

Encounters with an Ephraimite Identity through a Lost Heritage

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The children of whom you were bereaved will yet say in your ears, “The place is too cramped for me; Make room for me that I may live here.” Then you will say in your heart, “Who has begotten these for me, since I have been bereaved of my children and am barren, an exile and a wanderer? And who has reared these? Behold, I was left alone; from where did these come?” (Isaiah 49:20-21)



Encounters with an Ephraimite

Recently I had the opportunity to dialogue with several leaders in the Body of Messiah that identify themselves as part of the Two-House Movement (The term “Two-House” is synonymous with Ephraimites). In addition, I have shared dialogue with believers attending congregations which are affiliated with ministries that regard themselves as predominately Two-House in doctrine. These conversations have proven enlightening and productive and have spurred me to write down some of my own reflections on the movement. This paper is not a formal position paper, nor is it a concise theological statement. First Fruits of Zion’s position on the Two-House movement and Gentile inclusion within Israel has been clearly stated in meticulous terms in our two books: *Mystery of the Gospel* and *FellowHeirs*. The purpose of this paper is to encourage reconciliation between FFOZ, the Two-House Movement and the larger Hebrew Roots movement in general by pointing out the common ground we share. At the same time, I want to point out the areas on which we differ and explain why we differ. By understanding each other’s position, we can at the very least respect each other’s convictions. This paper is effort to clarify questions about First Fruits of Zion’s perspective which have been raised by those inside and outside of the Two-House Movement. Hopefully it will prove helpful to everyone and be an encouragement for all parties.

First the Disclaimers

I have used names, dates, and some internal communications in this document. These are not meant to be slanderous or divisive. Rather, my intention is to bring the reader understanding of the history and relevancy of the issues discussed. At the same time, it is only fair in a report such as this to present the comments and players properly. In my opinion, it would not have been productive to speak in vague terms or non-documented means. I would trust that one would hear through these written words a heart of reconciliation.

Next, I hope the reader will understand that in order to create a digestible report and communication piece, it is necessary to use some very broad terms. To break down the various groups, factions, and segments of the Messianic Jewish, Two-house, and Torah movements would require a great amount of time and effort. I do feel qualified to prepare such a report as I have many friends in all of the above-mentioned groups. Through my position with FFOZ I have enjoyed the opportunity to share and communicate with the various leaders of all of the main segments within the “messianic” spectrum. I would like to ask that you do not limit your reading by getting caught up in some of my broad strokes. I realize that those in leadership attempting to shape and mold Messianic Judaism and the Two-House Movement do not represent everyone that fall into those categories.

And before you begin reading this report, I would like for you to know how this whole process started. On a personal level, I was deeply convicted several years ago to, “be at peace with all men” and this paper is an attempt towards peace. We at First Fruits of Zion have clearly communicated with many in the Messianic Jewish movement, and shared debates, expressed difference, and have maintained a healthy respect for one another. This has not been the case with the Two-House movement. In some regard

we ignored those within the Two-House movement as a fringe, dysfunctional, and passing fad. We did not treat them the way that we would like to have been treated. FFOZ simply ignored them. This was unfair.

With the publishing of our books *FellowHeirs* and *Mystery of the Gospel*, lines of communication were established and we began to cautiously communicate with some of the key leaders in the Two-House movement. In turn, they were kind and gracious to us and a foundation was laid to begin to share our hearts and thoughts with one another. Where this will end up I do not know. I do believe that First Fruits of Zion has much in common with the balanced and fundamental ministries from both Messianic Judaism and the Two-House movement. I trust that this report will begin a process of honest dialogue and a collecting of hearts and minds for His purpose and for our continued desire to be faithful servants of His Kingdom.

My intent in writing this paper is to be clear, forthright and honest. With this said, I want to state that the lines which define and divide brethren are not as clear as we all may think.

A Word on Terminology

A word on terminology is necessary up front. In my conversations with the Ephraimites, I came to realize that within the Two-House movement, the term 'Gentile' is something of a dirty word. Just recently, I was teaching a seminar in which the majority of the people listening identified themselves as Two-House people. As I was teaching, I could see that their faces were filled with shock and dismay. I tried to ignore it and go on, but finally stopped the seminar and said, "Excuse me, am I saying something wrong?" That was when I found out that my use of the term 'Gentile' was offensive to them.

Most teachers within the movement understand the term 'Gentile' to refer to one who is a pagan or an idolater. But in common, modern use, the word Gentile is never used in this narrow fashion. It is simply a synonym for non-Jew, i.e. one from among the nations. It has become an English equivalent for the Greek word *ethnos*, which means "nationalities." This is the meaning we at First Fruits of Zion intend to convey when we use the word in our literature. This is merely a matter of semantics,¹ but for the sake of clear communication, please understand that when we say 'Gentiles' we mean 'non-Jews,' or those not identifiable as having a historic, genealogical or social-community ancestry stemming from the ancient people of Israel.

FFOZ and the Two-House Movement

First Fruits of Zion is not a "Two-House" ministry. That is to say, we do not teach non-Jews to base their participation in Torah, Hebrew Roots, or the people of Israel on the

¹ Batya Wootten comments, "The Messianic Jewish movement made the non-Jews feel like "Gentile" is a "dirty word," and those of *Messianic Israel* will probably continue to be dismayed if you continue to use it to define them."

supposition that they may be descendents of the Ten Lost Tribes². Nonetheless, we do share several areas of affinity with those in the Two-House movement. We share a common identity in Yeshua. We share a love and respect for the Jewish people. We share a desire to walk after the commandments and to live our lives in faithful obedience to God's Torah. We share a sense of belonging in the greater body of Israel. We share the belief that the "Israel of God" is a very broad tent which includes all of God's people, both Jew and non-Jew. We share a heart for the survival of the modern nation of Israel and we both desire to see the Land blessed.

In the final analysis, our points of affinity are probably greater than our differences. It is with the hope that we will be able to better recognize and understand both our differences and similarities that I have undertaken the task of preparing this paper.

First Fruits of Zion is not a proponent of the "Two-House theology", but neither are we an enemy of it. From our perspective, the entire question is largely irrelevant because we believe that a non-Jew's position in Israel and participation in Torah are the natural results of his identity in Messiah.³ As believers in Messiah, non-Jews have a right and responsibility to take hold of the commandments of God. Our primary misgiving regarding our "Two-House" brothers and sisters is that *some*⁴ have placed their supposed identity as a descendent of Israel above their certain identity in Messiah.⁵

In general, it appears that the Two-House Movement is less about the actual claims of genealogy; rather it appears to be more about the actual role of Gentiles within the Torah movement. The question of Gentile participation in Israel has been left unanswered by Messianic Judaism, and the Two-House Theology one attempt to answer the question. There exists a deep insecurity among Gentile believers who have taken up the yoke of the Master which needs to be addressed and answered. This is the core that needs to be answered, and it is the common ground which the Two-House Movement and First Fruits of Zion can agree upon.

² Unfortunately, many of the balanced teachers and ministries in the Two House movement have been stigmatized by this fringe teaching. My observations at two large Two House conferences would not have brought me to this conclusion. I did not hear this taught. In fact, I heard this approach spoken against. There is a huge need for those in the Two House movement to clearly separate itself from this approach.

³ Mrs. Wootten asks, "Would you say that Jewish identity is irrelevant? If the answer is no, then the people will demand that you use equal weights and measures." When it comes to the issue of Torah observance and faithfulness to our new identity in the Messiah my answer is yes—there is no distinction and it is a moot point. I briefly quote my article, "I am a Jew" *Messiah Magazine* issue 83, page 16-17, "The point is not whether or not you are Jewish or Israelite. The point is that there is a Jewish Israelite living within you."

⁴ Scott Diffenderfer, publisher of Messianic Home magazine and on the Shepard's Counsel of the Messianic Israel Alliance (MIA) states, "Boaz, I do not agree with this statement. Please remember that at least within our MIA camp we are Messianic Israel. Our focus has always been on Messiah...I realize you are generalizing but please be careful as our opinion is that it is our relationship with Messiah that has caused us to see ourselves as Israel not the other way around."

⁵ A challenging perspective that I have gleaned from my "Encounters with an Ephraimite" is that they are an extremely prophetically minded people. Case in point, my initial perception was that they all based their participation or inclusion into the Torah or Israel on a lost heritage. I was wrong. Many are quick to admit that they do not know, nor do they care. But upon their understanding of the prophets, specifically the undeniable passages of the people from among the nations role, position, and responsibilities as Israel in the coming kingdom they are **allowing their future destiny to define their current identity**. They express this future identity with such emphatic terms that it can become confusing whether they are referring to, as initially thought, a "lost" genealogy or their future destiny. I have made it a point to no longer assume, but rather clarify. I have found this to be very helpful and beneficial.

As I have come into contact with people in the Two-House movement, I have found them to be, by and large, people passionate for truth and devoted to their faith. They are attempting to submit their lives to God's Word. They appear to have orderly lives and godly homes, and it would appear that they are bearing fruit in godly children. As regards all of these types of issues, I am certain that FFOZ is on the same page with the Two-House Movement.

What is the Two-House Movement?

What is the Two-House Movement? Part of the frustration in talking about this issue is the difficulty in satisfactorily defining what 'Two-House' means. Whenever matters pertaining to the Two-House Movement have been raised in the past, whether by First Fruits of Zion teachers or the theology's detractors, voices within the movement have objected that their beliefs have been misconstrued or mischaracterized. This results from the fact that there is such great diversity of interpretation between teachers and factions that identify themselves as Two-House. The pendulum always takes some time to balance out in new movements and understandings.

Over the years, I have taken time to read a great deal of Two-House literature. In doing the homework, one of the things I have learned is that there is no consensus on the particulars. Those who claim to be Ephraimite or Two-House include people who understand the nexus between Gentile Christianity and Northern Israel in metaphoric and symbolic terms and those who fastidiously believe that their long ago ancestors were Israelites which in turn makes them Israelites.⁶ The only thing that is certain is that it is a divisive issue which has been largely misunderstood on all sides and, like all theological arguments, caused untold hurt between brothers and sisters.⁷

Still, I have done due diligence in trying to find a common denominator which can be identified as Two-House. I have been able to develop a relationship with several of the key teachers and leaders in the movement and done my best to understand their beliefs in their own words. The conclusions I have reached on the subject arise largely from those conversations. Therefore, if my description of the Two-House Restoration theology is still faulty, it is not for lack of trying.

As I understand the Two-House teachings, it is the belief that the Ten Lost Tribes of the Northern coalition are not as lost as we think. It is only their identity that has been lost. According to this teaching, the descendents of those Ten Lost Tribes are among us today. Additionally, a large number of non-Jews are actually descendents of those tribes.

The Two-House movement is premised on the idea that Israelite paternity, regardless of how distant or how many generations removed, determines one's tribal status. Therefore, most of Earth's population could be Israelite. The numerous biblical passages and prophecies which refer to the restoration of the tribes of Israel to the land

⁶ See companion document, "The Two-House Metaphor: An FFOZ Response to the Claims of the Two-House Movement" By Daniel Lancaster

⁷ Scott Diffenderfer comments, "I do not believe that the understanding of being Israel is the divisive force. Actually, it is a unifying force when people grasp that they are part of Israel—they understand that they are part of His set apart people. The division is due to man's shenanigans not the teaching/understanding."

of Israel will therefore be fulfilled only as these non-Jews discover their true identity as Israelites and return to Torah and the Promised Land. They believe in our own day, this restoration has begun. In their opinion, this is why many non-Jewish believers feel drawn to things Jewish and matters of Torah. They are, in fact, Israelites, awakening by the Spirit's prompting to their true identity. God, in His infinite wisdom, is using faith in His Messiah as the vehicle to return the exiles of Israel.

Adherents of the movement are quick to explain that one's identity is ultimately unknowable. No one can prove that they are actually descended from Israel, but neither can it be proven that they are not.

Those who subscribe to the Two-House teaching acknowledge that, although they are not Jewish, they may be descendants of the Ten Northern Tribes of Israel. As a result, they find a valid reason to take on the commandments and accoutrements of Torah. The observance of the Sabbath, the biblical Festivals, the biblical dietary laws and the lifestyle of Torah becomes, in some measure, incumbent upon them because of their identity as Israelites. Therefore, whole congregations and the whole movement have formed around the possibility of Israelite patrimony.

First Fruits of Zion teaches a different message, but many of the results are the same. We teach that the believer's identity in Messiah gives him the right and responsibility to "take hold" of the commandments of God. The observance of the Sabbath, the biblical Festivals, the biblical dietary laws and the lifestyle of Torah becomes incumbent upon us because we have been "created in Messiah Yeshua for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them." (Ephesians 2:10)⁸

How Messianic Judaism Birthed the Two-House Movement

Though First Fruits of Zion is not ready to endorse the particulars of the Two-House theology, we are able to understand why the teaching arose and why it makes sense to those within the movement. In my conversations with Ephraimites, I have heard the same story, told in one form or another, countless times. Over and over again, I have heard of how non-Jewish believers originally participating in Messianic Judaism were sent away, told that the Torah was not for them. In so doing, they have disenfranchised a large number of non-Jewish believers who are seeking out their biblical roots in an attempt to return to a purer form of our faith.

For example, I recently had a conversation with an influential young teacher in the Two-House movement. He is 23 years old, very well read, and balanced in regard to the claims of the movement he represents. One of the ways that he described the movement was that, "The Two-House Movement is the valid alternative to that of the Messianic Jewish Movement." He based this statement on the fact that the Messianic Jewish Movement had rejected Gentiles who desired to embrace a life of Torah. He explained that that the only other valid alternative to living in a community connected with other Torah-keeping, non-Jewish congregations is to accept the understanding of the Two-Houses of Israel.

⁸ "...For I also am an Israelite, of the seed of Abraham, of the tribe of Benjamin." (Romans 11:1). Paul found his identity not only in Messiah but in his lineage as well. There is room for both within proper Scriptural understanding.

In my conversations with those in the Two-House movement, the overall impression I received is that Messianic Judaism has rejected the vast majority of them by not welcoming or affirming them as they came into the movement. They desperately wanted, and needed, to keep Torah because it was something the Spirit was doing in their hearts and their minds. Rebuffed by Messianic Judaism, they sought another avenue of approach. The Two-House teaching struck an emotional chord within which said, “The non-Jewish Believers were told that they were ‘not’ part of the people of Israel, yet they were being drawn by the Spirit to the people of Israel, to the feasts, and to the Torah of Israel. A closer examination of the Scriptures indicated to them that they were in fact part of Israel, and very possibly part of the lost tribes of the former Northern Kingdom.”⁹ Once that chord was struck, it seemed to harmonize with the work that the Spirit of God was doing within them, turning their hearts toward the Torah of God—the work of the New Covenant.¹⁰

I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will be careful to observe My ordinances. (Ezekiel 36:27)

“But this is the covenant which I will make with the house of Israel after those days,” declares the LORD, “I will put My Torah within them and on their heart I will write it; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people.” (Jeremiah 31:33)

In all honesty, within mainstream Messianic Judaism, the issue is not actually Jewish or non-Jewish inclusion.

The Gentiles who are filling pews in the Messianic Jewish synagogues have been welcome to play a secondary or supportive role to the Messianic Jewish vision, which is the evangelization of the Jewish people. Thus non-Jewish Torah observance (i.e. *Shabbat*, festivals, *kashrut*, *tzitzit*, etc.) is only a component in the larger attempt to witness to Jewish people. The following quote illustrates the point well.

Some Christians experience a special calling to give themselves to a primary identification with the Jewish people for their salvation. This is parallel to those who have a call to a special mission field such as China, Nigeria, or France. Those who have this calling live out their faith in the midst of a Jewish community and join Messianic congregations. They participate in the whole of the life of the community.¹¹

So long as evangelism is the purpose for Gentile participation in the Messianic Synagogue, no conflict arises. The mainstream Messianic movement, including its key leadership, is of the conviction that the Body of Messiah at large is not in need of reformation on issues of Torah at all. In fact, many would discourage non-Jewish churches from taking hold of their Torah heritage.

⁹ Quoting Batya Wootten from in e-mail correspondence. September 2004.

¹⁰ Tim Hegg presents a compelling message in FFOZ’s DVD seminar, “What’s So New About The New Covenant.” In this teaching we present that the New Covenant is made with the house of Israel and the house of Judah, resulting in the restoration of Israel. It is a common teaching of FFOZ that there is no covenant made with the people of the nations—Gentiles. Our position is that the *ger* was always considered to be equal participants in Israel based on their faith and faithfulness to the covenants. This is not a replacement theology—this is a theology of inclusion. I would like to also recommend Tim’s work in the book *FellowHeirs*.

¹¹ *Tikkun*, July 2003, “Let Us Go With You”

Within the Messianic Jewish ideology there is not an identity crisis because those Gentile congregants are perfectly comfortable in their secondary, supportive role. The Torah is not a primary issue. They are not participating in the movement based upon their desire to keep Torah, but because they desire to evangelize Jews.

Mainstream Messianic Judaism often assumes the following premises.

- There is a distinction between Israel and the Church.
- Only the Jewish people are to be identified as 'Israel.'
- The Torah is for Israel (i.e. the Jewish people) alone.
- The Torah is optional for Jewish and non-Jewish believers.

By espousing these premises, Messianic Judaism has maintained a convenient niche right next to the evangelical Christian church. Since they are not teaching that the Torah is the biblically prescribed way of life for all peoples and nations who call upon the name of the God of Israel, they can conveniently co-exist in cooperation with the Church's anti-Torah theological assumptions. They can receive financial support, utilize their buildings, speak at their conferences, and have Christian leaders speak at their Messianic Jewish conferences because the perspectives do not conflict.

Messianic Jews cover the whole spectrum in terms of Torah observance. It can be observed that some Messianic leaders regularly disparage keeping kosher, keeping the Sabbath and the laws of Torah, denigrating them as 'legalism' and 'going back under the law.', while others may go to the other extreme and adopt Orthodox Judaism with its non-Biblical fences. Of course every combination within these extremes may exist too. It is not at all uncommon to encounter Messianic Rabbis who completely disregard biblical *kashrut* and deliberately break the Sabbath on the basis that they are 'free from the Law.' It may be hard to believe, but I have personally been at Messianic Jewish functions where pork chops were served and none of the assembled leadership even raised an eyebrow. This is not hypocritical on their part because it is their honest conviction that the scruples of Torah observance are only optional adornments which they might choose to put on or to take off as easily as a prayer shawl. It is what they believe. I believe they are mistaken, but that is another matter. When a non-Jew approaches non-observant, Messianic Jewish leader and says, "I would like to keep the Torah;" the non-Jew is going to be rebuffed. The last thing any Messianic Jewish leader would want is a congregation full of non-Jews who are more Torah observant than he is!

The following anecdote, offered by one of our volunteers at FFOZ, illustrates the situation well.

After our family had given up eating unclean foods, my young grand-daughter came out of Shabbat school saying that someone had brought pepperoni pizza for them to eat. She had refused (only being about 4 years old), but she was sure it was "pig pepperoni". We felt that it couldn't be, but on checking we were dismayed to discover that she was right and that the congregation had no problem with it. Another time, during one of our early celebrations of Feast of Unleavened Bread, we went out to eat with a group from the congregation, and the Congregational Leader's son was eating a roll. We were flabbergasted. We could not understand how these things could be and the theology of Two-House was extremely appealing. (N. Simpson 8/06/04)

To be fair, Messianic Judaism has never been about the return to Torah. The following passages from First Fruits of Zion's book, *Mystery of the Gospel*, explains the historical dynamic.

The original intent of the missionaries was to spread Judaism like peanut butter on a piece of bread. The bread was traditional Christianity. But now it had a Jewish flavor. At best, it was a trick. A fake. The old bait and switch. It is unpleasant to admit, but the movement began as something of a façade conceived with the intent of luring Jews into the faith. In some ways, much of the façade still remains. From its very inception, such an enterprise flirts with disingenuousness and invites pretense and pretending. In terms of converts, the results have been under-whelming.

However, as a result of these missionary efforts, something unique began to happen. Not what was expected. The expected result was that Jews would pour into the Christian faith. That's not what happened. What did happen was something completely unintended. In the attempt to create an artificial Judaism, the Jewish missionary movement had hit upon something authentic: Torah.

When Messianic Judaism decided to meet on Shabbat so Jews would feel more comfortable, someone must have raised the obvious question, "Hey, isn't this the real biblical Shabbat anyway?" And when Messianic Judaism started doing the festivals to make Jews interested, someone must have pointed out that, "These festivals teach about Messiah. This stuff is all about Messiah!"

It was an amazing thing! Messianic Judaism had accidentally stumbled into Torah! The rediscovery of Torah continues to this day and promises to be the most enduring contribution to the faith that the whole Hebrew Roots movement will make.

The Gentile presence within the Messianic movement is another unwitting result of Jewish Evangelism's accidental rediscovery of Torah. In the attempt to create an artificial Judaism, Messianic Judaism rediscovered an authenticity deeper and older than any form or structure existing within the mainstream Church: Torah. Suddenly, it wasn't primarily Jews coming into the movement. Rather, it was Christians, Gentile Christians who have been starved for authenticity for centuries. Gentile Christians hungry and zealous for Torah.

It was an accident. But when Messianic Judaism began to return to Torah in order to create a more Jewish venue, it struck a chord deep within the hearts of Christians everywhere. Suddenly Gentile Christians everywhere are responding, "Yes! This is what my faith has been missing. This is what I have always been looking for."

Lest there be any doubt about where First Fruits of Zion stands on this issue, allow me to remind everyone that First Fruits of Zion officially separated from the Union of Messianic Jewish Congregations (UMJC) in May of 2000 over the issue of Gentile inclusion. The following quotation is from a May 25, 2000 letter addressed to Russ Resnik, UMJC General Secretary,

This letter is to inform you of a decision that has been made by the director of First Fruits of Zion Ministries. This letter is to state official resignation of our status as an approved/endorsed organization of the Union of Messianic Jewish Congregations. We will immediately remove any mention of this status/relationship from all of our publications and web sites.

FFOZ, and myself as its director, have enjoyed many strong relationships within the UMJC. However, I have recently come to understand that our visions, mission, and goals are not necessarily the same. Through e-mail correspondence and telephone discussion with Russ Resnik it has become clear that the mission of FFOZ is focused on educating and encouraging the non-Jewish believer in their relationship to the Land, the People, and the Scriptures (The Torah); while that of the UMJC is as Russ Resnik states, "A Jewish organization for Jewish believers, not a movement of Gentiles taking hold of Torah." It seems to me that these two statements are opposed in nature, and I am not clear that I feel comfortable with the level of potential "intolerance" of these two scriptural opinions.

Our resignation was over the fact that the UMJC was neither allowing for, nor making provision for non-Jewish involvement. Since that time First Fruits of Zion has not been an official part of the Messianic Jewish Movement. Our primary focus and mission as an organization is to serve as an educational organization, not a congregational one. We create helpful resources for studying the Bible and our common Jewish Roots. Meanwhile, we still have a foot in the door of the mainstream Messianic Jewish Movement in that many congregational leaders use our materials. Although First Fruits of Zion may not be politically correct in Messianic Jewish circles, many leaders use our study materials and endorse our theology and our mission.

Some within Messianic Judaism perceive our inclusive attitude toward non-Jews as blurring the lines between who is really Israel and who is not. We recently received an email from Dan Juster, dated July 23rd in which he asserts First Fruits of Zion teaches replacement theology. He writes as follows:

...the last FFOZ writings, I think by Tim Hegg [i.e. *FellowHeirs*] are teaching replacement theology... [FFOZ's] view that it is not physical Jewery that counts but those who keep Torah that are the Israel of God is replacement theology with the addition of Torah for all. This is a big, big issue, and seems a change from FFOZ's position before...

In the same vein, we received a letter from Russ Resnik implying that First Fruits of Zion promotes Christian supersessionism because we teach that non-Jews, in Messiah, have full participation in Israel and its Torah.

In a July 2004 *Tikkun* Newsletter from Dan Juster, he states that the founding fathers of Messianic Judaism intended Messianic Judaism only as an evangelical outreach to unsaved Jews. He goes on to say that the mission has not changed. He clearly states that the Messianic Jewish Movement was never intended to be a place in which Gentiles would begin to embrace the Torah or feel compelled to keep the Torah. Instead, he says that the original vision of the movement is only "to bring Jewish people to the knowledge of Yeshua and disciple them while maintaining genuine corporate Jewish identity...Yet there is a danger...that some are following a different

vision and calling it Messianic Judaism. This vision is more to see the Church embrace its Jewish roots. This is important when done in balance, but... to form congregations of Gentiles who follow Jewish liturgy, and chant the Torah while having no Jewish members was not a goal of the 'fathers'."¹²

Similarly, in a July 2003 *Tikkun* Newsletter about non-Jewish participation in the Messianic Movement, Dan Juster lambastes those who regard the non-Jewish believers as full standing members of the commonwealth of Israel and holding full covenant responsibilities alongside the Jewish people.

...some have been teaching that there should be no distinction not only with regard to salvation but in any significant regard. It is said that Jew and Gentile together now constitute Israel. This is understood in such a way that it is taught that all have the same covenant responsibilities in the Body of the Messiah and are to keep the same Law. I believe this teaching is contrary to the Word of God and violates the Scriptural teaching that those from the nations are not responsible to live by the whole Law in the same way as the Jewish people.¹³

In the same article, Juster goes on to cite Galatians as evidence that, "If one is not circumcised, then one is not obligated to obey the whole Law."

We may argue with Mr. Juster's interpretations and we may disagree with the general stance of Messianic Judaism, but they are sincerely following their understanding of the Scriptures when they turn non-Jews away from Torah. It is their reading of the Scriptures which informs their convictions. Messianic Judaism should not be faulted for their position. The matrix of the Messianic Jewish Movement simply is not big enough for the restoration that God is doing in the Body of Messiah. The Hebrew Roots movement has outgrown Messianic Judaism. But you can understand how these clashing theologies have contributed to the Two-House Movement.

As non-Jews have been turned away from Torah by the Messianic Movement, is it any wonder that they have sought some other rationalization for their participation in Israel? The Two-House teaching offered a solution to the problem of identity within Israel. Due to Messianic Judaism's resistance to Torah and non-Jewish participation, the Two-House theology was left standing as the only viable alternative for a large number of people. An unsolicited letter received during the final edits of this report on August 19, 2004 bears out this perception, (emphasis mine)

We have had a very rough time with a congregation here. We attended for almost a full year. Then a problem arose regarding the 2 house issue. While my husband and *I do not believe that the Church will EVER replace Yisrael*, some how the congregation leader thought we were "Ephramites" We never got the chance to explain, we were told that we were *not welcome* anymore. In the meantime we have found a homegroup, which studies and midrash(es) Torah, and we like it very much. *While we attended the congregation mentioned above, there were never any discussions/teachings on Torah...* L. Weeks, Belmont, NH

The above statements are direct and forthright. To be sure, FFOZ has many friends and colleagues in the Messianic Jewish movement. In addition, the descriptive "Messianic

¹² *Tikkun*, July 2004, "Obedience to the Vision from Heaven"

¹³ *Tikkun*, July 2003, "Let Us Go With You"

Jewish Movement” is not owned by nor does it represent any particular group. There are many groups and individuals that utilize the term “Messianic Jewish” that would not endorse or fall in line with the comments and positions of those quoted above.

FFOZ Muddies the Waters

In my conversations with Two-House leadership, I became aware that a majority of the current leaders in the movement, as well as many of the constituents in the movement itself, first came to their understanding of Torah through the work of First Fruits of Zion. From the outset of our ministry, FFOZ has maintained equal covenant participation for Jews and non-Jews. That is to say, we believe that the Torah is for everybody who follows the Jewish Messiah. However, that message has not always been crystal clear in our magazine publications and personal communications. For example, at one time we hired a fellow to direct FFOZ operations. He contacted Scott Diffenderfer of *The Messianic Home*, and told him, in no uncertain terms, that we want nothing to do with the Two-House movement. Furthermore, he informed him that First Fruits of Zion considers the Two-House theology as heretical. That caused a lot of division because what that said to many people was that FFOZ does not believe in the inclusion of Gentiles in the Torah movement. At the time, people so closely connected the Two-House movement with Gentile participation that they could not separate them. They thought that we were saying that Gentiles do not have a place in the Torah movement.

As an educational organization, we felt that it was appropriate to give airtime and publishing space to both sides of the argument. We will not continue this as we now realize that it may have caused more confusion than productive or provocative thought. On limited and infrequent basis we will cautiously continue to offer clearly communicated forums for the sharing of ideas and thoughts that may differ. Some people read the material and came to the conclusion that we were making statements contrary to our traditional stand of inclusion and Torah observance.

It is important for you to understand that although we have sometimes published other opinions, the core teaching at FFOZ has always been one of full non-Jewish participation in the things of Torah and the people of Israel. We have predicated this participation upon the individual’s identity in Messiah alone. We believe that, as disciples of the Torah-observant Messiah, we are beholden to imitate His life and conform to His teaching. We believe in Torah observance on the basis of our identity in Yeshua. We believe that we have a position in Israel on the basis of the Messiah of Israel’s position within each one of us.

Affinities and Frustrations

Obviously FFOZ and the Two-House Movement have a great deal in common. We have a lot to offer each other. Both FFOZ and the Two-House Movement include non-Jews in the definition of greater Israel and the lifestyle of Torah. Both FFOZ and the Two-House Movement are committed to radical discipleship and the restoration of God’s people. We have a great deal to offer one another. But there are some distinctions to be made, and a few frustrations to be expressed.

Eschatology

Though we have a great deal in common with the Two-House movement, we do have several differing viewpoints with the entire theology. FFOZ is able to affirm several of the basic tenants of general Two-House teaching. We affirm the message of the prophets. That is to say, we believe that there will be a day when all the dispersed of Israel will be returned and restored. The message of the prophets is unanimous in this regard.

The Two-House message contains a prophetic truth that is yet to occur. There are ten lost tribes, whether they are lost by assimilation into the nations or into Judea—they are lost. We do not know who they are; we do not know where they are or what they are, but we do know that at some point in the future they will be identified and re-established. All the tribes will be brought home, and in the Messianic era, tribal differentiation reemerges. However, we do not suppose to know the means or mechanism by which this will be accomplished and are not willing to suggest one theory over another. It is a matter of eschatology, and in that regard, it is similar to the arguments over pre-tribulation, mid-tribulation and post-tribulation advent. Everyone has a theory, but no one will really know for certain until Messiah comes.

Two Un-Provables Don't Make a Proof

However, we do find it cause for serious concern when people predicate their participation in Torah and their identity in Israel upon an ultimately un-provable supposition. To be fair, not all Two House people do. The movement's early pioneers, the Woottens, point out that the Two House Movement originally began to answer the question of Israel, not the question of Torah observance. But as it has evolved, the two issues have become somewhat married.

In my conversations with Ephraimites, one of the things I heard over and over again was that genealogy and descent from Israel is ultimately un-provable. "By the same token," the Two-House brothers would say, "Jewish descent is also un-provable. Jewish people cannot prove that they are descended from Israel."

These two un-provables should not be equivocated though. The Jewish people, whether through rabbinic conversion or assumed genealogical decent, have an unbroken chain of continuity with Jewish ancestry, and ancestry which has been transmitted by community identity. The Two-House Israelite does not. The fact that a Jewish person cannot produce a genealogy reaching back to Jacob does not validate a non-Jew's supposition that he is descended from Israel.

The Proof is in My Heart

Many of the people I spoke with felt that their descent from Israel was provable in that they felt an innate call to Torah. From deep within them, they had a sense of Israelite identity, something that could not proven, but was certain nonetheless. Since the prophets predict that Israel's return to Torah is part of the Messianic Restoration, they pointed to their call to Torah as evidence that they must be a part of Israel. They must be a part of the prophetic restoration of Israel. Yet for most of these people, their own

mother and father, siblings, uncles and aunts and children had no parallel experience whatsoever. They shared no sense of that inner-identity, had no inclination to start keeping Torah whatsoever. Would it not stand to reason that if one's family was actually Israelite stock that this prophetic restoration would spread across those families?

FFOZ has a different explanation for that inner sense of Israelite identity and the sudden return to Torah. We believe that there is a Jewish man who has taken up residence within each and every believer. The more one gets in touch with this inner-Jew (i.e. Yeshua), the more one will feel compelled to turn to the ways of Torah and identify with the people of Israel. The non-Jewish call to Torah is part of biblical prophecy too. In the Messianic era, all nations will be keeping the Torah.

It's all about Messiah.

Working it Out...

In my conversations with Ephraimites, I was frustrated by a lack of consistent, linear argument. It seemed as if, when I was speaking with several people from the Two-House Movement, that they had amalgamated a mixture of Pauline theology of inclusion, which is the correct understanding of our one new man faith (Ephesians 2:15), and that of genealogy. In the same sentence they would switch back and forth between the two. When I would challenge them with my concerns about people embracing the Torah or considering themselves Israel based upon genealogy, they would quickly assure me that "Those are non-issues because nobody knows their ancestry anyway," and then quote a passage out of Paul's letters to prove the inclusion of the Gentiles. Then, in the very next sentence they would go back to predicating their identity on Israelite ancestry. This was very confusing. To be fair, like any new message or movement it takes time to have thoughts and communication solidified. As previously mentioned I have learned not to assume that I know what this movement represents or believes based upon a sound byte or limited information. Apparently, Dan Juster has learned the same lesson; I quote him once again,

My concern with some of the Two House views had to do with their being border line heresy or even actual heresy because the N. T. emphasis on the Gospel being offered to all peoples was down played and the N. T. was interpreted to mean that the preaching of the Gospel today is mostly an offer of salvation to Judah and the lost northern tribes of Israel. In addition, it was of concern that there was teaching that Christians should claim their part in the land of Israel, which could be understood in a way of displacement.

Monty (Judah) and Eddie (Chumney) do not hold these views and should be treated as brothers with whom we are in fellowship. This does not mean that I agree with all their emphases, but that is a different matter than heresy. One should read their full statement to understand their position...¹⁴ July 18, 2003

I wholeheartedly agree with Dan Juster on these points.

¹⁴ Statement available at: www.lionandlamb.net

Use of the Term Israel

Those within the Two-House Movement often point out that they are Israelites, full members of Israel. This they base upon the supposed fact that they are the likely descendants of the lost Ten Tribes. Yet at FFOZ, we believe that this is a debatable point for believers. What is not debatable is that all, believers already have citizenship in Israel through faith in Messiah. Non-Jews are grafted in to Israel. Non-Jews are made part of the commonwealth of Israel. Non-Jews are given the covenants of promise. All of this is accomplished only through faith in Messiah.

These are the biblical terms offered to explain the non-Jews position in Israel. And it is a position in Israel. However, we are uncomfortable with the Two-House Movement's casual use of the term Israel. By declaring themselves to be rightful Israel, the Two-House Movement creates an unavoidable sense of replacement theology. Certainly this is not the intention, but to the outside observer, the result is the same. For that reason, at FFOZ, we try to use only biblical language when describing the non-Jew's participation in the People of God. We acknowledge that believing non-Jews are part of Israel. There is a distinction to be made, and the distinction is biblical. Furthermore, it does not make an assumption based on an un-provable, it is less offensive to greater Judaism and it avoids the pitfalls of replacement theology.

Speaking of replacement theology—many are quick to accuse those in the Two-House movement of teaching this errant doctrine. I did not find this to be the case. I have read some material from some of the more fringe and radical individuals that purport a Two-House theology that to bring me great concern in this area. However, the more moderate adherents, which represent the vast majority, have a deep love and respect for the Land, the People and Scriptures of Israel. One would be hard pressed to find one individual in the Two-House movement that would boldly state that they have replaced and are now are physical Israel—whereas there are many churches and Christians denominations that fund and support the Messianic movement that do believe and support this false teaching.

Identity Only In Messiah

Our main concern with the Two-House Movement, as has already been stated, is the two-legged basis of identity. On the one hand, those in the Two-House Movement espouse identity in Messiah alone. Yet on the other hand, they validate their participation in Israel and Torah observance on their identity as Lost Tribes. We feel strongly that our identity in Israel and our participation in Torah must be predicated on our identity in Messiah alone. Only our identity in Messiah is provable, and only our identity in Messiah is eternal.

Though FFOZ and the Two-House Movement can be allies in almost every other respect, we will continue to be at variance on this issue. Our identity in Messiah is absolutely fundamental. As we have demonstrated in the books *Fellowheirs* and *Mystery of the Gospel*, the Gentile inclusion in Israel is based solely upon Messiah. Adding anything to that equation, especially something as spurious as theoretical ancestry, seems unwise.

Summary

In conclusion, First Fruits of Zion and the Two-House Movement share more commonalities than differences. Our differences are minor, on the order of terminology and eschatology. For the most part, we are saying the same things. We both espouse full non-Jewish participation in Israel. We both believe the Sabbath, the Festivals, the dietary laws and the whole of Torah applies equally to all God's people, Jew and non-Jew. We both believe in the ultimate restoration of all Twelve Tribes to Israel. Most importantly, we both confess the same crucified and risen Lord.

In the words of our common Master we close with hope and a prayer,

“I am no longer in the world; and *yet* they themselves are in the world, and I come to You. Holy Father, keep them in Your name, *the name* which You have given Me, that they may be one even as *We are*.” John 17:11

May He who makes peace in His heights, make peace upon us and upon all Israel. Amen.

Addendum: I would highly recommend the two books mentioned throughout this paper, *Mystery of the Gospel* and *FellowHeirs*. I mention these works as supplemental reading. This paper is based more on my perception and impressions of the current state of the Messianic/Hebrew roots movements. The books state our theology on the matter in certain terms. You can obtain these resources by calling FFOZ or visiting our website at www.ffoz.org

Question and comments are welcome:

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