

The Two-House Theory: Three Fatal Flaws

by Tim Hegg

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A General Description

A phenomenon is occurring in our times that has been labelled the Two-House Movement, sometimes also called the Ephraimite Movement. It is based upon the theory that essentially claims the following to be true:

1. The Northern Kingdom called Israel, comprised of Ten Tribes, lost their identity because of their exile to foreign lands at the hands of the Assyrians in the 8th Century BCE.
2. From the foreign lands of their exile they were dispersed to other nations, where their self-identity as Israel (Northern Tribes) was lost, and they saw themselves individually as natives of the foreign lands to which they had been dispersed (i.e., Gentiles).
3. Those who retained their identity as Jews were from the Southern Tribes of Judah and Benjamin. This group primarily makes up the Jewish communities of our modern times, and except for a small remnant, have rejected Yeshua (Jesus) as the true Messiah.
4. The rise of Messianic Judaism (especially since the 1960's) has seen an influx of "Gentiles" who love Torah, take on a "Jewish" life-style, and worship in the context of ancient Israel, keeping the Sabbath, the yearly feasts, and adhere (to one degree or another) to Torah principles. The Two-House Movement has taught that many of these Gentiles, unknown to themselves, are actually the descendants of the "Lost Ten Tribes." The reason that they are so inwardly drawn to Torah and to a Torah life-style is because they actually have the soul of an Israelite—they are the descendants of the Northern Tribes of Israel. It is therefore imperative that the truth of their identity be received, and they began to live and act as the people they actually are: the descendants of physical Israel.
5. Since Ephraim was the largest of the Northern Tribes, and since prophets like Isaiah used the name Ephraim to designate the nation of the Northern Tribes after the division of the United Kingdom, the movement has also been designated as the Ephraimite Movement.
6. The Two-House Movement believes that the recognition that Gentiles within the Torah movement are not Gentiles at all, but the actual descendants of the Northern Tribes, is the beginnings of the prophetic fulfillment that Ephraim and Judah ("Judah" designates the Southern Tribes of Judah and Benjamin) would one day be united as a single nation again.
7. Since the Northern Tribes are being regathered under the banner of Yeshua within the return to Torah in these Messianic congregations, the "stick" of Ephraim is being recognized once again, and thus the first step of fulfillment of the two sticks becoming one is becoming possible in our day (the parable of the two sticks is found in Ezekiel 37:16-17). But it is only when those who think they are Gentiles come to recognize their real identity as actual, physical Israelites that the fulfillment of Ezekiel's prophecy may be realized.
8. As a result, those who hold to this belief have formed their own congregations and fellowships (or denominations). They believe that only those congregations or communities who affirm this belief are furthering God's plans to unite Israel and Judah into the one nation of Israel in the last days.

Fatal Flaws in This Perspective

At first, to many, this explanation rings true in their own experience. Many Gentiles have wondered why they are so drawn to the Torah, to a love for Israel, and to all things “Jewish.” They wonder why, in light of the fact that the mainline Church continues to reject Torah, they are drawn to Torah, and are so willing to be rejected for their love of Torah. Given the explanation that they are actually Israel and have Israelite blood gives a reason for their inward love of Torah and the draw to take on a Torah life-style. After all, the Torah embodies the covenant of which they are actually members through bloodline, or so they are told.

But there are fatal flaws in this perspective because the Bible does not support it. In fact, the Bible teaches a much different reality.

1. The Two House theory is built upon the presupposition that the Northern Tribes were lost among the nations and have forgotten their true identity. In general, biblical and historical data show conclusively that the Northern Tribes were never lost.

The very core of the Two House theory is the presupposition that the Northern Tribes lost their identity and considered themselves as Gentiles. Does this notion match biblical and historical data?

While it may be true that some individuals may have lost knowledge of their heritage after many generations of being dispersed among the nations, in general the dispersed tribes of Israel have maintained their identity in their dispersion among the nations. Granted, many rejected their covenant obligations (Sabbath, festivals, circumcision, etc.) and even wanted to be viewed as Gentiles, but try as they would, their identity as physical descendants of ancient Israel could not be erased.

a. The prophets who spoke of the dispersion of Israel teach that even in her dispersion she remembers her true identity.

The prophet Hosea paints the picture of Israel as an unfaithful wife. In her unfaithfulness she leaves her marriage and plays the harlot with others, meaning that spiritually she worships false gods and claims false religions as her religion. She is “joined to another” and leaves her husband behind. In the prophetic metaphor, actually lived out in the marriage of Hosea and his wife, Gomer, the prophet pursues his wayward wife and buys her back, bringing her back into his house. But note carefully that even when Israel (portrayed as the prophet’s wayward wife) is joined to her lovers in the role of a harlot, she knows who her real husband is. In fact, when she seeks help from her lovers (the false religions she has engaged in as she has been dispersed among the nations) and they abandon her, she reasons this way:

“She will pursue her lovers, but she will not overtake them;
And she will seek them, but will not find them.
Then she will say, ‘I will go back to my first husband,
For it was better for me then than now!’ (Hosea 2:7)

Note carefully that she had not forgotten who her true husband was, nor had she forgotten that she was once married to the One true God of Israel. She knew who her first Husband was, and she knew that she was better off when she was married to Him. It clearly shows that she had not lost her former

identity.

Furthermore, that fact the Hosea uses language like “Israel has forgotten his maker” (8:14) does not mean that she no longer knows about God. The word “forgotten” is used in a covenant sense,¹ meaning that Israel has willfully acted against the covenant. Conversely, “to remember” is used in the sense of “be faithful to the covenant,” as in the injunction to “remember the Sabbath” (Ex 20:8).² For instance, at the reiteration of the covenant when Israel was about to enter the Land God says:

Deut. 8:19 “It shall come about if you ever forget the LORD your God and go after other gods and serve them and worship them, I testify against you today that you will surely perish.

To “forget” the LORD your God means to act in rebellion against the covenant. The same language is used during the time of the Judges:

Judg. 3:7 The sons of Israel did what was evil in the sight of the LORD, and forgot the LORD their God and served the Baals and the Asheroth.

It is also used during the united monarchy under King Saul:

1Sam. 12:9 “But they forgot the LORD their God, so He sold them into the hand of Sisera, captain of the army of Hazor, and into the hand of the Philistines and into the hand of the king of Moab, and they fought against them.

The fact that the word “forget” (שָׁכַח) is used in a covenant sense is clear from the very text of Hosea, for God Himself “forgets” Israel. This cannot mean that He no longer is aware of their existence, but that He sets aside the blessings of the covenant as a result of her disobedience:

My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge.
Because you have rejected knowledge,
I also will reject you from being My priest.
Since you have forgotten the law of your God,
I also will forget your children. (Hos. 4:6)

Thus, when Israel is said to have “forgotten her Maker,” it does not mean that she no longer knows He exists, or knows that He is her God. It means she has acted unfaithfully to the covenant and neglected to live according to its precepts. She has denied the God Who owns her.

Even before the Northern Tribes were exiled, in the prophecies of Isaiah warning her of the impending judgment if she did not return to covenant faithfulness, the prophet describes Israel as having

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1. For the meaning of “remember” and “forget” in the sense of “be faithful to a covenant” or “be unfaithful to a covenant,” see M. Weinfeld, “ברית” in *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*, Botterwick and Ringgren, eds., vol. 2 (Eerdmans, 1975), p. 261; M. Weinfeld, “Covenant Terminology in the Ancient Near East and Its Influence on the West,” *JAOS* 93 (1973), 194; M. Weinfeld, “The Covenant of Grant in the Old Testament and in the Ancient Near East,” *JAOS* 90 (1970), 187f.
 2. Note Amos 1:9, “Thus says the LORD, “For three transgressions of Tyre and for four I will not revoke its punishment, because they delivered up an entire population to Edom and did not remember the covenant of brotherhood.”

“forgotten” her God:

For you have forgotten the God of your salvation
And have not remembered the rock of your refuge.
Therefore you plant delightful plants
And set them with vine slips of a strange god. (Is. 17:10)

Once again, “to forget” or to “not remember” means to act in unfaithfulness to the covenant. This prophesy was given while Israel was still in the Land. It is impossible, therefore, that “you have forgotten the God of your salvation” could mean “you have forgotten that you are the nation that has a covenant with the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob!”

b. Historical data, archaeological evidence, and other ancient documents point to the fact that even into the Common Era, the identity of the Northern Tribes was known and received.

Archaeological finds from the region of Kanna³, a separate colony outside of Assyria, and dated to 650 and 606 BCE, show contracts containing distinct Hebrew names. These were Israelites deported by Sargon II from Samaria. Under the conquest of Assyria by Babylonia, they must have enjoyed group rights and privileges under the law of the land.³ Moreover, some 137 years after the Northern Tribes were taken into exile, Assyria was conquered by Babylon. Since evidence shows that the exiled Northern Tribes retained their identity as a separate people group with privileges and Hebrew names, it is beyond doubt that Israelites and exiles from Judah were reunited, having been exiled to the same regions.

Furthermore, Ezekiel, the prophet of the exile, lived, preached, and worked in Babylon. Thus his words about Babylonian Israel should not be overlooked. Who could have known better than he the component elements of the Jewish community of the exile?

In the famous prophecy of the two sticks, we should note the words carefully:

Ezek 37:16 “And you, son of man, take for yourself one stick and write on it, ‘For Judah and for the sons of Israel, his companions’; then take another stick and write on it, ‘For Joseph, the stick of Ephraim and all the house of Israel, his companions.’”

Upon the first stick is written “For Judah and the for the sons of Israel, his companions.” The “sons of Israel, his companions” must refer to Benjamin. Upon the second stick is written “For Joseph, the stick of Ephraim and all the house of Israel, his companions.” This must mean that the Northern Tribes as they existing in Ezekiel’s time constituted a unified, identifiable entity who survived their deportation and settled in Assyria. Furthermore, Ezekiel details the distribution of the Land to the Ten Tribes (Ezek 45:8; 47:13, 21-23; 48:1, 19, 23, 29,, 31) meaning that he considered them identifiable in his time. Jeremiah also identifies the House of Israel as a known entity well after their exile into Assyria (Jer 31:31ff). Zechariah, the latest of the prophets, likewise addresses his prophecy to the House of Israel,

3. See William Rosenau, “Ezekiel 37:15-28: What Happened to the Ten Tribes?” in David Philipson, ed., *Hebrew Union College Jubilee Volume (1875-1925)*, 79-88.

indicating that he knew of their existence as an identifiable entity (Zech 8:13). Moreover, in Ezekiel 37:21 where the prophet speaks of taking the “children of Israel from among the nations where they have gone” (אֲנִי לִקְחֵם אֶת-בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל מִבְּיַד הַגּוֹיִם אֲשֶׁר הִלְכוּ-שָׁמָּה), he can only be referring to Assyria and Babylon, since at this time these are the only nations to which they had been exiled. Note carefully the perfect הִלְכוּ-שָׁמָּה, “they have gone there” is not future—it does not read “where they will go.” For Ezekiel, the Northern Tribes are a known entity within the lands historically known as Assyria and Babylon. The Targum (dated between 2nd Century BCE and 2nd Century CE) emphasizes this fact by translating the phrase “where they have gone” with the Aramaic דְּאִתְגְּלִיאוּ לְתַמָּן, “where they have been exiled.”

In the introduction to The Book of Tobit (dated 275-125 BCE), we read:

The Book of the words of Tobit, the son of Tobiel, the son of Hananiel, the son of Aduel, the son of Gabael, the son of Raphael, of the seed of Asiel, of the tribe of Naphtali: who in the days of Shalmanezzer, King of the Assyrians, was carried away captive out of Thisbe”

Tribal identity is here clearly maintained 500 years after the exile of the Northern Tribes.

A 3rd Century CE Latin Poet Commodian (in the *Carmen* and *Instructiones*) and the author of the Acts of St. Matthew may preserve an otherwise lost Jewish apocalyptic and apocryphal work that apparently described the living conditions of the Northern Tribes of Israel. While it is not certain that such a work actually existed, it is clear that the legend of its existence was widely circulated in the 1st Century CE. Around 100 CE three Jewish works, namely 4Ezra (13:34-51), 2Baruch (77:17-26), and Josephus’ *Antiquities* (11.5) referred to this legend or document. Whether the document existed, there is clear evidence of 1st Century CE Jewish opinion that the Ten Tribes were identifiable and there was knowledge of their general geographical location.

Fitting this same pattern, James opens his epistle with these words: “James, a bond-servant of God and of the Lord Yeshua the Messiah, To the twelve tribes who are dispersed abroad: Greetings.” There is no reason to presume an allegorical interpretation of his designation “twelve tribes.” Apparently he not only reckoned their existence, but also knew of their identity and expected his epistle to reach them. In the same manner, Anna, the prophetess who rejoiced at seeing Yeshua as an eight-day old baby, is noted as being from the tribe of Asher (Luke 2:36). Apparently she did not consider herself one of the “Lost Tribes.”

Is it possible that individuals were separated from their Israelite heritage, and that over generations also failed to maintain the knowledge of this heritage? Surely this has happened. But my point here is that such a phenomenon did not happen on a national, people-group scale. The generational identity of Israel continued to be maintained well after her exile to Assyria.

So the first fatal flaw in the Two House theory is that the very foundation upon which it is built is a vapor. The Northern Tribes were not lost. Wherever they have been dispersed, they remained marked as God’s chosen people. European Jewry, even though many would have willingly been absorbed into the non-Jewish populations among which they lived, were singled out and slaughtered by Hitler and his demonically driven comrades. Far from losing their Israelite identity, the mark of the covenant was upon them and was evident to all. The whole hidden identity theory is nothing more than a house of cards.

2. The Two House theory ends up having all or most believers in Yeshua being the descendents of the Northern Tribes of Israel. Yet God's plan of salvation is for all the nations, not just the descendents of Jacob.

A second fatal flaw in the Two House theory is the notion that the vast majority of people who come to faith in Yeshua (Jesus) are actually from the Northern Tribes of Israel, those who lost their identity and only regain it when they come to faith. While some proponents of the Two House theory would admit that people without a physical bloodline from Jacob may also be part of the saved people of God, the emphasis is placed upon reclaiming Ephraimite identity for all who are believers in Yeshua. The fact that more and more churches are willing to investigate Torah festivals and issues of “Jewish roots” is brought forward as proof of an awakening to this identity.

But is this actually what the Scriptures teach about God's plan of salvation? Hardly! From the first revelation of the covenant God made with Abraham (Genesis 12:1-3), the culmination of the covenant is cast in these words: “in you all the families of the earth will be blessed.” This same phrase is reiterated four more times as the covenant is passed from Abraham to Isaac, and from Isaac to Jacob and his sons:

Gen. 18:18 since Abraham will surely become a great and mighty nation, and in him all the nations of the earth will be blessed?

Gen. 22:17 indeed I will greatly bless you, and I will greatly multiply your seed as the stars of the heavens and as the sand which is on the seashore; and your seed shall possess the gate of their enemies. 18 “In your seed all the nations of the earth shall be blessed, because you have obeyed My voice.”

Gen. 26:4 “I will multiply your descendants as the stars of heaven, and will give your descendants all these lands; and by your descendants all the nations of the earth shall be blessed;

Gen. 28:14 “Your descendants will also be like the dust of the earth, and you will spread out to the west and to the east and to the north and to the south; and in you and in your descendants shall all the families of the earth be blessed.

There is an interesting phenomenon that occurs in the listing of these covenant texts. First, regardless of the various orders in which the blessings of the Abrahamic covenant are listed, in each case the final blessing is the one that encompasses all of the families or nations of the earth. This consistent, final position in the listing of the blessings puts the blessing of the families/nations as the culmination or zenith of the covenant. The point is simply that the ultimate fulfillment of the Abrahamic covenant is the blessing that will come upon all the nations of the earth.

Secondly, it should be noted that the first (Genesis 12:3) and the last (Genesis 28:14) listing of the covenant blessings utilize the word “families” (מִשְׁפָּחוֹת) while those sandwiched between use the word “nations” (גּוֹיִם). Thus the use of the term “families” acts as bookends to envelope the covenant blessings.

Why is this important? It is important because the reader of Genesis (if reading from the Hebrew) has already encountered the word “family” or “families” and has come to recognize its meaning as indicating *distinct people groups based upon physical lineage*.

Gen. 8:19 Every beast, every creeping thing, and every bird, everything that moves on the earth, went out by their families from the ark.

Gen. 10:5 From these the coastlands of the nations were separated into their lands, every one according to his language, according to their families, into their nations.

Gen. 10:18 and the Arvadite and the Zemarite and the Hamathite; and afterward the families of the Canaanite were spread abroad.

Gen. 10:20 These are the sons of Ham, according to their families, according to their languages, by their lands, by their nations.

Gen. 10:31 These are the sons of Shem, according to their families, according to their languages, by their lands, according to their nations.

Gen. 10:32 These are the families of the sons of Noah, according to their genealogies, by their nations; and out of these the nations were separated on the earth after the flood.

Note carefully that the Hebrew text has linked together every possible means for showing the term “family” to be a term that identifies distinct bloodlines: they have distinct language, geographical location (“lands”) and political characteristics (“nations”).

Therefore the attentive reader is well informed about the meaning of the word “families” when he comes to the blessings of the covenant made with Abraham. “Families” identifies distinct people groups based upon distinct lineage or bloodline. And these families form the basis for distinct nations. When therefore God promises to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob that in them all the families of the earth will be blessed, it is clear that the covenant envisions the blessings of the covenant coming upon the nations that are distinct from them—distinct from the family of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

God’s plan of salvation does not envision the redemption of a single nation (Israel) nor even *primarily* a single nation (mostly Israel with a few others). God’s plan of salvation encompasses “all the families (distinct bloodlines) of the earth.” Furthermore, John’s description of the final picture of salvation in the book of Revelation shows that God’s covenant promises are finally and ultimately realized:

And they sang a new song, saying, “Worthy are You to take the book and to break its seals; for You were slain, and purchased for God with Your blood men from every tribe and tongue and people and nation. (Rev. 5:9)

And I saw another angel flying in midheaven, having an eternal gospel to preach to those who live on the earth, and to every nation and tribe and tongue and people; (Rev. 14:6)

God chose Israel to be His servant to take the light of Messiah to the nations. We may use the illustration of a butler. A butler is a chosen, trusted individual whom the master of the house entrusts with his affairs. The butler, dressed in his fine attire, brings the food to the family on a silver tray, in fine china and serves it with the utmost decorum. But the master does not expect that everyone should become his butler. You are not required to be a butler to enjoy the meal that is served. Rather, the butler is the servant to serve the family—the meal is prepared primarily for the family, not the butler. In this analogy, the master is God, the butler is Israel, the fine tray and china dishes is the Torah that always leads to Messiah, and the meal is the blessings of salvation in Yeshua or the Gospel. And the family being served are those called from the nations to become the Master’s family. (Of course, the butler also

eats the same meal!)

Somehow the Two House theory makes it appear that everyone is actually a butler—they just didn't know it. So everyone goes out and buys butler's clothes and seeks to carry the tray and fine china—a thousand butlers to serve an individual or two at the table. Something is definitely wrong with that picture!

Rather, the plan of salvation clearly portrayed in the Scriptures is that God chose Israel to be His servant in order to bring the good news of salvation to all of the families of the earth. As the families of the earth come to be blessed in this salvation, they are adopted into the family of the Master and eat at His table. The goal is to sit at His table and enjoy the benefits of the covenant (the meal), not to become the butler. Surely all who sit at His table receive the blessings and responsibilities of being part of the Master's family. But they do this because they are adopted into His family, not because they have become the butler in His house.

So the second fatal flaw in the Two House theory is the failure to emphasize the nationally *inclusive* focus of God's salvation. The Two House theory ends up with primarily a single nation enjoying the benefits of the covenant—the single nation of Israel. Unwittingly, the Two House theory brings into question the faithfulness of God, for He did not promise to bless only the family of Jacob, but to bless *all the families of the earth*, meaning families of the earth which are distinct from the family of Jacob. Until such blessings come to all the families of the earth, God has not kept His promise.

To argue that only those who are believers in Yeshua and who also pursue the Torah constitute Ephraimite Israel is also flawed. Does this mean that Christians who come to love Torah are therefore proving their actual identity as Israel? (This is actually what has happened among the vast majority of people who identify themselves within the Two House Movement.) If so, the same problem exists because in the end, all the nations come to follow Torah! Zechariah describes the time when the nations will celebrate Sukkot and come up to Jerusalem to worship. Indeed, the fact that Isaiah prophecies the Torah going forth from Zion would indicate that in the Millennial reign, all who bow before Yeshua as God's Messiah will be living in obedience to Torah. If it is argued that the followers of Yeshua who live by Torah are really the regathered Israel, then once again salvation is finally and ultimately enjoyed by Israel, not the nations as the Scriptures promise.

3. The Two House Theory teaches that only when believers realize they actually are descendents of the Northern Tribes can the prophecies of the union between Judah and Israel be fulfilled. But the Scriptures teach that the union of Israel and Judah comes as an event distinct from the salvation of the nations.

The Scriptures clearly teach the regathering of Israel (Northern Tribes) and Judah (the Southern Tribes) as one, unified nation in the end times. On that there can be no dispute.⁴ But how and when are the dispersed people of Israel and Judah gathered to the Land and united under the rule of One Shepherd?

The first thing that is noticed in reading the Scriptures regarding the regathering of Israel is that there are three distinct groups: Judah, Israel, and the nations:

And He will lift up a standard for the nations

4. Is. 43:5; 56:8; Jer. 23:3; 29:14; 31:8,10; 32:37; Ezek. 11:17; 20:34, 41; 28:25; 34:13; 36:24; 37:21; 39:27; Mic. 2:12; Zeph. 3:19-20; Zech. 10:10.

And assemble the banished ones of Israel,
And will gather the dispersed of Judah
From the four corners of the earth. (Is. 11:12)

Here in the parallel lines of this Hebrew poetry three groups are mentioned: “the nations,” “banished ones of Israel,” and “dispersed of Judah.” Even as “Israel” and “Judah” are clearly references to the Northern and Southern tribes respectively, so “nations” is a separate entity in Isaiah’s prophecy.

Take a scroll and write on it all the words which I have spoken to you concerning Israel and concerning Judah, and concerning all the nations, from the day I first spoke to you, from the days of Josiah, even to this day. (Jer. 36:2)

Once again, in the prophetic language of Jeremiah, three distinct entities are listed: Israel, Judah, and the nations. Like Isaiah, Jeremiah does not consider “Israel” to be synonymous with the “nations” but a distinct entity dispersed among the nations.

‘It will come about that just as you were a curse among the nations, O house of Judah and house of Israel, so I will save you that you may become a blessing. Do not fear; let your hands be strong.’ (Zech. 8:13)

Here, in language directly reminiscent of the promise made to Abraham that “in you all the families of the earth will be blessed,” the prophet Zechariah gives the word of Adonai promising the salvation of the house of Judah and the house of Israel from the nations by whom they have been cursed. It is by the promised salvation that they, Israel and Judah, become a blessing to the nations. Note carefully that “Israel” and the “nations” are separate entities. Israel is not synonymous with “nations”, as though “lost” Israel is the same as the nations, that is, that Israel has lost her identity and thinks she is the nations.

Furthermore, Judah and Israel are cursed among the nations. In the course of history, beginning with the rise of the Christian Church in the 2nd and 3rd Centuries CE, the Church (under whatever label she went) persecuted the descendents of Jacob. She was not herself persecuted, at least not in the broad sense. The anti-semitism of the Christian Church throughout the middle ages, in the time of the Renaissance, and into the modern era is well documented. It was not the Christian Church that was being persecuted. It was the other way around: the Church was cursing Israel.

Zechariah, prophesying about the end times with a view to the millennial reign of the Messiah, speaks of the salvation of Judah and Israel as the means for becoming a blessing. From whom are they saved? They are saved from the nations among whom they were a curse. This would indicate quite clearly that both Judah and Israel maintain a identity as they are dispersed among the nations. It is impossible to curse something that is not identified. Israel is a curse among the nations in which she is scattered precisely because the nations see her as Israel.

Ezekiel notes the same thing. He teaches that Israel, while in dispersion, is profaning the Name of God because the nations know that she should be in her own Land instead of being exiled in theirs:

When they came to the nations where they went, they profaned My holy name, because it was said of them, ‘These are the people of the LORD; yet they have come out of His land.’ But I had concern for My holy name, which the house of Israel had profaned among the nations where they went. (Ezek. 36:20–21)

If Israel had lost her identity and was not a distinct people group within the nations to which she had been exiled, how could the nations have said this about her?

Finally, Paul’s understanding of the identity of Israel is clear: he identifies with Israel as his brethren “according to the flesh.”

For I could wish that I myself were accursed, separated from Messiah for the sake of my brethren, my kinsmen according to the flesh, (Rom. 9:3)

Lest it be construed that Paul was referring only to Judah and not to the Northern Tribes, one should notice carefully how he uses the word “Israel” to refer to the whole nation upon whom the salvation of God comes in the end times. Even though “Israel” has been hardened for a season, in the end “all Israel will be saved.”

What then? What Israel is seeking, it has not obtained, but those who were chosen obtained it, and the rest were hardened; (Rom. 11:7)

For I do not want you, brethren, to be uninformed of this mystery—so that you will not be wise in your own estimation—that a partial hardening has happened to Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in; and so all Israel will be saved; (Rom. 11:25–26)

Paul makes a clear distinction between “Gentiles” and “Israel” in this passage. Any reading that confuses this distinction is hopelessly lost in finding a consistent hermeneutic for Paul’s words. Paul is well aware that the gospel is summed up in the Abrahamic promise that “in you all the families of the earth will be blessed” (Galatians 3:8). And he gives a chronological order: first the Gentiles (another way of saying “nations”) are brought to salvation, and then all of Israel. *The two events are not simultaneous.* Yet the Two House theory would have us believe that as the nations are being saved through faith in Yeshua, Israel is actually being saved, since the saved “Gentiles” are actually the “lost” tribes of Israel. If one adopts a consistent hermeneutic, one simply cannot accept the Two House theory.

But Paul’s message is very consistent. God has made a promise to Abraham, and that promise envisions all of the families of the earth. Israel was chosen to bring the grand message of the Gospel to all of the nations, but she refused to obey her God and has been dispersed as a result. God’s sovereign plan, however, is that Israel’s disobedience would not thwart His intentions to bless the nations. The nations will be blessed, and blessed in such a way that they will act as a catalyst to bring Israel herself back to obedience to the covenant as she humbly receives Yeshua as her true Messiah.

The third fatal flaw, then, is a misinterpretation of Scripture through a faulty hermeneutic. Where the Scriptures clearly differentiate between Judah, Israel, and the nations, the Two House theory tries to meld “Israel” (who has lost her identity) and the nations together as one. But if the Scriptures are interpreted consistently, the Two House theory simply cannot stand.

Conclusion

The Two House theory has three fatal flaws that render it unacceptable. First, the historical and biblical data show that the Northern Tribes were never lost. From the time of their dispersion and throughout the ensuing history of the world, the Northern Tribes or Israel has carried an identification as the nation God chose and redeemed from Egypt.

Secondly, the story of salvation as unfolded in the Bible envisions the blessing of the nations as people groups distinct from Judah and Israel. To identify a majority of believers in Yeshua as descendents of the Northern Tribes of Israel negates this promise of blessing upon the nations.

Thirdly, the Scriptures make it clear that in the end times three groups, not two, are gathered to

faith in the One true God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. These three groups are Judah, Israel, and the nations. When Judah and Israel are united once again and become Israel as she was before the division of the kingdoms, then all the nations who are gathered into Israel and adopted into the family of God will join as one people under the kingship of Messiah Yeshua. This is the biblical story of redemption. The fact that presently, in the body of Messiah, Jew and Gentile are constituted as “one new man” (Ephesians 2:15) constitutes the “first fruits” or a foretaste of the ultimate harvest when the New Covenant (Jeremiah 31:31-34) will be fulfilled.

Prologue

In writing the brief comments above, I am not unaware of what seems to me an obvious reason that the Two House theory has been so readily received by many people. As the return to Torah and the beauty of Torah life has been experienced in numerous groups, many who have no Jewish lineage feel like second-class citizens in the community of the faith. Believing that those with Jewish names and heritage are the “real thing” while the Gentiles are only “wannabes,” it is only natural to search for a way to be “on the inside” rather than “outside looking in.” To discover in the Bible a way of interpreting the Scriptures so as to actually claim physical descendency from Israel solves the problem. Suddenly those who always thought they had no real attachment to Israel can “legitimately” claim that they are, in fact, Israel! They are finally “in.”

This “identity crisis” rests upon a failure to teach and understand the glory of God’s way of salvation. Surely God chose Israel and gave her specific and glorious promises. But He chose her for the purpose of being a light to the nations, not as an end in itself. Israel is not the final glory—the untold number of the nations is the shining finale of redemption’s symphony.

My wife and I have had the profound privilege of adopting two wonderful daughters from Liberia, West Africa. When we received the decree of adoption, the language was stunning. It said that our daughters were to be considered as though they had actually been birthed from our own bodies! They are our daughters and we are their parents. Our love for our two natural sons is no different than the love we have for our two daughters. Nor are the requirements, rules, privileges, and expectations. Our two daughters have our name and live in every way as though they were natural born children in our home.

We must likewise see ourselves, whether Jew or non-Jew, as equal members in the household of God, for we all are adopted into His family. Our decree of adoption is written with the precious blood of a Lamb, Who is without blemish or spot. It is in Him and in Him alone we find our way to the Father, whether Jew or non-Jew. And His smile of grace, and His loving teaching of Torah, is equally enjoyed by all who are His children. There is no need to find some other means by which we think we may have a closer or more legitimate relationship with our Father. He has taken us upon His knee and called us His own. His words, confirmed in the loving work of His Son, is enough for us. We may rest assured that we are His children and that He is our Father. We find our identity in His promises, illustrated and confirmed in His Son, and written on our hearts by His Spirit. That is who we are—children of the Eternal God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.