

Two Into One

There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free man, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus. And if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's descendants, heirs according to promise. (Galatians 3:28, 29 NASB)

This article concerns a teaching called the “Two House” teaching. Most of the article is opinion, so take it for what it’s worth. This teaching has a great deal of possible truth to it, and by and large I do not reject it out of hand. I think there is way too much “rejecting out of hand” going on in the Messianic Movement as it is. However, I have a large concern for the effects of the teaching, and that is what is addressed here. I am not trying to give a complete, scholarly treatment of the doctrine itself; that is done in other articles and books much more ably than I could attempt. Here I will give a short background or history, then give a summary of the doctrine, and finally make some of my own observations at the end. Bear with me here, because the background and summary are important to understanding what I think is the cause of the two house teachings, and what is the fruit of the teaching.

History of the Movement. Some decades ago, a movement gained momentum within Judaism oriented towards accepting Jesus as the Messiah. In the early ‘70’s there were few adherents or Messianic Synagogues in the United States. About thirty years later there are an estimated several hundred thousand people who have made the plunge into Yahshua (Jesus’ actual name), and dozens of synagogues. New ones are starting or changing over almost every month. Throughout history there has always been a remnant, even among the Jews, who followed Yahshua. One organization (IMJA) can trace its existence back to 1866. But after Israel became a nation again He became much more widely accepted among them than anytime before, except for perhaps the first or second century A.D.. There are probably dozens of reasons why this movement is developing, including such things as schools that started in the newly revived nation of Isra’el, or the influence of Christians and Jews who spent time learning from each other. But one of the biggest factors driving this movement in my opinion is, perhaps for many the surprising, realization that accepting Yahshua (Jesus) as the Messiah does not mean having to give up Torah or the Jewish cultural heritage.

For many centuries it was assumed that “conversion” required the giving up of all semblance of Jewishness, embracing a so-called “freedom in Christ” which generally meant giving up the “legalism” of Torah observance. Historically, after about the first century following the resurrection, the Gentile component of believers increased and the Jewish component decreased. As the Gentile component increased, Gentiles began moving away from anything Jewish due mainly to the (mostly self-inflicted) persecution of the Jews. But the Gentile Christians really didn’t know how to deal with the

“Jewishness” of the Bible, and invented many extra-biblical doctrines that “replaced” the Jews with the Church to justify the elimination of Jewish behavior and culture. The newer Biblical writings became the “New” testament, while the existing Scriptures became “Old.” The “god” of the Old Testament wanted blood sacrifice, while the god of the New was all about really good feelings. “Israel” gave way in their theology to the “Church,” all the Biblical blessings were appropriated by this “Church,” and all the curses were dumped on Israel. These types of doctrines seemed to work fine until the state of Israel sprang into existence again, overnight as it were, when the doctrines blew up in the Church’s face.

Suddenly, all of the anti-Jewish replacement schemes looked extremely foolish. Here was an event that did not fit any of the extra-biblical doctrines, but instead was an exact fulfillment of Biblical prophecy previously thought to apply to the replacement Church. The Church began to deal frantically with the confusion by re-vamping their carefully constructed house of cards so rudely blown down by the winds of reality. Into the “Babel” stepped a number of learned men, some of whom studied at schools started in the new Israel and some of whom arrived at similar conclusions independently, who realized that God’s plan had remained the same since the beginning. It was understood by these gifted teachers that any apparent change to His plan had more to do with removing the human works “plaster,” that hid the beauty of His plan, rather than any change in YHVH’s Word. They took a hard look at all of the extra-biblical doctrines, and began to reject those that did not measure up to Divine Truth. It was “discovered” that what was previously rejected as “Jewish” Law, with the death penalty already paid, was in fact a beautiful discipleship program. And it was available to all people everywhere.

At first the realization that Yahshua and Torah went together like a hand in a glove mostly affected Jewish believers. When they began to understand that Yahshua had not actually come to destroy Torah but to show His followers how to live it properly, they embraced Him at an ever increasing rate. But also over the last couple of decades a new problem (that is really not new at all) confronted searching Gentile believers, which is best phrased as a question. “If Torah is a legitimate, YHVH honoring lifestyle for the Jew, why isn’t it also legitimate for the Gentile?” Since it is okay for the Jews to follow all the words of the Bible, live a lifestyle pleasing to God, AND receive the blessings of that lifestyle, then to me it would follow that everyone should pursue it. If Torah is the legitimate Word of God, and we are all “one new man,” doesn’t it make sense that the entire household is subject to the same set of instructions for holy living?

Many Gentiles have faced these questions and decided that, yes, we are all of one household and we are all subject to the same rules of behavior. Consequently, these Gentiles (my humble self included) have embraced a Torah that is filled with Yahshua and begun to apply it to every area of their walk with YHVH. However, most Gentile “Christians” still believe in the cardinal doctrines of replacement theology, regardless of actual events or teaching from the Word of YHVH to the contrary. They insist on

believing that the Jews must become Christian in order to walk with YHVH, and that Torah is the “old” system while theirs is the “new.” Many Jews, on the other hand, contrive to exclude the Gentiles from the blessings of Torah observance. They are busy with manufacturing their own extra-biblical reasons for why the Torah does not apply to everyone.

This back and forth problem has gone on for a long time. Abraham was a Gentile, a fact that Jews tend to overlook. The Jews were given a mandate after release from Egypt to be a “light” to the Gentiles, but reacted by developing the belief that one had to become a “Jew” to walk with God. After Yahshua came and corrected that belief (among many other beliefs), what was intended as a “new man” made up of Jew and Gentile was corrupted by the Gentiles into the belief that one had to become “Gentile” in order to walk with God. Almost everybody seems to overlook the fact that there are no Jews in the first five books of the Bible. Only Isra’el. And with the blossoming in the desert of the “apple of YHVH’s eye,” we are now seeing a return to an awareness of the original plan of YHVH, that of one man.

Many of the people in the Messianic Movement, as it is called sometimes, believe that the Torah is a covenant only with Isra’el, and therefore the Gentiles should not follow it. There is in fact much ridicule and mocking being hurled at those Gentiles who’ve seen the Torah as YHVH’s Universal Word, and have begun to incorporate those instructions into their own lives. But there are also Jews who realize that the Torah was intended as “inclusive” rather than “exclusive,” and who have been trying to share with willing Gentiles their understanding of YHVH’s instructions. These people have found themselves caught between two worlds – rejected equally by the Church and the Jews over the issue of attempting to incorporate ALL of YHVH’s Word into daily living.

Summary of the doctrine. Another fish thrown into this fine kettle is a doctrine known as the “Two House” teaching. Simply put, this refers to the re-joining of the 12 tribes of Isra’el into one nation. According to prophecies in the Tanakh (OT to you diehards), the northern ten tribes of Isra’el (frequently called Isra’el or Ephraim in the Tanakh) and the southern two tribes (Judah and Benjamin, referred to as Judah) that split from each other after the time of Solomon will eventually be joined back together. This rejoining is very clearly stated in a number of passages and is pretty much without dispute. The ten northern tribes (Isra’el or Ephraim) were carried into captivity by Assyria about 150 years before Judah. Judah went into captivity (by the hand of Babylon) later and the time in captivity was shorter because they did not descend into idolatry as completely and quickly as Ephraim. So far so good. At this point is where the difficulties come in, mostly over the “when” and “who.”

One group of people within the Messianic Movement, composed of both Jews and Gentiles (and some who would not class themselves as Messianic), is convinced that the ten tribes have not yet returned to the Land of Israel. Instead, through migration and

intermarriage with Gentiles they dispersed into history and the world population. If you would like to read more detail about this teaching, a good book is “Who Is Israel?” by Batya Wooten. But without going into a lot of detail, it is thought by this group that Christianity has grown out of the dispersion of Ephraim (either genetically or practically), and so are part of those ten tribes, while the people who continued to recognize themselves as Jews are composed mostly of the Y’hudim (Judah). The “Two Housers” call Christians Ephraimites (eh-fry-im-ites).

The Two Housers acknowledge that it is impossible to tell if one is genetically a part of physical Isra’el (or not). They grant that all who desire to be part of YHVH’s Kingdom and follow His Ways are His Children. They also seem to believe that the two houses of Isra’el have to reunite in order for the Messiah to return, so it is their task to help both houses realize who they are, thus hastening the reunification and the return of the Messiah.

My observations. The first problem I see with these teachings is that nowhere, in any Scripture that I have found, does it say that the disciples of the Messiah are supposed to contribute anything at all to the reunification of the tribes. There is not one scrap of evidence that tells us we should concern ourselves at all with making this reunion happen. Everywhere it is said to be a work of YHVH, and no one else. As a matter of fact, the job is so terribly difficult that I don’t think anyone BUT our Elohim could accomplish it. It will be done, but it will be according to His timing and His power, and nothing I contribute will either stop it or speed it up. Yahshua told us to “go forth and make disciples, teaching them all I have commanded you,” not “go forth and put the tribes back together.”

“Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.”
(Matthew 28:19,20 NASB)

The second problem I see is that instead of promoting “one new man,” we are now promoting division and strife.

But now, you who were once far off have been brought near through the shedding of the Messiah’s blood. For he himself is our shalom – he has made us both one and has broken down the m’chitzah (fence-Oral Torah) which divided us by destroying in his own body the enmity occasioned by the Torah, with its commands set forth in the form of ordinances. He did this in order to create in union with himself from the two groups a single new humanity (one new man) and thus make shalom, and in order to reconcile to God both in a single body by being executed on a stake as a criminal and thus killing in himself that enmity. (Ephesians 2:13-16 Complete Jewish Bible, parenthesis mine)

Perhaps the two-house teaching is a reaction to the lack of identity on the part of those who believe Torah is an inclusive lifestyle, suitable for either Gentile or Jew. Lack of identity is a real problem for those of us who find ourselves caught between two worlds – rejected by the Jews for the sake of the Messiah, and rejected by the Gentile Church for living according to His Word. Rejected even by many Messianic groups because of advocating a Torah submissive lifestyle for Gentiles. But our identity should come from the Messiah, not our standing as “Isra’el” or “Gentile.”

We had (have) a golden opportunity to recover the truth of the Word, practicing and teaching it to such an extent that the whole world will know us by our unity and love for one another, and here we are acting just like the Gentile Church that we are supposedly so much better than. What a wonderful blessing, or series of blessings, to put the Word back together in it’s fullness and follow it step by step to a deeper and more satisfying relationship with our Papa! And what do we choose instead? Factions, discord, distrust, mocking one another, and generally acting like the worst of those who wear His name and don’t do what He taught us to do!

Yes, it is frustrating that our Jewish brothers and sisters don’t recognize us as part of the family. Yes, I grieve over the fact that even among those that we should be closest to some of us are denied the blessings of Torah submissiveness. Yes, I find myself yearning for an identity in this world; a family; a history. And yes, I earnestly hope that one day (the sooner the better) we will all realize that we are one body, with one head, one Father, and one hope. Until that day I will do what I can to reach people with the Good News, and teach as many as I can to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which we are called.

It is hard enough to teach the plain truth of YHVH’s Word, including Torah, to a bunch of stubborn, flint headed people who I would sometimes just as soon slap upside the head as look at. At most this doctrine, even if true, should be what I call a “back burner” doctrine. That is, we should keep it in a place out of the main fire, to talk about when we have a few spare minutes from laboring in the fields to bring in YHVH’s harvest. It does not need to be a front line teaching.

I don’t disagree very much with most of the ideas put forth by the Two House teachings that appear to match up with Scripture. It seems reasonable to me that YHVH could have “salted” the seed of the Gentiles with that of the children of Abraham in the same way that Lucifer tried to destroy people by supposedly mixing humanity with fallen angelic seed. I also don’t think He HAD to do that, and it seems to me from Scripture that sons and daughters are made by grace through faith. I think we are introducing an element of confusion and division in an effort to foster the unity of the one new man. And I think it’s much more important to concentrate on “one house” than on “two houses.” Maybe a bunch of people won’t recognize it, but that’s what Yahshua told us to do. It’s important that we come together; the reason we are coming together is not so much because of

genetics as it is because of the Messiah. God never tells any of us from the Word to go forth and bring two houses together. That task appears to be reserved for He, Himself, alone. Should we see ourselves as part of "Isra'el," or part of Messiah?

For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek; for the same Lord is Lord of all, abounding in riches for all who call on Him; for "WHOEVER WILL CALL ON THE NAME OF THE LORD WILL BE SAVED." (Romans 10:12,13 NASB; verse 13 quoting Joel 2:32)

Hoping we get the point
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