

The purpose of this short paper is to offer a biblical assessment of certain foundational distinctives of the Two House or Ephraimite movement.

For many believers, an assessment of a movement's foundational distinctives will be more useful and beneficial than lengthy interaction with every claim the movement makes. If Two House Theology can be shown to be based upon erroneous presuppositions then the movement should be rejected.

An examination of a selection of the movement's writings¹ reveals a number of distinctives. Among these:

- belief in the concept of lost tribes and the attendant claim that today's Gentile believers are in fact Ephraimites (i.e. physical descendants of the lost tribes of Israel)
- novel meanings assigned to the terms *Israelite*, *Jew* and *Gentile*²
- denial that the ekklesia (church) is an entity distinct from Israel

The movement makes other controversial and novel claims -most of which are merely logical developments of the distinctives above.

Lost Tribes

The concept of ten lost tribes is nothing new³. British Israelism has long held that the ten tribes of the northern kingdom became lost and that the British and American people are mostly descended from these supposedly missing tribes. Various supporting arguments have been presented including alleged linguistic connections and dubious interpretations of history and biblical prophecy.

¹ Your Arms To Israel Doctrinal Statement
http://yourarmstoisrael.org/misc/official_statements/?page=doctrinal_statement&type=2
What is the Two-House Teaching? by J.K. McKee
Various by Moshe Yoseph Konuichowsky
Various, B'Nai Avraham Messianic Congregation
Various, Eddie Chumney
Various, Batya Wooten
The Mystery of the Gentiles, Joy Jacobs

² e.g. THT often reads *Gentile* to mean *Israelite* (but only if it is necessary to support their thesis), or, uses oxymorons such *Gentile Israel* (Wooten)

³ Although Two House proponents are known to loudly protest that their movement is unrelated to BI, the similarities between the two belief systems are striking.

The question should first be asked: from a biblical perspective, were any of Israel's tribes ever lost?

The short answer is no.

The scriptures repeatedly make the prediction that the descendants of Israel will be scattered throughout the nations⁴ and that in the last days they will be regathered to the land of Israel, leaving none behind⁵. The dispersion has been fulfilled. Though scattered for more than two millennia the Jews have largely remained distinct and identifiable.

The biblically predicted dispersion is entirely different, however, from the concept of lost tribes as promoted by British Israelism. As we shall see, the lost tribe contention is without biblical support.

The Biblical Record

Following the kings Saul, David and Solomon, the kingdom of Israel was divided in the time of Rehoboam. Thereafter Judah and Benjamin were seen as the southern kingdom while the other ten tribes were frequently referred to as Israel, the northern kingdom.

The northern kingdom was invaded by the Assyrians around 722BC and *many* (not all) of its people deported⁶. However, prior to the invasion many of the Israelites (...*from every tribe of Israel...*) were living in the southern kingdom among the people of Judah and Benjamin (I Kings 12:17; II Chronicles 11:3, 16). *Large numbers* from Ephraim, Manasseh and Simeon had moved to the southern kingdom (II Chronicles 15:9).

Even following the Assyrian exile many Israelites were recorded as still dwelling among the people of Judah and Benjamin (II Chronicles 30:25; 34:9; 35:18).

Early in the 6th century BC the southern kingdom (Judah) was conquered by the Babylonians and some of its people (not all) were deported⁷.

⁴ e.g. Deut 4:27, 28; 30:1; Jer 30:11; Micah 5:7, 8

⁵ e.g. Isa 11:11,12; Jer 16:14,15; 23:3-8; 31:10; Ezek 11:17-19; 39:28; Zeph 3:20

⁶ II Kings 17:6

⁷ Jer 52:28-30

From the time of the return from Babylonian exile the terms *Israelite* and *Jew* began to be used interchangeably. This is to be expected as there had been significant intermingling of the tribal groups. Examples of returning Judahites referred to as *Israelites* include Ezra 8:35; 10:25 and Nehemiah 12:47.⁸

Proponents of British Israelism will frequently teach that Judah ("the Jews") returned to the Holy land while the ten tribes ("Israel") somehow became lost. The Bible, however, reveals that there was significant intermingling of the twelve tribes before, during and after the exile. By the time of the return from Babylonian exile *all* twelve tribes were represented both *within* and *outside* the land of Israel⁹. One of the fundamental flaws of British Israelism (and Two House Theology) is the insistence that Israel and Judah remained entirely distinct.

The New Testament meaning of *Israelite* and *Jew*

As should be expected, the New Testament continues to use the terms *Israelite* and *Jew* interchangeably.

Peter, in Acts 2, addressed his kinsmen as *fellow-Jews* in verse 14 but *men of Israel* in verse 22. Paul explicitly calls himself both an *Israelite*¹⁰ and a *Jew*¹¹.

Throughout Romans, Paul uses *Israel* and *Jew* interchangeably. He freely moves between statements distinguishing *Jew* and Gentile¹² and *Israelite* and Gentile¹³. If these terms are given the meanings assigned by Two House Theology¹⁴ some of Paul's propositions become meaningless

or absurd¹⁵.

None of the twelve tribes was considered lost in the first century. James knew that there were believers among all twelve tribes and that many were living in the Diaspora (dispersion). He began his letter to those Jewish believers *...to the twelve tribes scattered among the nations, greeting...*¹⁶. Yeshua's listeners in John 7 clearly understood that many of their people remained scattered among the Gentiles¹⁷.

The prophetess Anna, mentioned by Luke, was of the tribe of Asher, one of the supposedly lost tribes¹⁸.

The notion of lost tribes is found to be contrary to the biblical record.

Two House Theology -a new spin on an old error

Two House Theology appears to be established largely in the fringes of the Hebrew Roots and Messianic movements. Not surprisingly, most of its adherents are Gentiles. While it is not classic British Israelism it does draw from many of the same ideas.

Essentially, it is argued that those Gentiles who become believers are in fact mostly Ephraimites - that is, they are directly descended from Ephraim, Jacob's grandson, which of course would make them Israelites. Thus it is largely only Israelites and so called Judahites who are coming to saving faith in these days.¹⁹ Born again Gentile believers are taught to be in fact Ephraimites unaware of their

⁸ In light of the aforementioned texts (I Kings, II Chronicles, Jeremiah) many of Nehemiah's references to Jews necessarily include some non-Judahites.

⁹ See the aforementioned texts.

¹⁰ Romans 11:1; II Corinthians 11:22

¹¹ Acts 21:39; 22:3

¹² e.g. Romans 1:16; 2:9-3:1; 3:28-30; 9:24; 10:12; 15:8,9,27

¹³ e.g. 9:30; 11:11-14; 11:25-26

¹⁴ THT is wildly inconsistent and contradictory in its reading of the NT terms Israelite, Jew and Gentiles -at times they are interchangeable, at times they are taken at face value..

¹⁵ e.g. Rom 11:11 *...through their (Israel's) fall, salvation has come to the Gentiles to provoke them to envy...* THT teaches that most Gentiles who come to saving faith are in fact Israelites. As such, Paul's statement is rendered meaningless.

¹⁶ James 1:1

¹⁷ John 7:35

¹⁸ Luke 2:36

¹⁹ The obvious question arises: what about the "Gentile Gentiles"? A major provision of the Abrahamic covenant was that *all the families of the earth will be blessed* through Abraham (Gen 12:3). Paul later refers to this statement as the *gospel announced in advance* (Gal 3:8). Plainly, millions more Gentiles than Jews have come to faith in Messiah. THT, while not absolutely denying that some Gentile believers are in fact Gentiles, seems to have very little to say about Gentile salvation. Is this revenge for replacement theology?

true identity -till now!²⁰

One of the key texts to which Two House Theology appeals is Genesis 48:19²¹. Ephraim is prophesied to become *melo hagoyim* -a multitude of peoples or nations. It is argued that this is a prediction that the descendants of Ephraim would one day become separate national identities distinct from those we today identify as Jews.

Again, it is taught that these “Ephraimites” have till now been unidentifiable. It is further taught that their self-recognition as Israelites and their union with the “Jews” is a necessary prelude to “all Israel’s” restoration and redemption.

It is true that Genesis 48:19 does use the Hebrew word *goyim* -the plural of *goy*, the word normally translated as *Gentile* or *nation*. The fundamental error, however, is in the assertion that this word *always* and *only* ever refers to Gentiles²².

Genesis 12:1-7 records the announcement of what has come to be known as the Abrahamic covenant. God promises to make a great nation of Abraham’s physical descendants -a clear reference to Israel. Even in this passage the word used is *goy*.

Another clear example is Jeremiah 31:36 where the Lord promises that Israel will always exist as a *nation before me*. Again, the word is *goy*.

Zephaniah speaks of the Jewish people regathered for judgement and, ultimately, for great blessing. He speaks of Israel as a *goy* in Zephaniah 2:1 and 9.

While it is true that *goy* normally refers to Gentiles (i.e. those who are not physically descended from Abraham, Isaac and Jacob) that is not *always* the

²⁰ Jude 3 speaks of *the faith once for all entrusted to the saints*. Given that THT teaches a doctrine evidently unknown to the NT writers, and even contradictory of the NT, it would qualify as a cult (as many evangelicals use that term).

²¹ ...but truly his younger brother shall be greater than he, and his seed shall become *many peoples, or, a group of tribes, or, a multitude of nations*.

²² *Goy*: “...in early usage, it was used of a nation, a people, a tribe, and even a clan. Thus the point of Gen 48:19 is that Ephraim will be the father of a multitude of clans and so he was. His prominence is seen in that after the division of the kingdom, his name was often synonymous with the whole northern kingdom of Israel.” Dr Arnold G Fruchtenbaum, Ariel Ministries, December 2002

case. Context must determine meaning.

All belief systems are based on particular primary assumptions. Two House Theology is predicated upon a number of significant errors. Its misunderstanding of the biblical usage of *goy* and *goyim* is one such error.

The Ekklesia (or Church²³) -a distinct new entity or simply new covenant Israel?

Replacement Theology, in its many forms, has long confused the two biblically distinct entities Israel and the church. From the time of Augustine and his unbiblical teachings²⁴, and before²⁵, the church has been seen as *the new Israel* -effectively disenfranchising ethnic Israel of its covenants and helping to usher in centuries of error and antisemitism within Christendom.

A plain reading of scripture reveals a clear distinction²⁶ between the two entities: *Israel* as those who are physically descended from Abraham, Isaac and Jacob²⁷; the *ekklesia* (or church) as those Jews and Gentiles who, since Acts 2, have come to saving faith in Yeshua the Messiah.

While replacement theology effectively displaces Israel, Two House Theology denies and functionally displaces the *ekklesia*.

Two House Theology, consistent with its other errors, sees the *ekklesia* as simply “new covenant Israel”²⁸. It teaches that supposedly Gentile believers

²³ The English word *church* is probably a poor and unfortunate choice to translate the Greek *ekklesia*. The primary meaning of *church* in many English dictionaries is: *edifice for public Christian worship*. Significantly, this is a meaning the scriptures never assign to *ekklesia*. For this and other reasons some prefer not to use the term *church*.

²⁴ Augustine 354-430. e.g. promoted Mariolatry; consented to death penalty for those who submitted to believer’s baptism; development of amillennialism: “...second major factor which prompted the rejection of premillennialism was the teaching of Augustine... ..he developed... ..new view (which) became known as amillennialism.” (Renald E Showers, *There Really Is A Difference*, p132) etc

²⁵ Origen 185-254 is considered an important figure in the move toward allegorisation and replacement theology.

²⁶ Since a Jewish believer today is a member of both groups it is preferable and more accurate to speak of Israel and the church as *distinct* entities rather than *separate*.

²⁷ A Gentile believer is a son of Abraham by faith (e.g. Gal 3:29; Rom 4:11,16). This does not make him a Jew, however. Biblically, Jewishness is a matter of physical descent from Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.

²⁸ Your Arms To Israel Doctrinal Statement

within the ekklesia are in fact mostly unrecognised Ephraimites ("Israelites")²⁹. These "Israelites", by uniting with the believing Jews ("Judah"), are reuniting both houses of Israel -hence Two House Theology. One error leads to another. Confusion regarding origin and terminology inevitably creates confusion regarding the identity and destiny of Israel and of the church.

Scripture teaches that the ekklesia or church is a truly *new* entity. Paul speaks of Jewish and Gentile believers united in *one body*³⁰. Union of this kind was impossible before Messiah's death³¹. We are now *heirs together, sharers together, fellow partakers*³².

Under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit Paul describes this entity with the Greek word *kainos*³³ -i.e. *what is new and distinctive as compared with other things; new in kind*. He describes the concept as a *mystery*³⁴ -that is, something that was formerly unrevealed but now has been made known³⁵. Paul declares the church to be a truly *new* entity.

Paul tells his Gentile readers³⁶ that they were formerly *excluded from the commonwealth of Israel*³⁷. What he does *not* say (here or anywhere else) is that Gentile believers have now become part of Israel³⁸. Rather, he teaches that Gentiles now *share the Jews' spiritual blessings*³⁹ and have been made members of a *new* entity, variously described as the *body of Messiah*⁴⁰, *one new man*⁴¹, *the household of God*⁴², *the ekklesia* (or church)⁴³.

Boldly, one Two House Theology proponent describes the above teaching concerning the ekklesia as *an unscriptural doctrine of hell*⁴⁴.

A Foundation of Sand

The purpose of this paper has been to address several⁴⁵ of Two House Theology's key presuppositions. If these have been recognised to be false then the system can be, and should be, rejected. Those in positions of leadership within the ekklesia are obliged not only to teach sound doctrine, but also to identify and refute that which is false⁴⁶. Two House Theology is one of an increasing number of movements that should be strenuously opposed. True shepherds will protect the flock from wolves⁴⁷.

It is heartening that in recent years many thousands of believers have come to recognise the Jewishness of the scriptures and to acknowledge Israel's centrality in God's plan of redemption. It is tragic, however, that so many subsequently embrace errors such as Two House Theology that appeal to the pride and insecurity of believers.

In these days of increasing deception believers ought to devote themselves wholeheartedly to the proclamation of Yeshua's Messiahship and to sound, biblical discipleship. Winds of doctrine such as Two House Theology serve only to distract, disable and divide.

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²⁹ Your Arms To Israel Doctrinal Statement

³⁰ I Cor 12:13; Eph 2:16

³¹ Col 2:14; Eph 2:14, 15

³² Eph 3:6

³³ Eph 2:15

³⁴ Eph 3:4-6

³⁵ Greek: *mysterion* see also Romans 16:25-26; Col 1:26

³⁶ Eph 2:11; 3:1

³⁷ Eph 2:12

³⁸ Romans 11:17 and 24 teach that Gentile believers are grafted into a tree belonging to Israel. It does *not* teach that Gentile believers become spiritual Jews.

³⁹ Rom 15:27

⁴⁰ I Cor 12:13, 27; Eph 4:12; 5:23

⁴¹ Eph 2:15

⁴² Eph 2:19

⁴³ Eph 1:22; Col 1:18

⁴⁴ Your Arms To Israel Doctrinal Statement

⁴⁵ The errors of Two House Theology are certainly not limited to those outlined above. Another is the teaching that believers must obey Mosaic law. Of course, any believer has the freedom in Messiah to keep the feasts, to observe selected portions of the Mosaic law code or even to keep kosher. The view, however, that a believer *must* keep the Mosaic law is both unbiblical and untenable. The Bible presents Mosaic law as indivisible -to fail to keep even one of the 613 is to break them all (Deut 4:2; James 2:10; Mat 5:19). Furthermore, many Mosaic commands simply cannot be kept today. Who is able to return to Jerusalem every Pesach? (Deut 16:5) And who is going to stone all the Sabbath breakers? (Ex 31:14). It is simpler to accept what scripture declares: the Mosaic law was rendered inoperative by the death of Messiah (Rom 7:6; Gal 3:19; Col 2:14-17 etc).

⁴⁶ Titus 1:9; Romans 16:17

⁴⁷ Acts 20:28-31