sons of the

living God."

Note who it is that is being spoken about in the above verse: the children of Israel, as distinct from the children of Judah. (This distinction is made again in the very next verse, where the two houses are mentioned as two separate groups.) The antecedent of the pronouns "them" and "ye" is "the children of Israel." The children of Israel, the ten northern tribes, are to be scattered among the nations, unpitied, and disowned by God. Yet here is a promise that God is going to have pity on a great number of their descendants and reclaim them as His people someday, and they will then be called sons of God. According to the Apostle Paul, the fulfillment of that promise started taking place when Gentiles began coming to faith in Israel's Messiah. Look at Paul's statement, keeping in mind the Jew-Gentile distinction Paul makes, and note the fact that he applies Hosea's prophecy to Gentiles:

"...Even us, whom he hath called, not of the Jews only, but also of the Gentiles. As he saith also in Hosea, 'I will call them my people, which were not my people; and her beloved, which was not beloved. And it shall come to pass, that in the place where it was said unto them, Ye are not my people; there shall they be called the children of the living God'" (Rom. 9:24-26).

Paul speaks here of Jews and Gentiles as two separate groups before he quotes Hosea's prophecy. This prophecy in Hosea concerned only the children of Israel, the ten northern tribes. The Jews were never disowned by God and never declared to be *lo-ammi*, not my people, as were the ten tribes. Therefore Paul understood the calling of the Gentiles into the Messianic faith to be the fulfillment of Hosea's prophecy. The descendants of the ten tribes would be reclaimed by God as the Gentiles started coming to the faith, because that's where the descendants of the house of Israel were, scattered among the Gentile nations and living as Gentiles, because their Israelite identity had been lost.

Peter also quotes Hosea's prophecy and, like Paul, he too connects the calling of the Gentiles to Hosea's

prophecy:

"But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a peculiar people ... which in time past were not a people [*lo-ammi*], but are now the people of God: which had not obtained mercy [*lo-ruhamah*], but now have obtained mercy" (1 Pet. 2:9f).

Once again, Peter applies Hosea's prophecy to Gentiles, not Jews, because it could not be said of Jews that they were "not a people" before the coming of Christ. Furthermore, Peter addresses his letter to "strangers" ("aliens," NASB) (1:1) and "Christians" (4:16). If Peter is writing to "Christians" (which he is) and telling them that Hosea's prophecy is fulfilled in them, then we must conclude that Peter knew that there were descendants of the ten tribes among these Gentile Christians, and that was how Hosea's prophecy was being fulfilled.

So both Peter and Paul understood that Hosea's prophecy was being fulfilled by Gentiles coming to the faith. That being the case, what does this have to do with the re-uniting of the two houses? The answer to that question is in the rest of Hosea's prophecy. Immediately after the children of Israel are pitied and reclaimed as God's people and called sons of the living God, Hosea says, "Then..."

"Then shall the children of Judah and the children of Israel be gathered together, and appoint themselves one head, and they shall come up out of the land: for great shall be the day of Jezreel"(1:11).

Here the re-uniting of the two houses is directly linked to Hosea's prophecy about the house of Israel being scattered, unpitied, and disowned, and later pitied and reclaimed as God's people and gathered together again with the house of Judah. The New Testament explanations of the fulfillment of Hosea's prophecy (Rom. 9:25f & 1 Pet. 2:9f) show that both Peter and Paul understood that the fulfillment of this prophecy was taking place as a result of Gentiles coming to the Messianic faith. Therefore the inescapable conclusion is that: 1) there were Israelite descendants among the Gentile Christians, and 2) the reuniting of the two houses was beginning

to take place as a direct result of Gentiles coming to faith in Israel's Messiah and being joined together with Messianic Jews into one corporate body which the New Testament calls the Body of Messiah. This reunion of the house of Israel and the house of Judah in the Body of Messiah is no small, insignificant event. It is an event that inspired Hosea to proclaim, "Great shall be the day of Jezreel." The Day of Jezreel began when Gentiles started coming to the Messiah, and it will continue "until the fulness of the Gentiles [*melo hagoyim*] be come in. And so all Israel shall be saved..." (Rom. 11:25f).

ACTS 15 & THE PROPHECY OF AMOS

Another New Testament passage that is related to this subject is Acts 15. The Apostles gathered together in Jerusalem for the express purpose of trying to determine where the Gentiles fit into God's plan. Some said that the Gentiles needed to "be circumcised after the manner of Moses" in order to be saved. This meant going through a formal, full-fledged conversion process which would turn the Gentiles into Jews. Was this what God wanted? If not, what was the significance of all these Gentiles being drawn to the Messianic Community? After "much disputing," James reminded the others about a prophecy of Amos. This prophecy explained what the Gentile phenomenon was all about. Here are the words of James:

"Men and brethren, hearken unto me. Simeon hath declared how God at the first did visit the Gentiles to take out of them a people for his name. And to this agree the words of the prophets; as it is written [here James quotes Amos 9:11 & 12], 'After this I will return, and will build again the tabernacle of David, which is fallen down; and I will build again the ruins thereof, and I will set it up: That the residue of men might seek after the Lord, and all the Gentiles, upon whom my name is called, saith the Lord, who doeth all these things.'" (Acts 15:13-17).

Keep in mind that this prophecy of Amos was the Scripture which helped the Apostles understand where the Gentile Christians fit into the plan of God. I have asked Gentile Christians to read James' statement and tell me what

they think James is talking about when he quotes Amos. How do Gentile Christians fulfill the prophecy of Amos? When I ask this question to Gentile Christians, I usually get a blank stare. This was the Scripture that gave the Apostles an understanding about where the Gentiles fit into God's plan, yet most Gentile Christians admit that they don't have a clue what it means.

Amos wrote some very short prophecies against some of the pagan nations that surrounded Israel and Judah, but the bulk of God's message through Amos is against "the whole family which I brought up from the land of Egypt" (3:1), i.e., the house of Israel and the house of Judah. Amos speaks more against the house of Israel than he does against Judah. This can be seen by all the references to Samaria (the capital of the northern kingdom) and Beth-el (the place where Jeroboam set up one of the golden calves).

In virtually every chapter about the house of Israel, Amos prophesies the coming captivity of the house of Israel (3:14f; 4:2; 5:5; 6:7; 7:17; 8:2; 9:4). Near the end of his book, Amos writes this:

"Behold, the eyes of the Lord God are upon the sinful kingdom, and I will destroy it from off the face of the earth; saving that I will not utterly destroy the house of Jacob, saith Yahweh. For, lo, I will command, and I will sift the house of Israel among all nations, like as corn is sifted in a sieve, yet shall not the least grain fall upon the earth" (Amos 9:8f).

It is right after this that Amos prophesies the restoration of "the tabernacle of David that is fallen down," an event which the Apostles linked to the Gentiles coming to faith in Israel's Messiah. It should be obvious that "the tabernacle [*sukkah*] of David" does not refer to a literal *sukkah*. A *sukkah* is a temporary booth covered with leafy branches, a shelter used to celebrate *Sukkot*, the Feast of Tabernacles. The Feast of Tabernacles prophetically speaks of the Messianic Kingdom (Zech. 14). Therefore the "*sukkah* of David" refers to a place of spiritual rest and shelter into which the Gentiles (including those who are descendants of the house of Israel) can enter and join the Messianic Jews as we all await the return of King

Messiah. The *Sukkah* of David was standing when David ruled over all¹ twelve tribes, and Israel was one united kingdom with one king. The *Sukkah* of David fell when the kingdom was divided into two separate houses after the death of Solomon. The *Sukkah* of David was to be restored when all twelve tribes were once again united as one kingdom with one king. The Apostles understood that this was beginning to take place as a result of the Gentiles coming into the Messianic Jewish Community. David Stern's *Jewish New Testament Commentary* supports this view of the Apostles' understanding of Amos. Stern writes: The complete fulfillment of Amos's prophecy will take place when the undivided realm of King David's time is restored. Meanwhile, this is a beginning.⁶

It is unclear how much the Apostles understood about exactly how and when all the details would come to pass ("It is not for you to know the times or the seasons..," Acts 1:7), but it is very clear that they understood that the restoration of David's united monarchy would somehow be fulfilled by the Gentiles coming into the Messianic Community. James did not specifically mention the two houses by name when he quoted the prophecy of Amos, but he did not need to. He and all the other Apostles knew the Scriptures well enough to know that Amos wrote primarily about the ten northern tribes. And the Apostles all knew, as Orthodox Jews today know, that part of the Messiah's mission would include the regathering of the descendants of the ten lost tribes. The very last question the Apostles asked their Messiah before He left this earth was a question about this part of His job as the Messiah: "Lord, wilt thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel?" (Acts 1:6).

Notice, they did not ask, "Lord, wilt thou at this time drive out the Romans and restore the tribal territory of Judah to the Jews?" Their expectations *included* the house of Judah, but their expectations were not *limited* to the Jews. They were looking for a re-united kingdom that included all the tribes of Israel. Their expectations were based on the writings of the Prophets, writings with which they were very familiar. If our vision and expectations are likewise based on the writings of the Prophets,

then we too will have a vision that includes all twelve tribes of Israel - and even more, for the writing on Ezekiel's two sticks also included the words "and companions." These "companions" of Judah and Ephraim are those Gentiles who do not have any physical Israelite ancestry. They too are full-fledged Israelites. Their status as Israelites is by adoption, which does not make them a whit inferior to blood-line physical descendants. Their identity as Israelites carries with it all the privileges, blessings, and duties that belong to every Israelite.

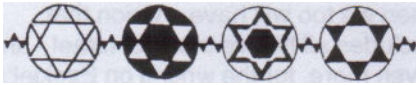
WHERE SHOULD OUR EMPHASIS BE?

Having laid the groundwork by showing the Scriptural foundation of the Two-House teaching, let us now turn to our original question. Where should our emphasis be when presenting this teaching? What aspect is really important, and what is the best way to communicate that aspect?

I believe the answer to that question depends on the spiritual maturity, spiritual receptivity, and Biblical literacy of the people to whom we are speaking. Are we speaking to Jews or to non-Jews? To Messianic Jews or to Orthodox Jews or to Conservative, Reform, or secular Jews? To Gentile Christians or to non-Christians?

Some people need to first hear the basics of repentance, faith, baptism, etc. before we try to present an in-depth teaching about the Two Houses. We first need to get people into God's House, the Body of Messiah, and then get them into the Scriptures. There are some basics of discipleship that need to be incorporated into a disciple's life, and these basics are far more important than having a clear understanding of Two-House teaching. Once a disciple has gotten grounded in the basics of disciple-ship and once he is stable in his walk, then the vision of the Two Houses can be presented.

So how should the Two-House teaching be presented to various groups, and what should be emphasized? First let's look at ways that the teaching might be presented to Jews, and discuss the possible effects it might have on Jewish people.



JEWISH PEOPLE AND THE TWO-HOUSE TEACHING

I do not have as much contact with Jewish people now as I did in the past when I lived in Israel and New York, so I am not sure about the best way, if any, to approach the subject when speaking to Jews. We should be aware of the fact that Orthodox Jews do expect *Mashiach* (Messiah) to regather the twelve tribes. Perhaps it could be pointed out to them that the descendants of the tribes are indeed being regathered from among the Gentile nations as they come to Yeshua and into the Messianic Community. Centuries ago, when virtually all Gentile Christians just lived a typical Catholic or Protestant lifestyle, the suggestion would not have been so feasible. But now that so many Gentile Christians are embracing the Torah, honoring the true Sabbath, and celebrating the Biblical Feasts, the idea may not seem too far-fetched for Orthodox Jews to consider it. (Some already *do* believe it, by the way.) And if they are persuaded that many of these "Messianic Gentiles" are really descendants of the ten northern tribes and are awakening to their Israelite identity because of their faith in Yeshua of Nazareth, then they might also be persuaded to consider His Messianic claims more seriously than they did in the past, when they viewed Christianity as just another pagan religion.

Two reasons that Orthodox Jews give to explain their refusal to consider the Messianic claims of Yeshua are: 1) He did not regather the tribes; and 2) He [allegedly] taught His followers to abandon the Torah. Both of these reasons are based on mistaken assumptions. The Two-House teaching presents a vision of Yeshua currently in the process of regathering the tribes and awakening them to their identity as Israelites. And as these "Messianic Gentiles" awaken, they also see that Yeshua did not teach against the Torah. On the contrary, He honored it, upheld it, and taught His disciples to obey it. As the Messianic Israel movement continues to grow, I believe that Jewish people will be more open to examining the Messianic claims of Yeshua.

PHYSICAL DESCENT AND TRIBAL IDENTITY

What about the subject of tribal identity, genealogy, and physical descent from Israel? How important are these things? Some Two-House people put a very heavy emphasis on physical descent, and insist that they could not possibly be of 100% pagan (Gentile) stock. Because there are undoubtedly many physical descendants among the Gentiles, they assume (and state categorically) that they are undoubtedly one of those physical descendants. Some even go so far as to claim that they know which tribe they are descended from. They know this either by Divine revelation or by looking at the character traits and prophecies about the tribes in Genesis 49 and Deuteronomy 33, and comparing these things to their own personality and character traits.

I do not wish to deprive anyone of a genuine Divine revelation. God can certainly reveal specific tribal ancestry if He wants to, and perhaps He does. But if someone tells me that God revealed to them which tribe they were descended from, I have no way of knowing if it really was Divine revelation or if it was just their own wishful thinking and overactive imagination. There's no way to prove or disprove the claim. It's not for me to say if it's true or not, so I don't say. I will say this, though. Physical descent and tribal identity are not the major points we need to be focusing on right now. We have no way of knowing what percentage of Gentile Christians have physical Israelite ancestry. It could be over 90%, it could be less than 10%. Who knows? The important point is that among the Gentile Christians there are some who are physically descended from Israel, and this number is large enough to fulfill the prophecies, because the prophecies must be fulfilled. The Scripture cannot be broken.

The tribes *will* be identified, but there is nothing in Scripture that tells us to try to figure out our tribal identity. There is not even any Scripture that tells us to try to find out whether we are an Israelite by physical descent or by adoption. Some people are so insecure in their identity that they feel they just *must* know. This desperation for non-essential knowledge can lead to imaginary "Divine revelation"

and, for some, feelings of pride.

Speculating about our possible tribal identity can be harmless fun, providing we understand that a true Gentile (one without any Israelite ancestry whatsoever) is just as much an Israelite in God's eyes as those with physical ancestry. Paul told the "Gentiles" in Ephesus that they were no longer "aliens from the commonwealth of Israel" (Eph. 2:11-13). They were now a part of Israel as a result of their faith in Israel's Messiah, regardless of any physical Israelite ancestry or lack thereof. So on an individual level, we do not really need to know whether or not we, personally, have any physical Israelite ancestry. Therefore I would not recommend seeking Divine revelation about physical descent or tribal identity.

According to Jewish tradition, the tribal identity of each individual will be determined by the Messiah. From an Orthodox Jewish source:

"In the era of the Messianic King, when his kingdom will be established and all of Israel will gather around him, all of them will have their pedigree determined by him, by means of the Holy Spirit that will rest upon him ... As for the Israelites, he will only determine their tribal lineage, that is, he will inform that 'this one is of such-and-such a tribe and that one is of such-and-such a tribe.'"⁸

The same book states: The determination of tribal pedigree and affiliation is important for the proper resettlement of all the tribes in their Divinely assigned territories in the Holy Land..."⁹

This resettlement to which the writer refers is described in the last two chapters of Ezekiel.

"But what about those true Gentiles who are of 100% pagan ancestry, and do not have a drop of Israelite blood in them? Which tribe will they identify with?" That question is answered in Ezekiel:

"So shall ye divide the land unto you according to the tribes of Israel. And it shall come to pass, that ye shall divide it by lot for an inheritance unto you, and to the strangers that sojourn among you, which shall beget children among you: and they shall be unto you as born in the country among the children of Israel: they shall have inheritance with you among the tribes of Israel. And it shall come to pass, that in what tribe the

stranger sojourneth. there shall ye give him his inheritance, saith the Lord God" (Ezk.47:21ff).

THE IMPORTANCE OF THE NEW COVENANT

If physical ancestry is not important on a personal level, and if tribal identity will be established by the Messiah, then what should be emphasized when presenting the Two-House teaching to Christians? I believe it is important to emphasize Israelite identity. Christians need to be awakened to see themselves as Israelites, and no longer as "Gentile Christians." The Two-House teaching can definitely strengthen and confirm Israelite identity for a Christian, but the Two-House teaching does not need to be the starting point. Let me explain.

When we tell Christians about the Sabbath (or other parts of the Torah which the Church ignores), what is their usual response? It is most often something like this: "But that was just for the Jews. I'm a Gentile Christian. I live under a different covenant, the new covenant."

"A *Gentile*?" I ask. "Under the new covenant?"

Let's see what the Bible says about the new covenant. Yes, Jesus made a new covenant at the Last Supper (Matt. 26:28). Hebrews chapter 8 tells us that this new covenant was the one prophesied by Jeremiah. Hebrews even quotes Jeremiah's prophecy word for word. Let's see who this covenant was made with:

"Behold, the days come, saith the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah" (Heb. 8:8/Jer. 31:31).

With whom did the Lord make the new covenant? With two parties: with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah. That excludes everybody else. Gentiles are not even mentioned, so how can a Gentile claim to be a partaker of the new covenant? What right does a Gentile have to try to muscle his way into the new covenant that God made with the two houses of Israel and Judah?

I use this analogy. A covenant is a legal agreement, a contract between two or more parties. If I make an agreement with the family of Smith and with the family of Jones, that excludes everybody

who is not a part of either the family of Smith or the family of Jones. If someone else comes along and wants to lay claim to the promises I made in this contract, what do I say? I say, "Are you a part of the family of Smith or of the family of Jones? No? Sorry, my contract is only with these two families. You have no legal right to be a part of it. *Unless...* unless you can find a legal way to get yourself into the family of Smith or the family of Jones, either through marriage or adoption. Then you'll be a legal, full-fledged member of the family of Smith or the family of Jones."

Christians need to be made to understand that they cannot be a partaker of the new covenant unless they are part of the house of Israel or the house of Judah. They may be of 100% Gentile ancestry, but they have to join themselves to one of the two houses in order to lay claim to any new covenant privilege or status. Even the true Gentile "companions" had to be in one of Ezekiel's two sticks. There was no third stick called "the stick for the Gentiles." The twelve gates of the New Jerusalem have the names of the twelve tribes written on them. There is no gate labeled "Gentiles." If Gentiles wish to enter the New Jerusalem, they will have to identify with one of the twelve tribes and pass through that tribe's gate.

Once a Christian has been awakened to his *spiritual* identity as a full-fledged member of the house of Israel, it will be easier for him to relate to his Israelite heritage - Israel's Torah, Israel's Sabbath, Israel's history. Because the Christian is joined to Israel's Messiah, he is also joined to Israel. Israel's Torah, Israel's Sabbath, and Israel's history also become *his* Torah, *his* Sabbath, *his* history. He has not stolen these things from the Jews. He has inherited them as a joint-heir by means of his adoption into the house of Israel through Israel's Messiah. Whether or not he has physical Israelite ancestry is unimportant on a personal level. The important thing is that God is re-uniting the two houses, and he is a part of it, regardless of whether or not he understands (or even believes) the Two-House teaching.

So, in a nutshell, the answer to my original question is this. We should first emphasize the Christian's *spiritual* identity as an Israelite. Once that is

firmly established in the heart and mind, it is only another short step to a proper, balanced understanding of the Two-House teaching. And when the Christian's spiritual Israelite identity is firmly established *before* he studies the Two-House teaching, it will lessen the possibility of an unhealthy obsession about physical ancestry and tribal identity, for the Christian will realize that these things are not real important on a personal, individual level. God will take care of those things in His way and in His time. We can wait for the Messiah to establish tribal identity. Until He comes and does that, let's focus on our identity in Him.

NOTES

- ¹C.I. Scofield Reference Bible, 1917 edition, Introduction to Genesis. ²Some interesting information from a Jewish source: "Interestingly enough, according to *PirkeideR. Eliezer*, ch. 28 (in non-censored versions), the Ishmaelites (Arabs) will be the final kingdom to be defeated by Mashiach. Other sources state 'Edom and Ishmael' (see *Torah Shelemah* on Genesis 15:12, note 130). Note, however, *PirkeideR. Eliezer*, ch. 44 (and cf. *Midrash Tehilim* 2:6 and 83.3) that Edom and Ishmael have become intermingled." Jacob Schochet, *Mashiach* (New York: S.I.E., 1992), p. 95, fn. 6.
- ³KJV, NASB, New Living Translation, Hertz Pentateuch, 1917 Jewish Publication Society, Zondervan's English translation of LXX. "Stone Tanach, TEV, NIV, CJB.
- ⁵Delitzsch translation and 1976 United Bible Society translation. ⁶*Jewish New Testament Commentary*, p. 277.
- ⁷From an Orthodox Jewish source: The Ten Tribes of the Northern Kingdom of Israel, exiled by the Assyrians before the destruction of the first Bef *Hamikdash* (Temple] (II Kings, ch. 17), and dispersed beyond the river Sambation and the 'Mountains of Darkness,' will also return. This Divine promise of the return and restoration of Israel is unconditional. It will occur even if the people should not want to return." (Schochet, p. 21 f) ⁸Schochet, p. 83f. ⁹*ibid.*, p. 83.