

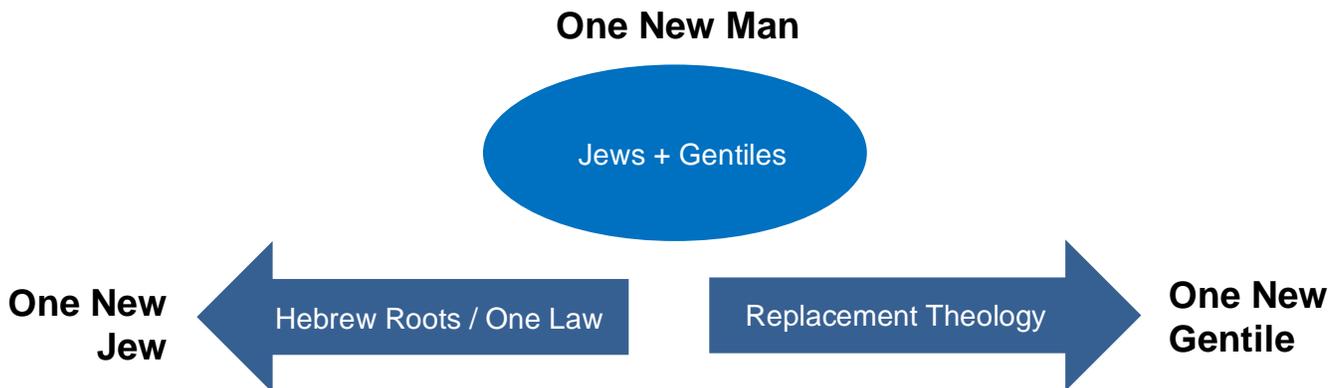
# One New Man, Hebrew Roots, Replacement Theology

*How to restore the Jewish roots of the Christian faith without getting weird*

By David Rudolph, PhD  
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I have been the director of [Messianic Jewish Studies](#) at [The King's University](#) since 2015, and I get the sense from my little corner of the universe that the Church is at a crossroads in understanding its relationship to Jews and Judaism. I keep meeting pastors and worship leaders and other devoted Christians who want to wade into these deep waters but *find it difficult to know which directions are healthy and which lead to weirdness*.

The aim of this article is to call us to work toward realizing Paul's Ephesians 2 vision of the One New Man,<sup>1</sup> made up of Jews and Gentiles in Messiah, who affirm each other as Jews and Gentiles.<sup>2</sup> This is a healthy direction and it leads to much partnership, fruitfulness and peace in the kingdom of God. I also want to show how *Hebrew Roots/One Law Theology* and *Replacement Theology* represent departures from Paul's One New Man vision—in opposite directions—with the former resulting in the One New Jew and the latter in the One New Gentile.



## The King's University Experience

From its beginnings in 1997, The King's University has been a trailblazer in its mission "to love, affirm, and stand with the Jewish people and Israel."<sup>3</sup> As a result, today we have a [Center for Israel and Jewish Studies](#), a Messianic Jewish Studies program (undergraduate through doctoral

<sup>1</sup> I use "Man" here in the sense of "Person."

<sup>2</sup> The term "Gentile" comes from the Hebrew word *goy*, which means "nation" or someone from a nation other than Israel (i.e., the Jewish people).

<sup>3</sup> Jack Hayford, "Allowing the Spirit to Refocus Our Identity," in *Unity: Awakening the One New Man* (ed. Robert F. Wolff and Don Enevoldsen; Chambersburg: Drawbaugh, 2011), 20. See David Rudolph, "Count Zinzendorf, Pastor Jack, and Messianic Jewish Revival," in *The Pastor & the Kingdom: Essays Honoring Jack W. Hayford*, ed. Jon Huntzinger and S. David Moore (Southlake: Gateway Academic and TKU Press, 2018), 103

level), a master's degree with a concentration in [Antisemitism and Jewish Advocacy](#), Land of the Bible concentrations, and a faculty, staff, and student body made up of Gentile Christians and Jewish believers. What makes The King's University all the more fascinating is that this Jewish presence and focus is not something that runs parallel to the rest of the university; rather, Messianic Jews and Messianic Jewish studies are fully integrated into the life of the community even as Jews and Gentiles at TKU affirm each other in their respective identities and callings. Our "[Statement on the Church and the Jewish People](#)" puts it this way:

We believe that the Church is a body of Jews and Gentiles in Messiah who are called to live out a God-given relationship of interdependence and mutual blessing (Rom 11:11-25; 15:7-27). At The King's University, we celebrate this unity in diversity. Gentile believers do not need to become Jews or take on Jewish lifestyle to walk in the ways of the Lord (Acts 15). However, Jewish followers of Jesus are called to remain true to their identity as Jews (1 Cor 7:17-24; Acts 21:17-26).

Given the centuries old parting of the ways between the Church and the synagogue, it is a miracle that we have a Christian university in our day where the faculty, staff, and student body is made up of Messiah-confessing Jews and Gentiles, who identify as Jews and Gentiles, and there is *shalom bayit* (peace in the house). As one who has participated in this learning community since 2015, I can testify that it is the real deal. Consider also that Jew-Gentile partnership is where the Church is heading. History is going in the direction of healing the schism between the Church and the Jewish people, and God forming his One New Man described in Ephesians 2. The King's University is modeling something of eschatological importance (John 17:20-23), and we sense the leading of the Spirit and the goodness of the Lord in pioneering this Ephesians 2 approach to unity in the Church.

### **The Legacy of Jack Hayford and Robert Morris**

I chronicle the history of how The King's University became a learning community of Jesus-believing Jews and Gentiles in "[The Story of TKU's One New Man—To the Jew First Vision](#)."<sup>4</sup> For those who want the two-minute version, however, it all goes back to the legacy of Pastor Jack Hayford and Pastor Robert Morris. For centuries, Gentile Christians have widely held that the Church—the One New Man—is composed of former Jews and former Gentiles.<sup>5</sup> However, Pastor Jack, the founder of The King's University, contended that the One New Man reflects a

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<sup>4</sup> Cf. Rudolph, "Count Zinzendorf, Pastor Jack, and Messianic Jewish Revival," 99-116.

<sup>5</sup> ". . . many interpreters have understood this [One New Man] to be implying that Christ, by forming a new kind of humanity, has nullified all forms of Jewish distinctiveness. Chrysostom could speak of the 'two' becoming 'one' in ways that appear to eradicate any possibility for distinct Jewish identity. Calvin understood this passage to be teaching that maintaining Jewish ethnic identity was antithetical to the gospel of Christ. The twentieth century saw the rise of 'third race' concepts, involving the claim that Christians form a new 'race' of people in distinction from the 'races' of Jew and gentile. The translators of the RSV (followed by NRSV and ESV) added the phrase [in Eph 2:15] 'in place of the two,' implying that the new humanity is to be understood as a 'replacement' of distinct Jewish and gentile humanity. However, these constitute over-readings of the text in question . . . although there is a 'new humanity,' there is no reference to the replacement of Israel. On the contrary, the new humanity is comprised of 'both' (ἀμφοτέρους [v. 16]) Jew and gentile" (Lionel J. Windsor, *Reading Ephesians and Colossians after Supersessionism: Christ's Mission through Israel to the Nations* [Eugene: Cascade, 2017], 143-44).

continuing relationship of interdependence and mutual blessing between Jewish and Gentile believers in Jesus,<sup>6</sup> the natural and grafted-in branches of the Romans 11 olive tree. *He maintained that the Church is fully and authentically the One New Man only when it is made up of Jewish and Gentile followers of the Messiah who affirm each other in their respective identities.*<sup>7</sup> This means that Gentile Christian leaders should extend the right hand of fellowship to welcome Messianic Jews. As Pastor Jack wrote:

...every effort should be bent toward helping the whole Body of Christ recognize, embrace, and receive Messianic Jews with understanding...<sup>8</sup>

Pastor Jack fervently maintained for half a century that unity in the Church and the global spread of the gospel would only be realized when we, like Peter in Acts 10-11, are awakened by the Holy Spirit to what God is doing today in forming his One New Man made up of Jews and Gentiles in Messiah, who remain in their respective callings. Pastor Jack gives the charge, “*If any one of us—but better, each one of us—will open [up] to the Lord’s purpose to give rise to [the] One New Man, revival will spread and Messiah Jesus will be glorified through His Church.*”<sup>9</sup>

Similarly, Pastor Robert, our Chancellor, has instilled in The King’s University a vision for the gospel being “to the Jew first,” as Paul says in Romans 1:16. For Pastor Robert, *To the Jew First* is not only a principle of God’s order for sharing the gospel but it also has implications for how we read the Bible. Pastor Robert describes his own journey in this regard:

I was taught replacement theology in Bible college [the idea that the Church has replaced the Jewish people as the people of God] and I didn’t know any different. It wasn’t until Wayne Wilks at Shady Grove Church, in an elders meeting, began to take us Scripture by Scripture to show us that God still had a place in his heart, and a plan, for the nation of Israel. Once you see it in Scripture, it changes everything. Just a while back I was with one of the largest churches in the world and the senior pastor said to me, “What’s the most important thing you can share with us?” I just immediately said, “Take the gospel to the Jew first: Romans 1:16.”<sup>10</sup>

As a little exegetical background on Romans 1:16, when Paul says that the gospel is “to the Jew first,” he fires the first shot in his attempt to push back against the idea that the Church has replaced Israel. Paul’s words—to the Jew first—should be understood in the wider context of his defense of Israel’s ongoing covenantal relationship with God—a defense that begins in Romans 1:16, continues in chapters 2–3, climaxes in chapters 9–11, and concludes in chapter 15. The expression “to the Jew first” is Paul’s rallying cry for the continued prioritization of Israel in the life of the Church.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Hayford, “Allowing the Spirit to Refocus Our Identity,” 28.

<sup>7</sup> Hayford, “Allowing the Spirit to Refocus Our Identity,” 18-19, 28-30. Cf. 1 Cor 7:17-24. See David Rudolph, “Paul’s ‘Rule in All the Churches’ (1 Cor 7:17-24) and Torah-Defined Ecclesiological Variegation,” *Studies in Christian-Jewish Relations* 5 (2010): 1-23.

<sup>8</sup> Hayford, “Allowing the Spirit to Refocus Our Identity,” 20-21.

<sup>9</sup> Hayford, “Allowing the Spirit to Refocus Our Identity,” 28-29.

<sup>10</sup> GOD TV interview with Pastor Robert Morris, Dallas, 5 February 2020.

<sup>11</sup> See David Rudolph, “To the Jew First: Paul’s Vision for the Priority of Israel in the Life of the Church,” *Keshar: A Journal of Messianic Judaism* 37 (2020): 11-25.

Paul’s principle of “to the Jew first” should raise the following questions for Gentile Christians: Do I have a sincere love for the Jewish people? Do I value the Jewish roots of my faith? Has replacement theology shaped my understanding of the gospel? When was the last time that I shared with a Jewish friend about Jesus the son of David? Is Jewish ministry a priority of my church? Do I encourage Jesus-believing Jews to retain their Jewish identity as a matter of calling, or to assimilate for the sake of being “one in Christ”? Do I have relationships with Jewish followers of Jesus? If so, are these relationships characterized by interdependence, mutual blessing, and mutual humbling? Do I give to Jewish charities and advocacy organizations? Do I fight antisemitism in the Church and the public square, or look the other way? Do I regularly pray for Israel and the well-being of the Jewish people worldwide? All of these are spheres of life that will be impacted when we experience Spirit-led vision to bring the gospel to the Jew first as Paul taught. Pastor Jack and Pastor Robert have provided TKU with the biblical-theological foundation and Holy Spirit orientation to catch these spiritual insights.

### Unity and Diversity in God’s Kingdom

In addition to Ephesians 2 and Romans 1, other passages of Scripture remind us that God desires unity and diversity in his kingdom. Acts 15 is the most foundational of these texts because it tells us about the first church council, convened by the apostles, and how it directly addressed the question of whether Gentiles have to become Jews, or take on Jewish life, in order to be part of the people of God. The Jerusalem Council decided that Gentile believers were exempt from circumcision and ipso facto other boundary markers of Jewish identity. However, the four requirements in Acts 15:20, 28-29,<sup>12</sup> and Paul’s letters, demonstrate that Gentile believers were expected to keep universal Torah ethics (e.g., 1 Cor 5-10).<sup>13</sup>

The Jerusalem Council also has implications for Jewish followers of Jesus. Think about it for a moment. If the apostles in Acts 15 considered Jewish life optional for Jews, why did they debate the question of whether Gentiles had to keep the Torah? Moreover, if Jews were exempt from Jewish law, why write a letter specifically addressed to Gentiles (Acts 15:22-29)? Acts 15, when read in light of its mirror text—Acts 21:17-26—assumes that Jewish disciples of Jesus would remain faithful to their covenant with God, which included keeping boundary markers of Jewish identity like circumcision (Gen 17).<sup>14</sup>

Paul’s letter to the Romans also emphasizes that Jews and Gentiles have different callings. The apostle to the Gentiles divides the world (including the Church) into two groups: Jews and Gentiles (Rom 11:13).<sup>15</sup> Jews are “the circumcised” as distinct from “the

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<sup>12</sup> Acts 16:4; 21:25.

<sup>13</sup> Markus Bockmuehl, “The Noachide Commandments and New Testament Ethics,” in *Jewish Law in Gentile Churches: Halakhah and the Beginning of Christian Public Ethics* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 2000), 167-71; Jostein Ådna, “James’ Position at the Summit Meeting of the Apostles and the Elders in Jerusalem (Acts 15),” in *The Mission of the Early Church to Jews and Gentiles*, ed. Jostein Ådna and Hans Kvalbein (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2000), 125–61; Richard Bauckham, “James and the Gentiles (Acts 15.13-21),” in *History, Literature, and Society in the Book of Acts*, ed. Ben Witherington III (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 155-84; Brian S. Rosner, *Paul, Scripture, and Ethics: A Study of 1 Corinthians 5-7* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1999).

<sup>14</sup> David Rudolph, “Was Paul Championing a New Freedom from—or End to—Jewish Law?” in *Understanding the Jewish Roots of Christianity: Biblical, Theological, and Historical Essays on the Relationship between Christianity and Judaism*, ed. Gerald R. McDermott (Bellingham: Lexham, 2021), 38-50.

<sup>15</sup> Cf. Gal 2:15. When Paul refers to Jews and Gentiles as a pair, he typically lists Jews first, the exception being Col 3:11.

uncircumcised” (Rom 3:30; 4:9, 12). Jews are “natural branches” in contrast to “wild olive shoot[s]” (Rom 11:21, 24). Jews are “Israelites” in contrast to “the nations” (Rom 9:4; cf. Rom 10:1; 11:11, 25-26).<sup>16</sup>

In Corinthians 7:17-20, Paul refers to the circumcised and uncircumcised members of his community. His “rule in all the Churches” (v. 17) is that the circumcised are “called” to remain circumcised and not to become uncircumcised. “Circumcision” is a metonymy for Jewish identity and lifestyle.<sup>17</sup> Paul is saying, “If you are Jewish, stay Jewish. Do not stop being Jewish (i.e., don’t assimilate).”<sup>18</sup> He similarly states that the uncircumcised are “called” to remain uncircumcised and not to become circumcised. In other words, “If you are Gentile, stay Gentile. Do not stop being Gentile (i.e., don’t become a Jew).” This is Paul’s rule; not just in Corinth but in all of his congregations.

In Paul’s view, honoring individual identities is part of the warp and woof of the kingdom of God,<sup>19</sup> a kingdom that is manifest in a table fellowship of Jews and Gentiles in Messiah who remain faithful to their callings as Jews and Gentiles. Paul’s Isaianic vision of the world to come is best expressed in Romans 11 and 15 where Israel and the nations are described as worshiping God together in unity and diversity, in interdependence and mutual blessing.<sup>20</sup> The apostle to the Gentiles sums it up beautifully in Romans 15:10 when he says, quoting the Song of Moses, “Rejoice, O Gentiles, with his people.”

### Three Approaches to Gentile Believers and the Torah

When I interview prospective students for the Messianic Jewish Studies program at The King’s University, I want to get a sense of their communal vision and see how it compares with our perspective at TKU. How does the person envision the kingdom of God in relation to Jews and Gentiles? Do they share our *One New Man—To the Jew First* vision, or do they have a different kind of vision? In order to help them process their thoughts on this, I will say something like this:

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<sup>16</sup> David Rudolph, “Zionism in Pauline Literature: Does Paul eliminate particularity for Israel and the land in his portrayal of salvation available for all the world?” in *The New Christian Zionism: Fresh Perspectives on Israel and the Land*, ed. Gerald McDermott (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2016), 182-94.

<sup>17</sup> Paul confirms that circumcision is linked to covenant fidelity and Torah observance when he writes in Romans 2:25, “Circumcision indeed is of value if you obey the law; but if you break the law, your circumcision has become uncircumcision.” He makes the same point in more explicit language in Galatians 5:3, “Once again I testify to every man who lets himself be circumcised that he is obliged to obey the *entire law*.” Paul’s wording in 1 Corinthians 7:18—“Let him not seek to remove the marks of circumcision”—points back to the Maccabean period when some Hellenistic Jews rejected their Jewish identity, even to the extent of surgically altering their bodies so that they appeared to have a foreskin. 1 Maccabees 1.11–15 describes Jews who removed the marks of circumcision as “those who abandoned the holy covenant.”

<sup>18</sup> Rudolph, “Was Paul Championing a New Freedom from—or End to—Jewish Law?” 35-37; David J. Rudolph, “Paul’s ‘Rule in All the Churches’ (1 Cor 7:17-24) and Torah-Defined Ecclesiological Variegation,” *Studies in Christian-Jewish Relations* 5 (2010): 1-23; David J. Rudolph, *A Jew to the Jews: Jewish Contours Pauline Flexibility in 1 Corinthians 9:19-23* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.; Eugene: Pickwick, 2016), 75-88; J. Brian Tucker, *Remain in Your Calling’: Paul and the Continuation of Social Identities in 1 Corinthians* (Eugene: Pickwick, 2011), 62-135.

<sup>19</sup> See J. Brian Tucker and John Koessler, *All Together Different: Upholding the Church’s Unity While Honoring Our Individual Identities* (Chicago: Moody, 2018); Daniel C. Juster, *Mutual Blessing: Discovering the Ultimate Destiny in Creation* (Clarksville: Messianic Jewish Publishers, 2013).

<sup>20</sup> See esp. Rom 11:11-17, 25-26, 30-31; 15:27.

Now I'd like to ask you a theological question. As you probably know, many Christians today are exploring the Jewish roots of their faith and those who press into this area inevitably face the question, "What is the relationship between Gentile believers and the Torah (Jewish law)?" I'm going to give you three basic approaches to this issue, which represent points on the spectrum, and I'd like you to tell me which perspective you think is the most biblical.

The *first* approach we will call the *Hebrew Roots/One Law View*. In this perspective, the Torah applies to Jews and Gentiles in exactly the same way. This includes commandments like keeping the Sabbath and festivals as described in the Torah. There is no difference between Jews and Gentiles when it comes to the Torah.

The *second* approach we will call the *Replacement Theology View*. In this perspective, Christ is the end of the law. Moral law may still be applicable in some way but the more Jewish-specific aspects of the Torah, like keeping kosher, have been transcended and are not incumbent on anyone, Jew or Gentile.<sup>21</sup>

The *third* approach we will call the *Jerusalem Council View*. In this perspective, the Torah applies to Jews and Gentiles in different ways. The Jerusalem Council decision in Acts 15 exempted Gentile believers from aspects of the Torah that serve as boundary markers of Jewish identity, such as circumcision. By contrast, Jewish followers of Jesus continue to have a calling to remain true to their identity as Jews.

To sum up, we have the *Hebrew Roots/One Law View*, the *Replacement Theology View*, and the *Jerusalem Council View*. Of these three basic approaches, which one comes closest to the Bible's perspective?

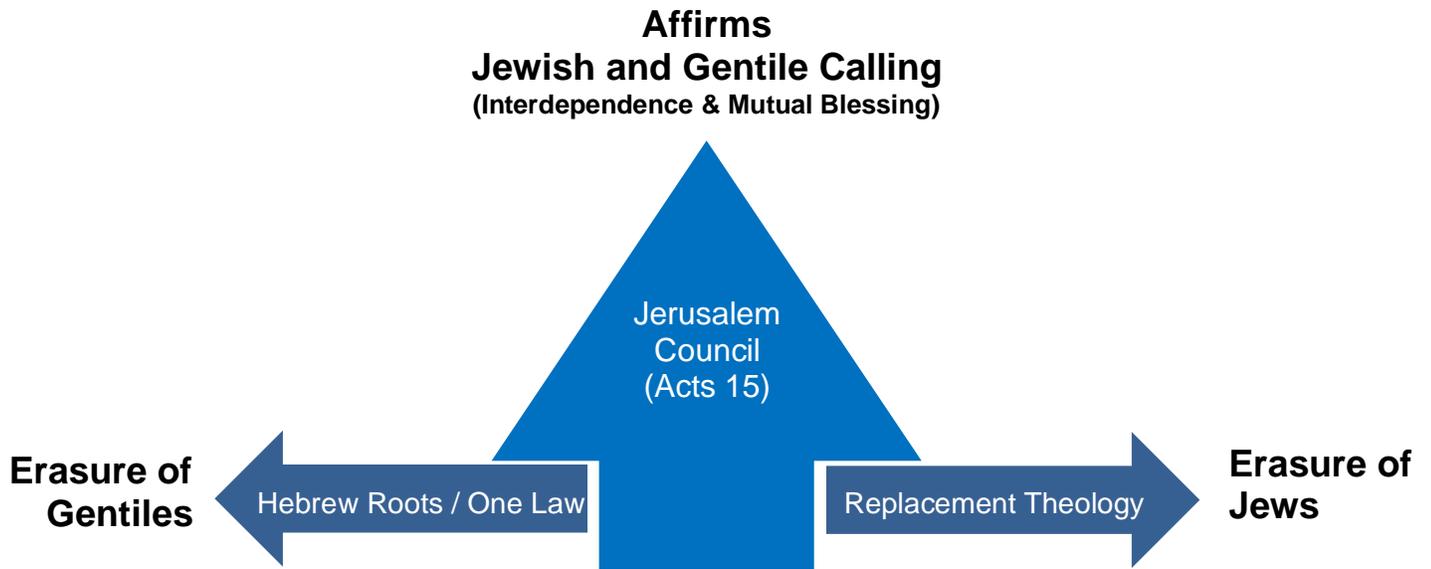
How the applicant answers this question tells me a lot about not only their familiarity with Scripture but also, and more importantly, about the kind of community they are drawn to and want to build. It gives me a sense of their trajectory. Why is this? If you think about it, each of the three views results in a different kind of community. The *Hebrew Roots/One Law View* leads to the erasure of Gentile identity in the body of Messiah since everyone is called to live like a Jew. This means that all churches should ideally become Hebrew Roots communities. The *Replacement Theology View* moves in the opposite direction. Instead of erasing Gentile identity, it erases Jewish identity within the ecclesia. Replacement theology leads to churches without Jews, or at least practicing Jews, and it views Messianic synagogues as rebuilding the wall of partition.<sup>22</sup> Only the *Jerusalem Council View* fosters a vision of the Church in which Jewish and Gentile believers affirm each other in their respective callings and where interdependence and

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<sup>21</sup> The *Replacement Theology View* typically makes room for Jewish and Gentile believers to live out aspects of Jewish life for the purpose of gospel ministry. Two texts often cited to support this idea are 1 Cor 9:19-23 and Acts 21:17-26. However, the ethical implications of putting on a pretense are usually not considered. See Rudolph, *A Jew to the Jews*, 13-19, 67-73, 173-212. Cf. Michael Brown, "As Jewish Followers of Jesus, We Deplore Deceptive Techniques," *The Christian Post*, 4 May 2021; Jayson Casper, "Messianic Jews Say 'Fake Rabbi' Was Wrong Way to Reach the Ultra-Orthodox," *Christianity Today*, 23 June 2021.

<sup>22</sup> We might say that *Hebrew Roots/One Law* and *Replacement Theology* are two sides of the same coin. One leads to the "One New Jew" and the other to the "One New Gentile."

mutual blessing is highly valued. This results in the One New Man made up of Jews and Gentiles that Paul describes in Ephesians 2.



### The Hebrew Roots/One Law View

Having had many conversations with people who hold a *Hebrew Roots/One Law View*, I have come to appreciate how fast this perspective is growing and gaining traction around the world, mainly due to the Internet.<sup>23</sup> Most of the people I meet in the *Hebrew Roots/One Law* movement are sincere and passionate in their desire to learn about the Jewish roots of the Christian faith. This is commendable. We should affirm those who are called to be bridges between the Church and the Jewish people and have an important contribution to make in this area. For too long, the Church has deemphasized its Jewish roots, leading to a parting of the ways with the Jewish people, and there is a need for restoration and reconciliation.

At the same time, those who have this bridge calling should speak the truth in love (Eph 4:15) and be faithful to communicate the whole counsel of God. For example, it is good to teach about Israel's festivals in Gentile Christian contexts since the festivals are mentioned throughout the Scriptures and they deepen our understanding of who God is, what he has done, and what he

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<sup>23</sup> See Manoela Carpenedo, *Becoming Jewish, Believing in Jesus: Judaizing Evangelicals in Brazil* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2021); Heidi Paster Harf, "The Emerging Jews of Colombia: Why are so many Christians in this South American country converting to Orthodox Judaism?" *The Washington Post*, 14 April 2021. Online: <https://www.washingtonpost.com/magazine/2021/04/14/converts-judaism-colombia/>; Lorena O'Neil, "Hebrew roots rising: Not quite Christians, not quite Jews," *USA Today*, 13 March 2014. Online: <https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/nation/2014/03/13/ozy-hebrew-roots-movement/6373671>; Menachem Kaiser, "For Some Believers Trying To Connect With Jesus, the Answer Is To Live Like a Jew: The Torah-observant gentiles of the Hebrew Roots movement get circumcised, lay tefillin, and grow peyos," *Tablet Magazine*, 3 February 2014. Online: <https://www.tabletmag.com/sections/belief/articles/observing-torah-like-jesus>.

will do in the future. However, teaching about Israel's festivals and encouraging all Gentile Christians to observe them are two different things.

In this section, my aim is to introduce three kinds of One Law theology, explain their contours, briefly address some of the arguments made to support these perspectives, and offer an evaluation.

### *Hard, Soft and Partial One Law*

*Hard One Law* proponents are typically Gentile believers who maintain that the Torah applies to Jews and Gentiles in exactly the same way. They view themselves as the faithful remnant who live out a purely biblical faith, the evidence of which is keeping the Sabbath on the seventh day, observing the Leviticus 23 festivals, and abstaining from pork and other unclean foods described in Leviticus 11. On the flip side, they regard Christians who violate these Torah commandments as workers of lawlessness. *Hard One Law* proponents view the Church as largely apostate, and they see this as confirmed in the Christian embrace of alleged pagan practices such as worshipping on Sunday, bowing down to Christmas trees on December 25<sup>th</sup>, and celebrating "Easter."<sup>24</sup> Here is an email that I received from a *Hard One Law* adherent. The subject heading was "man of lawlessness":

Hello Rabbi Rudolph,

My name is \_\_\_\_\_ and I have been studying the Hebraic roots of Christianity for a number of years. I have a pressing question I was hoping you could help me with. It seems as I study history, that the form of Christianity we have inherited was birthed by pagans in blatant antisemitism. We seem to have mingled much pagan custom in our attempt to worship the one true God, and have been severed from the biblical feasts (Lev. 23). We have separated ourselves from those "Christ killers" (to use a phrase from Constantine).

My question to you is about the Messiah of Christianity. Does this Torahless Jesus fit the description of the false prophet of Deuteronomy 13? The Christian doctrine of the Law being nailed to the cross, Messiah being born on the winter solstice and rising from the dead on the spring equinox, returning to rapture the Church, etc. seems to create a completely different "messiah" from the Torah observant Savior, who died on Passover, buried on Unleavened Bread, rose on Firstfruits, will return on a future Trumpets (day no man knows the day or hour) to regather the lost sheep of the house of Israel. Is the Messiah of Christianity one that upholds the Law, or does away with the Law? Which one fits the image of God as He presents Himself in the Scripture? A messianic teacher I

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<sup>24</sup> See R. L. Solberg, *Torahism: Are Christians Required to Keep the Law of Moses?* (Franklin: Williamson College Press, 2019), 115-16, 135. Solberg offers a helpful response to the *Hard One Law* view of Christmas and Easter, the divinity of Jesus, and the trinity. His work does not address the broad spectrum of views (esp. Soft and Partial One Law) in the Hebrew Roots movement. Also, Solberg maintains that the Torah's Jewish boundary markers of identity were phased out between the coming of Jesus and the destruction of the Temple, "The Law of Moses was given to a specific nation for a specific time, and that time ended with Yeshua's resurrection . . . In other words, if Christians were to try to keep both the Law of Moses and the Law of Christ, we would be committing spiritual adultery!" (175, 177; cf. 53, 56, 59, 62, 176).

heard once said “Show me which commandments you keep, and I will tell you which God you serve.” The implication here is that maybe we have created for ourselves an image of God that we are comfortable with, that doesn't match the image of God presented in Scripture. Any thoughts on this?

Thank you so much for your kind attention. May the LORD richly bless you and your ministry.

Since the *Hard One Law View* is suspicious of church teaching, this sometimes leads to a repudiation of the divinity of Jesus and the trinity.<sup>25</sup> This in turn results in a rejection of New Testament texts that emphasize Jesus' glory. Daniel Lang's *Reviving the Reformation* and Jeffrey Dandoy's *Our Bible Too* are examples of recent works that promote a *Hard One Law View*.<sup>26</sup>

*Soft One Law* is the same as *Hard One Law* in its theological vision that Gentile Christians should live as Jews; however, the former lacks the critical spirit of the latter. *Soft One Law* shrinks back from voicing the radical implications of One Law theology and is more often than not a reaction to the extremism of the “Torah terrorists” as they put it. *Soft One Law* adopts the perspective that you can catch more flies with honey than with vinegar. Therefore, instead of demonizing the Church for celebrating Easter, and describing Christians as law breakers if they don't observe the Jewish festivals, *Soft One Law* adherents emphasize the importance of gently instructing disciples of Jesus about the Torah in a way that is not imposing and that invites people to spend more time in this part of God's Word. *Soft One Law* emphasizes the role of grace, faith, and the empowerment of the Spirit in keeping the Torah, which leads to spiritual maturity. It rejects legalism. *Soft One Law* aims to be non-judgmental even as it seeks to see all Christians embrace Jewish life, including circumcision:

...non-Jewish male Believers who are uncircumcised can be physically circumcised as a simple matter of obedience and progression in holiness...Being circumcised as an adult male should be an issue of maturity, as Believers are called to “continue” (Grk. *menō*, μένω) in the faith (1 Corinthians 7:20).<sup>27</sup>

J. K. McKee's *The New Testament Validates Torah* and Tim Hegg's *Introduction to Torah Living* are good examples of books that promote the *Soft One Law View*.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Cf. Solberg, *Torahism*, 6, 145-46, 156.

<sup>26</sup> Daniel Lang, *Reviving the Reformation: A Jewish Believer Peers Backward to Move Biblical Truth Forward* (Maitland, FL: North Loop, 2016); Jeffrey W. Dandoy, *Our Bible Too: A New Soteriology of Messianic Judaism* (Eugene: Wipf & Stock, 2021). Cf. Michael Rood, *The Pagan-Christian Connection Exposed* (Newberry: Bridge-Logos, 2004).

<sup>27</sup> J. K. McKee, “Is Circumcision for Everyone?” in *Torah in the Balance, Volume II: The Set-Apart Life in Action—The Outward Expressions of Faith* (Richardson: Messianic Apologetics, 2015), 214, 226. Cf. Tim Hegg, “Didn't Paul dismiss the Torah commandment of circumcision?” in *Why We Keep Torah: Ten Persistent Questions* (Tacoma: Torah Resource, 2009), 89-96.

<sup>28</sup> J. K. McKee, *The New Testament Validates Torah: Does the New Testament Really Do Away With the Law?* (Richardson: Messianic Apologetics, 2012); Tim Hegg, *Introduction to Torah Living: Living the Torah as Disciples of Yeshua* (Tacoma: Torah Resource, 2011). Cf. William Mark Huey and J. K. McKee, *Hebraic Roots: An Introductory Study* (Richardson: Messianic Apologetics, 2009); J. K. McKee, *Approaching One Law Controversies: Sorting Through the Legalism* (Richardson: Messianic Apologetics, 2016); Tim Hegg, *Why We Keep Torah: Ten Persistent Questions* (Tacoma: Torah Resource, 2009).

*Partial One Law* is a scaled back form of *Soft One Law*. Blurring the lines of Hebrew Roots/One Law and Messianic Judaism, this highly nuanced perspective tends to create confusion. *Partial One Law* maintains that the “sign commandments”—which are defined to include circumcision on the eighth day, wearing *tzitzit* (tassels), putting on *tefillin* (phylacteries), and affixing a *mezuzah* to the doorpost of one’s house—are only incumbent upon Jews. However, this view also holds that the Sabbath and festivals described in Leviticus 23 are God’s universal *ideal* and, therefore, Gentile believers ought to adopt these calendar celebrations. As Daniel Lancaster, Director of Education at First Fruits of Zion (FFOZ), puts it:

Paul himself was the biggest Judaizer of all. There he was, trudging around the Roman world, persuading Gentiles to adopt the Jewish holy books, the Jewish God, Jewish teaching, the Jewish religion, the Jewish Messiah, *Jewish holy days*, Jewish moral codes, and so forth. He was the apostle to the Gentiles, and he was out teaching Judaism . . . *Despite differences and distinctions between Jewish and Gentile disciples, I argue that, ideally, they share the same biblical calendar, holy days, and sanctities.*<sup>29</sup>

FFOZ is a good example of an organization that promotes *Partial One Law*.<sup>30</sup> Over the years, this flagship One Law organization has zigzagged across the Hebrew Roots spectrum, shifting from Soft to Hard to Soft One Law positions. First it described its approach as Divine Permission, then Divine Mandate, then Divine Invitation, and now Divine Distinction.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> D. Thomas Lancaster, “Distinction Theology and Diversity in the Communities of Yeshua,” *Messiah Journal* 134 (Summer 2019): 32, 39. Italics mine. Lancaster writes in his book *The Holy Days: Returning the Biblical Festivals to the Disciples of Jesus*, “It seemed logical to me that if the biblical festivals and holy days were all about the Messiah, then as a disciple of Jesus, I wanted to be celebrating them. It seemed obvious to me that a Bible-believing person would want to keep the Bible’s holy days . . . HEAD START ON THE KINGDOM . . . In the kingdom everyone will observe the biblical holy days . . . they will find themselves beholden to the universal standards of the biblical calendar . . . If you are a Gentile, I will try to convince you that you could spiritually benefit from celebrating the biblical holy days . . . at the very least, every disciple of Yeshua can learn a little bit about God’s holy days and learn to keep them in remembrance, whether we are Jewish or Gentile . . . In reality, the LORD did not refer to the appointed times as Jewish festivals; he referred to them as his ‘appointed times.’ They are God’s holy days . . . In those days [the apostolic era] the idea of not keeping the appointed times simply had not occurred to anyone because Jewish and Gentile believers in Yeshua observed God’s appointed times together . . . the emerging Gentile church neglected the appointed times . . . The Sabbath and the festivals can be compared to the Temple . . . God did not designate an alternate worship center for non-Jews. He expected everyone to worship him at his appointed place in Jerusalem . . . I will argue for restoring the biblical calendar to the disciples of Yeshua—both Jews and Gentiles . . . we wanted to follow the same calendar that Jesus, the apostles, and all the early disciples of Jesus observed . . . In New Testament times, disciples of Yeshua followed the Jewish, or biblical, calendar” (D. Thomas Lancaster, *The Holy Days: Returning the Biblical Festivals to the Disciples of Jesus* [Marshfield: First Fruits of Zion, 2021], 3, 5, 7, 9-12, 15). Cf. D. Thomas Lancaster, *From Sabbath to Sabbath: Returning the Holy Sabbath to the Disciples of Jesus* (Marshfield: First Fruits of Zion, 2016), 1-11.

<sup>30</sup> Another example is Glory of Zion International Ministries. See Robert D. Heidler, *The Messianic Church Arising! Restoring the Church to Our Covenant Roots!* (Denton: Glory of Zion International, 2006), 97-105, 166-214; Chuck D. Pierce with Robert and Linda Heidler, *A Time to Advance: Understanding the Significance of the Hebrew Tribes and Months* (Denton: Glory of Zion International, 2011), 67, 72, 77-78. Cf. Paul Wilbur, *Roar from Zion: Discovering the Power of Jesus through Ancient Jewish Traditions* (Washington, D.C.: Salem, 2021), 66, 130, 157, 160. Foreword by Chuck Pierce.

<sup>31</sup> See Boaz Michael and D. Thomas Lancaster, “‘One Law’ and the Messianic Gentile,” *Messiah Journal* 101 (Summer 2009): 46-70; Boaz Michael, “Messianic Judaism: Reconsidering the One-Law, Two-House Trajectories,” *Messiah Journal* 111 (Fall 2012): 55-64; Toby Janicki, “The Gentile Believer’s Obligation to the Torah of Moses,” *Messiah Journal* 109 (Winter 2012): 45-45-62; Toby Janicki, *God-Fearers: Gentiles & the God of Israel* (Marshfield: FFOZ, 2012); Boaz Michael, *Tent of David: Healing the Vision of the Messianic Gentile* (Marshfield:

“Messianic Judaism for all nations” is the slogan they have used in recent years to articulate their worldview. In his article “The Unifying Judaizer,” Ryan Lambert writes:

We encourage Gentile disciples to celebrate Shabbat, holidays, and other Torah commandments . . . According to Paul’s vision, this Judaizing activity within the nations draws the nations closer to the Jewish people and toward kingdom unity as we keep Torah together—in the way that is appropriate for each one . . . We at FFOZ also use the term “Messianic Judaism for all nations,” which we believe captures the essence of Paul’s vision for the kingdom: Judaizing the nations (or the nations Judaizing) to bring proximity, unity, and shalom between Israel and the nations . . .<sup>32</sup>

Despite FFOZ’s motto “Messianic Judaism for all nations,” it is important to point out that the Messianic Jewish community and the *Hebrew Roots/One Law* community are not synonymous. The latter is a shadow movement of the former and *Soft/Partial One Law* proponents like FFOZ try to make inroads into Messianic synagogues and Messianic Jewish organizations. The International Alliance of Messianic Congregations and Synagogues (IAMCS), affiliated with the Messianic Jewish Alliance of America (MJAA), represents the historic mainstream of the movement and has a sixty-page position paper that rejects the *Hebrew Roots/One Law View*.<sup>33</sup> Though FFOZ today denies being One Law, its members use most of the One Law arguments described below to win others to their communal vision. Also, excitement about calling the Church to celebrate “God’s festivals” is the engine that drives FFOZ and the rest of the *Hebrew Roots/One Law* movement.

### *One Law Arguments and Responses*

In my interviews with prospective students who hold One Law views, I have heard six arguments repeated over and over that seem to represent the primary motivations for why people adopt a One Law perspective. In my ad hoc experience, people learn these arguments from Hebrew Roots websites and usually do not take time to critically think about their weaknesses. In this section, I will describe the arguments and then explain some of their shortcomings.

#### 1. We should live like Jesus lived

The argument here is that since the Gospels describe Jesus as Torah observant, and since Christians are by definition followers of Jesus, Christians should also be Torah observant. The main problem with this logic is that Jesus was Torah observant *because he was a Jew and God calls Jews to keep the Torah*. If the One Law argument were correct, we would have to say that

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FFOZ, 2013); D. Thomas Lancaster, “Radial Ecclesiology: A Kingdom View of the Body of Messiah,” *Messiah Journal* 124 (Summer 2016): 34-43; Lancaster, “Distinction Theology and Diversity in the Communities of Yeshua,” 31-39.

<sup>32</sup> Ryan Lambert, “The Unifying Judaizer: Paul’s Jewish View of a Diverse and Unified Kingdom,” *Messiah Journal* 136 (2020): 60-61. Cf. Boaz Michael, “The Vision: Messianic Judaism for All Nations,” *Messiah Journal* 124 (Summer 2016): 7-12.

<sup>33</sup> International Alliance of Messianic Congregations and Synagogues (IAMCS), “One Law, Two Sticks: A Critical Look at the Hebrew Roots Movement” (2014).

because Jesus was circumcised, all Gentile Christians should be circumcised. However, the Jerusalem Council decision (Acts 15), Paul's rule in all the Churches (1 Cor 7:17-24), and Paul's letter to the Galatians (Gal 5:2), clarify that God does not expect Gentile believers to be circumcised.<sup>34</sup> In other words, the One Law argument is not consistent with New Testament teaching.

But what about Jesus' teaching that "whoever breaks one of the least of these [Torah] commandments, and teaches others to do the same, will be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever does them and teaches them will be called great in the kingdom of heaven" (Matt 5:19 NRSV)? Doesn't this mean that all Christians should keep God's commandments, including kosher laws, etc.? Once again, context is key. Jesus spoke these words to his disciples, *all of whom were Jews*. Gentiles are not in view in this passage.<sup>35</sup> Gentile Christians should walk like Jesus walked when it comes to Torah ethics, carrying the cross, and being led by the Spirit. However, there is no indication in Scripture that Gentile followers of Jesus are supposed to keep distinctly Jewish customs because Jesus did.

2. We should be celebrating God's feasts today  
since the nations will be observing them in the future

The argument here is that Zechariah 14:16-19 indicates that everyone in the age to come will observe Israel's festivals and thus the biblical ideal is for all Gentile believers to observe them today. There are several problems with this argument: (1) It overstates what the Scriptures actually say. Zechariah 14:16-19 may refer to representatives of the nations going up to Jerusalem to celebrate *Sukkot* (the Feast of Tabernacles) and not everyone in the world, which does not seem possible. Other annual festivals are not mentioned; (2) Even if God calls the nations to observe *Sukkot* and other aspects of Israel's calendar in the future, why would that mean Gentile believers should celebrate Jewish festivals today? Are we supposed to do everything now that will be done in the eschaton? Where do we see this principle in the Bible? Consider Jesus' teaching, "For in the Resurrection, neither men nor women will marry; rather, they will be like angels in heaven" (Matt 22:30 CJB). Should God's people, therefore, not marry in the present age? Behind this One Law argument is an over-realized eschatology; and (3) The consensus of New Testament scholarship is that Paul did not instruct Gentile believers to keep Israel's festivals. See Paul's pastoral guidance in Romans 14:5-6.<sup>36</sup> He gives Gentile believers (his primary audience in this letter) a wide-latitude of freedom with respect to the Jewish

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<sup>34</sup> The implication of Paul's warning to Gentile believers in Gal 5:3 ("Once again I testify to every man who lets himself be circumcised that he is obliged to obey the entire law") is that they do not have to keep the whole Torah. That is why Paul circumcised Timothy, who was Jewish through his mother, but not Titus (Acts 16:3; Gal 2:3). See Rudolph, *A Jew to the Jews*, 23-27.

<sup>35</sup> The Gospel of Mark, which was written primarily to Gentile believers, includes the parenthetical statement, "(Thus he [Jesus] declared all foods clean)" (NRSV). See David Rudolph, "Jesus and the Food Laws: A Reassessment of Mark 7:19b," *Evangelical Quarterly* 74:4 (2002): 291-311.

<sup>36</sup> David Rudolph, "Paul and the Food Laws: A Reassessment of Romans 14:14, 20," in *Paul the Jew: A Conversation between Pauline and Second Temple Scholars*, ed. Carlos A. Segovia and Gabriele Boccaccini (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2016), 151-81.

calendar. In 1 Corinthians 5:8, Paul writes, “Therefore, let us celebrate the festival,” but the context suggests that he is talking about living out the spiritual meaning of Passover.<sup>37</sup>

### 3. Don't you want to be blessed?

The argument here is that God gave the Torah to his people so that they would be blessed (Deut 28:1-14). Therefore, anyone who wants to be blessed should keep the Torah. The problem with this logic is that God gave the Torah *to the Jewish people* and his promises of blessing and cursing in Deuteronomy 28-30 *relate specifically to Israel's covenant relationship with God*. While some Gentile believers will experience God's blessing when they live out aspects of Jewish life, this is a matter of personal calling and they should not think that everyone else in the world is called to have the same experience. Paul says in 1 Timothy 1:8, “We know that the Torah is good, provided one uses it in the way the Torah itself intends” (CJB). The real question is whether God intends for all Gentile believers to be circumcised, to keep kosher, to observe the Sabbath on the seventh day, to celebrate all of Israel's festivals, etc. The Torah simply does not say this. We only experience God's blessings when we are in alignment with his will. When we step outside of his order and the leading of the Spirit, we step outside of the realm of God's blessing. Consider as well that every culture in the world has elements within it that are gifts from God. Faced with these millions of blessings from God, the key question is not, “Do you want to be blessed?” but “Where is the Lord leading you to experience the blessings that God has uniquely prepared for you?”

### 4. We are one family

The argument here is that families don't have different traditions for natural born children and adopted children respectively. Families share the same lifestyle. Therefore, Gentile believers should live out the same lifestyle as Jewish people since they have been adopted into the family of Abraham. Ironically, this view is counter to Jewish thought. In the Hebrew Scriptures, the family of Israel is not monolithic in practice. The firstborn has distinct family responsibilities. Priests are called to a different Torah lifestyle than non-priests. Levites are called to a different lifestyle than non-Levites. Nazirites set themselves apart by keeping supererogatory commandments. In the New Testament, Paul differentiates between the natural and grafted-in branches in the family of God, with the former having a different calling than the latter (Rom 1:16; 2:8-9; 3:1-2; 9:1-5; 11:24-29; cf. 1 Cor 7:17-24). In Ephesians 2, Paul describes the family of God as One New Man made up of Jews and Gentiles who remain Jews and Gentiles. All of this teaches us that, in the Bible, equality does not mean sameness. We worship a God who loves diversity and calls his children to different ways of life.

### 5. How can Gentiles witness to Jewish people if they don't keep the Torah?

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<sup>37</sup> David Rudolph, “Passover in Corinth (1 Cor 5:7-8),” *Verge* 2:9 (2010): 4. Cf. David Rudolph, “The Celebration of Passover by Gentile Christians in the Patristic Period,” *Verge* 2:3 (2010): 4

The argument here is that Jewish people will be more open to the gospel if all Gentile Christians live like Jews. But is this accurate? Actually, most mainstream Jews I know regard Christians keeping the Torah as odd and a form of cultural appropriation.<sup>38</sup> Around Passover time, it is common for Jewish news organizations to publish opinion pieces that highlight the problem of Gentile Christians hosting Passover seders.<sup>39</sup> In one recent article in the *Forward* entitled “Please do not host a ‘Christian seder,’” Joachim Steinberg writes:

It’s time to discuss the “Christian seder.” If you are having one this year, or are thinking about doing one next year, here are some helpful tips from Jewish practice: Don’t. Please, we are begging you, don’t do it. I’m not suggesting you not attend a seder if your Jewish friend invites you; take that as a big compliment and be a good guest. Ask questions, learn what you can, and follow their lead. Passover is often observed with very close friends and family (or, as has happened to me on a few occasions, with distant acquaintances and strangers who have taken you in because you are far from home), and being invited is genuinely meant as an honor. But please don’t host your own, especially if you are trying to emulate Jesus...

With the Hebrew Roots practices in general and Christian seders in particular, a closer look past the veneer of appreciation for Judaism reveals something much more troubling: a superficial philo-Semitism that is inherently anti-Semitic, relying on pernicious ideas about Jews, whether its adherents admit it (or even realize it) or not. Those who engage in these practices don’t really care what Jews have to say; at the very least, are unaware that they should care what Jews have to say. There is no interest in our complaints that it can be very painful to watch Christians appropriate our holidays, because of the long history of pogroms tied to Jewish observance and the even longer history of Christian mockery of our customs... Jews themselves are totally erased from the purportedly “Jewish” holiday observance. Instead of attempts at interfaith dialogue, these groups instead simply take what they want from Jewish customs...

Fetishizing groups is dehumanizing, even if one’s view of the group is positive. Play-acting in Jewish ritual space, in aid of a different religion, is a totemic fetishization of Jews. Even with the best of intentions, it is dehumanizing; basic decency, to say nothing of manners, means they should knock it off.<sup>40</sup>

Hebrew Roots/One Law groups are typically tone deaf to the concerns of the Jewish community as expressed in articles like this. Gentile Torah observance generally does not lead to greater openness to the gospel among Jews, just greater offense. Jews typically regard a Gentile missionary who lives like a Jew as a wolf in sheep’s clothing.<sup>41</sup> The fact is that Jews respect and take time to listen to Gentile Christians who honor church traditions, respect Jewish sensitivities about cultural appropriation, and have a sincere love for the Jewish people. If a Gentile believer has a desire to participate in Jewish life, and senses the leading of the Holy Spirit to do so, the

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<sup>38</sup> Hillary Kaell, “Pastors wrapped in Torah: Why many Christians are appropriating Jewish ritual,” *Forward*, 18 October 2020.

<sup>39</sup> Shira Feder, “Why Are Christians Starting to Have Passover Seders,” *Forward*, 26 March 2018; Bethany Mandel, “I reached out to the woman behind that viral Christian Seder. She deserves compassion,” *Forward* 1 April 2021.

<sup>40</sup> Joachim Steinberg, “Please do not host a “Christian seder,”” *Forward*, 8 April 2020. Note that Steinberg is fine with Gentile Christians participating in a Passover seder as long as it is hosted by Jews.

<sup>41</sup> Jake W. Simons and Jonathan Sacerdoti, “Unmasked, the Christian missionary who went undercover in Jerusalem as an Orthodox rabbi,” *The Jewish Chronicle*, 6 May 2021.

key to avoiding cultural appropriation (as I explain below) is to come alongside their Jewish brothers and sisters in a Messianic synagogue or Jewish ministry context.

6. Gentile believers are supposed to attend synagogue and learn how to keep all of the Torah

The argument here is that James' words in Acts 15:21—"For Moses has been preached in every city from the earliest times and is read in the synagogues on every Sabbath" (NIV)—means that all Gentiles should keep the Sabbath and go to synagogue since this will eventually lead to a fully Torah observant life. There are numerous problems with this interpretation:

- 1) The text of Acts 15:21 does not explicitly say that Gentile believers are supposed to go to synagogue and, over time, learn to keep the Torah as Jews do. This is conjecture.
- 2) The Hebrew Roots/One Law view assumes that there is only one way to interpret James' comment in Acts 15:21 and places the full weight of the argument on this assumption. However, is this assumption valid? In point of fact, there are a number of ways to interpret James' comment that are more in line with the Acts 15 context than the *Hebrew Roots/One Law* interpretation:
  - a) One of the more compelling ways of interpreting Acts 15:21 is that James here addresses a concern raised by the Council that accepting "Gentile brothers and sisters" (v. 23 NET) into the community, with the freedom to not keep Jewish boundary markers of identity, could result in Jews wanting this same freedom and thus *assimilating*. James may be reassuring the council members in verse 21, "Don't be concerned that our welcoming Gentile brothers and sisters into the community will result in our fellow Jews becoming lax toward the Torah, 'For Moses has been preached in every city from the earliest times and is read in the synagogues on every Sabbath.'"<sup>42</sup> In other words, "As Jews, we know our covenant responsibilities and we are reminded of them every week." This interpretation flows well with the narrative context while the One Law interpretation of verse 21 goes against the grain of verses 1-20 where Luke portrays the Jerusalem Council as rejecting the One Law perspective of the Pharisee believers. There are three contextual reasons to support this proposed reading of verse 21: (i) The Pharisee believers probably presented several arguments for why they thought the Gentiles should be circumcised and keep the law of Moses, and one of them was likely that, if the community did not require this, the close interaction with Gentiles, including regular table fellowship with

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<sup>42</sup> "The point is... that ethnic Israel would preserve this custom [of preaching Moses] no matter what and hence the practice was not endangered by the influx of Gentiles who would not follow all the precepts for Israel. This argument fits Luke's apologetic: the Christian movement even in its Gentile form was no threat to Judaism or to Jewish ways (preserved by Jewish Christians) despite accusations to the contrary (Acts 21:21; 24:5-6)" (Craig S. Keener, *Acts: An Exegetical Commentary: Volume 3* [Grand Rapids: Baker, 2014], 2279). Cf. Carl R. Holladay, *Acts: A Commentary* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2016), 303-304.

them, would inevitably result in assimilation of the Jewish believers; (ii) James was strictly Torah observant<sup>43</sup> and the Jerusalem community he led was made up of thousands of Jews who were zealous for the law. They were concerned about Jewish assimilation as evidenced by what James and the elders told Paul in Acts 21:20-21, “You see, brother, how many thousands there are among the Jews of those who have believed. They are all zealous for the law, and they have been told about you that you teach all the Jews who are among the Gentiles to forsake Moses, telling them not to circumcise their children or walk according to our customs.” Given this communal concern, it makes sense that James would have felt it necessary in Acts 15 to address the issue of assimilation;<sup>44</sup> and (iii) If Acts 15:21 is focused on Jews remaining Jews, and not Gentiles becoming Torah observant over time, this would explain why the content of Acts 15:21 is not included in the apostolic letter to the Gentiles in Acts 15:23-29. It was not included because it was a concern about Jewish covenant responsibilities and they did not want to make the Gentiles feel that they were a threat to Jewish continuity.<sup>45</sup>

- b) Another way of interpreting Acts 15:21 is that, after listing the four requirements for the Gentiles, which likely served as a clear and unambiguous statement of the Gentile believer’s rejection of idolatry, James indicates that it is not necessary to go into detail about other weightier matters of God’s law since a knowledge of universal Torah ethics has already been disseminated in the Greco-Roman world through Diaspora synagogues.<sup>46</sup>
- c) A third way of understanding Acts 15:21 is that James could be pointing out that proselytizing the Gentiles all these years through the synagogue has not worked, “Ya’akov [James] says that Moses has been preached ‘throughout many generations,’ but only now that Messiah has appeared is there a great ingathering of Gentiles. His emphasis is not that Moses is currently being read in the synagogues and available to the Gentile believers, but that Moses has been read in

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<sup>43</sup> Eusebius, *Hist. eccl.* 2.23.3-4.

<sup>44</sup> See David Rudolph, “Luke’s Portrait of Paul in Acts 21:17-26,” in *The Early Reception of Paul the Second Temple Jew: Text, Narrative and Reception History*, ed. Isaac W. Oliver and Gabriele Boccaccini with Joshua Scott (London: T & T Clark, 2018), 192-205.

<sup>45</sup> This *l’dor vador* (Jewish continuity) reading of Acts 15:21 is consistent with the framing of Luke’s narrative in the mirror text: Acts 21:17-26. Here the primary focus is on Jews remaining Jews and passing on the covenant to the next generation. The secondary focus is on what the Gentiles are required to do. James again has the final word and reassures Paul that his testimony in the temple—that he lives in observance of the law—will not cause the Gentiles to think that they should be Torah observant too. James reminds Paul of the Jerusalem council decision which Paul himself delivered —“as for the Gentiles who have believed, we have sent a letter with our judgment that they should abstain from what has been sacrificed to idols, and from blood, and from what has been strangled, and from sexual immorality” (Acts 21:25 ESV). The narrative correspondence between Acts 15 and Acts 21:17-26 is also highlighted by similar vocabulary, such as the reference to Moses and circumcision in both texts (Acts 15:21; 21:21) and Luke’s use of *phulasso* in Acts 16:4 and 21:24.

<sup>46</sup> “. . . the knowledge of morality in the Greco-Roman world was partly influenced by the Mosaic revelation. This was a common understanding among first century Jews and is put forth by Josephus and others. This was a way of explaining the moral norms in the Greco-Roman world that were common to Jews and gentiles . . . The basic standards of Acts 15 were additions to an assumed basic morality that was common in the Roman world” (Daniel Juster, “Jewish and Gentile Distinction in Messianic Congregations,” Tikkun International, 1 April 2006, 5).

the synagogues for generations, without bringing the glorious changes, foretold by the prophets, that are now evident with the appearing of Messiah. Why would Ya'akov emphasize the generations-long study of Moses if his point were to encourage present-day Gentiles to come under his influence? Instead, he is contrasting this long and venerable tradition with the new conditions that prevail with Messiah's appearing"<sup>47</sup>

- 3) It is notable that in Acts 21:17-22, Luke portrays James and the Jerusalem elders as excited to hear Paul's report that the Gentiles are turning to the Lord, but they don't seem interested at all in what Paul was teaching the Gentile believers about the law. By contrast, James and the elders are very concerned about the rumor that Paul is teaching Jews to be lax about Torah observance, and they ask Paul to publicly testify that the rumor is false and that he keeps the Torah.<sup>48</sup> This difference in response shows a difference in expectation. James and the elders, as Acts 15 and 21 make clear, never expected the Gentiles to become fully Torah observant. This is confirmed in Acts 21:25 where James says to Paul, "But as for the Gentiles who have become believers, we have sent a letter with our judgment that they should abstain from what has been sacrificed to idols and from blood and from what is strangled and from fornication."<sup>49</sup>
- 4) The apostolic decree does not include James' comment in Acts 15:21, "For Moses has been preached in every city from the earliest times and is read in the synagogues on every Sabbath." The implication is that it was not essential to what the Gentile believers needed to know.
- 5) If the apostles at the Jerusalem Council intended to give the Gentile believers a transition period to learn how to keep the Torah fully, the apostolic letter would have been written very differently. It would have said something like, "While you do not have to be circumcised and keep the whole Torah, we do believe and expect that as you study and learn the Torah you will progressively keep more and more of it until you observe the Torah like those of us who grew up keeping it. However, there is no pressure on you to do so quickly." This is not what the apostolic letter says.
- 6) The apostles write in Acts 15:28, "For it has seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us to impose on you *no further burden than these essentials...*" (NRSV). It then lists four requirements. Note the wording "no further burden."

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<sup>47</sup> Russell Resnik, "Is the Torah Only for Jews? The Relationship of Jew and Non-Jew in God's Covenant: A Response by Russ Resnik," 6.

<sup>48</sup> In all likelihood, the rumor was able to gain traction because Paul was teaching in accord with the Jerusalem Council decision that Gentile believers did not have to circumcise their children or keep Jewish specific customs. Paul's opponents may have taken what he taught Gentiles and twisted it to give the impression that this is what he taught Jews as well.

<sup>49</sup> In quoting the Jerusalem Council's letter to the Gentile believers, James may be saying to Paul, "Testify in the Temple so that everyone will know that you are faithful to the Torah and that the rumor about you leading Jews away from the Torah is not true. Don't be concerned that the Gentiles will misunderstand your testimony and think that they should be fully Torah observant too. We've already made it clear in our letter to them that this is not the case."

*Fruit of the Hebrew Roots/One Law View*

Jesus said, “If you make a tree good, its fruit will be good; and if you make a tree bad, its fruit will be bad; for a tree is known by its fruit” (Matt 12:33 CJB). The below chart details some of the fruit of the *Hebrew Roots/One Law View* (Hard, Soft and Partial).<sup>50</sup>

<b>Fruit</b>	<b>Reason</b>
Reminding the Church of its Jewish roots	A positive aspect of the <i>Hebrew Roots/One Law View</i> is that it reminds Gentile Christians that they have a Jewish Savior, a Jewish Bible, and that the Church’s origins go back to Jewish apostles who lived in the land of Israel.
Erasure of Gentile identity	The <i>Hebrew Roots/One Law View</i> calls Gentiles to live like Jews, which ipso facto results in the suppression of Gentile identity. This is counter to Paul’s vision of the One New Man in Ephesians 2, which affirms Jewish and Gentile identity.
Not seeing the forest for the trees in Scripture	All of the New Testament is read through the lens of a decontextualized interpretation of Matthew 5:17-20 and Acts 15:21. Paul’s writings are either leveled down to conform to <i>Hebrew Roots/One Law</i> teaching or the Pauline letters are removed from the canon altogether.
History is ignored or revised	The <i>Hebrew Roots/One Law View</i> maintains that Paul’s churches observed the Jewish festivals, circumcised Gentiles, etc. However, Paul’s writings, Acts, and the historical witness of these communities in the late first century and early second century CE does not support this.
Self-appointed Bible scholars	The personal discovery of biblical and historical information that most Christians do not know leads to some adherents thinking that they are experts in the field of biblical

<sup>50</sup> Even leading proponents of the *Hebrew Roots/One Law View* acknowledge that the movement is characterized by many of these fruits. E.g., John McKee writes, “What people too frequently encounter from the One Law/One Torah sub-movement, is a great deal of legalism, judgmentalism, pride and superiority, a condemnatory spirit, and stifling environments widely devoid of the presence of God’s grace . . . the One Law/One Torah sub-movement is a place where rigidity and fundamentalism tend to abound, and even be encouraged” (J. K. McKee, *Approaching One Law Controversies: Sorting Through the Legalism* [Richardson: Messianic Apologetics, 2016], x-xi).

	<p>studies, rabbinics, and Ancient Near Eastern languages. This in turn leads to strange teachings on <i>Hebrew Roots/One Law</i> websites. Paul’s words are apropos concerning self-appointed Bible scholars like this, “They want to be teachers of the law, but they do not know what they are talking about or what they so confidently affirm” (1 Tim 1:7).</p>
<p>Quest for secret knowledge</p>	<p>Many <i>Hebrew Roots/One Law</i> adherents believe that the Church has lied to them and they seek to discover the truth that has been hidden from them. This leads to an unhealthy interest in mystical readings of Scripture, sometimes based on numerology or misunderstandings of the Hebrew text.</p>
<p>Another gospel</p>	<p><i>Hebrew Roots/One Law</i> adherents are highly motivated to preach the good news of “God’s festivals” to the Church. This message is the engine that drives the <i>Hebrew Roots/One Law</i> movement. Notably, Paul warns us in Galatians about how Judaizing tendencies like this can negatively impact Gentile Christians and he describes it as another gospel (Gal 1:6-9; 4:10).</p>
<p>Replacement theology</p>	<p>If all Gentile believers lived like Jews, the Jewish people would no longer be distinct. If the Jewish people were no longer distinct, they would cease to exist as a people set apart from the nations. In this sense, the <i>Hebrew Roots/One Law View</i> is an indirect form of replacement theology. The replacement perspective is also manifest when <i>Hebrew Roots/One Law</i> adherents identify as Israel<sup>51</sup> and when they say things like, “Don’t call them <i>Jewish</i> festivals; they are <i>God’s</i> festivals.”<sup>52</sup></p>

<sup>51</sup> “The idea behind ‘One Law’ theology, whether stated or implied, is that he who keeps the law given to Israel, therefore IS Israel. Accordingly, ‘One Law’ theology is simply a form of replacement theology . . . In Hebrew Roots, whether one is considered physically descended from Israel or not, there is a presumed duty upon every ‘true believer’ in the Messiah, to observe Torah. And if one keeps Torah, then this verifies a person’s ‘chosen-ness,’ and that means, he or she is an Israelite. In this manner, the Jews are not Israel, but rather, the Jewish people are replaced by a remnant of end-time Torah-keeping Gentiles” (IAMCS, “One Law, Two Sticks: A Critical Look at the Hebrew Roots Movement,” 6-7, 32-33).

<sup>52</sup> What often goes unstated is that God refers to these appointed times as “your festivals” (Num 28:26; Deut 16:14; Nah 1:15).

Imaginary Jewish identity	It is not uncommon to hear <i>Hebrew Roots/One Law</i> adherents express that they wish they were Jews. As time goes by and they get used to living like Jews, they sometimes make their dream come true by claiming that they have found a long lost relative who was a Jew (sometimes from centuries ago). Some turn to DNA tests in the hopes that a percentage of their ancestry is Ashkenazi. <sup>53</sup> Others make bizarre claims that all Gentile believers are really descendants of the lost tribes of Israel. <sup>54</sup> The bottom line is that it is unhealthy for Gentile believers to deny their own identity and to claim a fictive one.
Anti-Jewish tropes	The focus on keeping the commandments of God, <i>and not the traditions of men</i> , leads to a negative view of “Jewish tradition” and “the rabbis” who introduced many of these traditions. Even the word “Jewish” takes on a negative valence, which is why adherents refer to “Hebrew Roots” instead of “Jewish Roots.” Sometimes <i>Hebrew Roots/One Law</i> proponents speak negatively about real Jews who are viewed as lax in Torah observance. According to the IAMCS/MJAA report, <i>Hebrew Roots/One Law</i> adherents “see actual Jews as a threat to their core beliefs. What stands between them and their ‘rightful’ claim to be Israelites is the Jews.” <sup>55</sup>
Anti-church	<i>Hebrew Roots/One Law</i> advocates describe the Church as “pagan” and “apostate.” Christians who do not keep Hebrew Roots practices are “workers of lawlessness.”

<sup>53</sup> DNA tests cannot prove that someone is a Jew. See Susan M. Kahn, “Are Genes Jewish? Conceptual Ambiguities in the New Genetic Age,” in *Boundaries of Jewish Identity*, ed. Susan A. Glenn and Naomi B. Sokoloff (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2015), 5, 8; Sarah Imhoff, “Traces of Race: Defining Jewishness in America,” in *Who Is a Jew? Reflections on History, Religion, and Culture*, Leonard J. Greenspoon (West Lafayette: Purdue University Press, 2014), 1; 2014. Wesley K. Sutton, “‘Jewish Genes’: Ancient Priests and Modern Jewish Identity,” in *Who Is a Jew?* 113.

<sup>54</sup> Rivkah L. Adler, ed., *Ten from the Nations: Torah Awakening Among Non-Jews* (Jerusalem: Geula Watch, 2017), 1-245; Boaz Michael, *Twelve Gates: Where Do the Nations Enter?* (Marshfield: FFOZ, 2012), 16-42; Kay Silberling, Daniel Juster and David Sedaca, “The Ephraimite Error: A Position Paper Submitted to the International Messianic Jewish Alliance,” 6 July 2007, 1-37; Patricia A. Power, “Blurring the Boundaries: American Messianic Jews and Gentiles,” *Novo Religio* 15:1 (August 2011): 83-84.

<sup>55</sup> IAMCS, “One Law, Two Sticks: A Critical Look at the Hebrew Roots Movement,” 33.

Fault-finding	A sense of mission to call the Church to its Hebrew roots, and to sanitize the body of Messiah from paganism, often leads to disparaging comments about Christianity. Even <i>Soft and Partial One Law</i> adherents, while claiming they do not judge others, nevertheless implicitly do so when they encourage other Gentile Christians to “grow to spiritual maturity” through observing the festivals, keeping kosher, etc.
Divisiveness	The combination of being highly motivated to share <i>Hebrew Roots/One Law</i> teaching, and being critical of those who are not Torah observant, typically leads to division and polarization within believing communities. It is not uncommon for <i>Hebrew Roots/One Law</i> adherents to try to spread their views within churches and Messianic synagogues and eventually leave with a following.

### *Two Discussion Questions*

Here are two discussion questions that I have found helpful for prompting conversation and reflection about *Hebrew Roots/One Law* thinking:

1. Is it God’s *ideal* for all Gentile believers to celebrate the Jewish festivals in this age? (I am not talking about for salvation or holiness or as law but just his good and perfect will, his desire).
2. Is there something wrong with the local Baptist church if they are not observing Israel’s festivals?

In my experience, these two questions help to get at the crux of the matter. They focus on the festivals because, as I explain above, having a sense of mission to see Gentile Christians celebrate “God’s festivals” is the engine that drives the *Hebrew Roots/One Law* movement.

In the first question, the word “ideal” cuts to the chase over whether someone thinks that it is *God’s desire* for Gentile believers to keep the festivals. *Soft/Partial One Law* people don’t like to answer this question directly since it reveals an extreme view. They may respond, “I don’t think celebrating the festivals is necessary for salvation. It’s not something they have to do if they don’t want to but it’s better if they keep the Torah.”<sup>56</sup> If you follow up with the question,

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<sup>56</sup> “The more rigid of these folks believe that this is absolutely incumbent upon Gentiles. Others say that it is voluntary, but better if gentiles keep the Torah. Of course, *if something is better, one ought to do it*. One cannot escape an ‘ought’ if the behavior is better” (Juster, “Jewish and Gentile Distinction in Messianic Congregations,” 4).

“What, then, is God’s *ideal*?” they will often concede that they think it is God’s will for everyone in the world today to celebrate the festivals.

The second question helps *Hebrew Roots/One Law* people to reflect on whether this is a disobedience issue. It also calls them to consider the communal implications of what they are saying. If they say *yes* to the second question, they are saying that almost all churches in all cultures are deficient, and that they should change their calendars and hold festivals on the days described in Leviticus 23. A helpful follow up question is, “Are you saying that all churches should look like Hebrew Roots congregations or Messianic synagogues?”

Most *Hebrew Roots/One Law* advocates that I meet have never been challenged to think through questions like this. Consequently, I have found that it is good to give them time to process it. Sometimes this leads to genuine reassessment. Giving people space to backtrack on what they have said, and to restate their views in light of new considerations, is an important part of helping them to reevaluate *Hebrew Roots/One Law* theology.

### *Affirmation of Personal Calling*

In my conversations with people who are drawn to the *Hebrew Roots/One Law* movement, I often point out that there is a difference between personal calling and universal ideal. Some Gentile believers are led by the Holy Spirit to come alongside Jewish people and participate in the rhythm of Jewish life.<sup>57</sup> If someone has a personal calling along these lines, they should not assume that everyone else in the world has this calling as well. In fact, the vast majority of Gentile believers and churches do not have this calling, as evidenced by their not having any sense of divine leading to observe the festivals, etc. By distinguishing between personal calling and universal ideal, we are able to affirm the Gentile believer who says, “I sense that the Holy Spirit is leading me to celebrate the festivals” while at the same time being clear that the *Hebrew Roots/One Law View* departs from New Testament teaching when it asserts that Jewish life is God’s universal ideal for the nations.

### *Gentile Participation in Messianic Synagogues and Jewish Ministries*

If a Gentile believer senses a calling from God to celebrate Israel’s festivals, how can they avoid cultural appropriation? One way is for Gentile believers to attend Messianic synagogues where they can worship with Jews and contribute to the vitality and growth of the community. In the Messianic synagogue, Gentile believers come alongside Messianic Jews who extend the right hand of fellowship. The connection to Jewish people, in a synagogue context led by a Jewish rabbi, helps to mitigate the concern of cultural appropriation since it is the Jews of the community who are inviting the Gentile believers (who sense a personal calling to live out aspects of Jewish life)<sup>58</sup> to join them in worshipping together.

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<sup>57</sup> This includes Gentile Christians who are married to Jews. See David J. Rudolph, *Growing Your Olive Tree Marriage: A Guide for Couples from Two Traditions* (Clarksville: Lederer, 2003), 53-127.

<sup>58</sup> Jeffrey A. Adler, “Gentiles Within the Messianic Jewish Community,” in *The Borough Park Papers, Symposium III: How Jewish Should the Messianic Jewish Community Be?* (Clarksville: Messianic Jewish Publishers, 2012). 118-20. The UMJC’s “Defining Messianic Judaism” statement emphasizes the importance of calling, “Messianic Jewish groups may also include those from non-Jewish backgrounds who have a confirmed call to participate fully

There are also a growing number of churches, like Gateway Church, that hold Shabbat (Sabbath) and festival services so that their Jewish members can continue to live as Jews and not assimilate. In these Jewish ministry contexts, Gentile members who have a personal calling to celebrate the festivals, etc., are welcome to participate. Once again, *the key to everything being healthy and avoiding weirdness is making sure that the Jewish ministry has a Jewish leader and that Gentile believers participating in Jewish life are doing so alongside their Jewish brothers and sisters.* When this happens, and Jewish and Gentile identity is affirmed, and personal calling is affirmed, we can see Paul's vision of the One New Man realized and there is much blessing.<sup>59</sup>

I would say that Gentile Christian celebration of Jewish life in the home is also best done in conjunction with being a part of a Messianic synagogue or a church's Jewish ministry.<sup>60</sup> What a Gentile believer does in the home is then an extension of their worship with Jews on a communal level. This will sensitize the Gentile believer to Jewish community norms and halakhic (Jewish law) related issues so that they are not mishandling ritual objects or saying liturgies that only Jews should say because they relate to the Jewish journey. Part of the learning curve of a Gentile believer in a Messianic Jewish or Jewish ministry context is learning how to be supportive of Jewish boundary markers of identity.<sup>61</sup>

### *Messianic Judaism's Rejection of Hebrew Roots/One Law Teaching*

The International Alliance of Messianic Congregations and Synagogues (IAMCS), affiliated with the Messianic Jewish Alliance of America (MJAA), rejects *Hebrew Roots/One Law* theology in their position paper entitled "[One Law, Two Sticks: A Critical Look at the Hebrew Roots Movement](#)." This sixty-page document traces the historical development of the Hebrew Roots movement and surveys a number of its most prominent ministries. The IAMCS concludes that *Hebrew Roots/One Law* teaching is not consistent with the Scriptures:

We do not believe the Gentile church is called necessarily to observe Shabbat, the Levitical feasts, the laws of kashrut, and other Mosaic laws that are specific to Israel. We don't forbid anyone from doing those things, but we do not fault the Church for not keeping them. Nor do we believe in urging Gentile believers worldwide to observe commandments other than the ones the Apostles commanded in Acts 15. Indeed the Apostles in Acts 15 dealt with the issue of Gentile Torah observance squarely on point. As Peter said to the "One Law" proponents of his day in Acts 15:10: "*Why do you test God by putting a yoke upon the neck of the (Gentile) disciples, which neither our fathers nor we were able to bear?*" When it comes to the issue of Gentile Torah observance, our approach is simply to follow the advice of the Apostles. They determined not to put a yoke of law upon the Gentiles. Neither would we. And like the Apostles, we would oppose those who do...The power of the One New Man is not in our relationship to the

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in the life and destiny of the Jewish people" (Union of Messianic Jewish Congregations, "Defining Messianic Judaism: Basic Statement," 20 July 2005).

<sup>59</sup> See Joseph Culbertson, "Rediscovering My Gentile Roots," *Kesher: A Journal of Messianic Judaism* 36 (2020): 89-95.

<sup>60</sup> When this is not possible in one's locale, I recommend that the Gentile believer attend a healthy Messianic Jewish community or Jewish ministry online and develop a relationship with the leadership

<sup>61</sup> See Jon C. Olson, "Gentile Yeshua-Believers Praying in the Synagogue: Why and How," *Kesher: A Journal of Messianic Judaism* 23 (2009): 47-69.

law, and not in our observance of ordinances or statutes; but, rather, in the fellowship that we enjoy as both Jew and Gentile, cleansed by the blood of Messiah, and immersed by One Spirit into the same body.<sup>62</sup>

The Union of Messianic Jewish Congregations (UMJC) also clarifies in its Statement of Faith that the Torah applies to Jews and Gentiles differently.<sup>63</sup>

While IAMCS and UMJC rabbis uphold a *Jerusalem Council View*, they face the reality that Gentile believers drawn to Messianic synagogues often come with *Hebrew Roots/One Law* motivations and it is not possible to check this at the door.<sup>64</sup> As a result, Messianic synagogues typically have a large number of Gentile visitors, members, and even sometimes leaders who hold *Hebrew Roots/One Law* perspectives unless the rabbi is vigilant and proactively addresses the matter of Jewish and Gentile identity in sermons, adult education classes, and foundational documents.<sup>65</sup> As an example of how this can be done tactfully, Kol Dodi Messianic Congregation in Nashville makes available its Statement of Faith on its synagogue website. The Statement includes the following section:

#### JEWISH AND GENTILE FOLLOWERS OF YESHUA

We believe that Jewish followers of Yeshua are called to maintain our Jewish biblical heritage and remain a part of our people Israel. This is part of our identity and a witness to the faithfulness of God. We believe that Gentile followers of Yeshua are called to unity

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<sup>62</sup> International Alliance of Messianic Congregations and Synagogues (IAMCS), “One Law, Two Sticks: A Critical Look at the Hebrew Roots Movement” (2014), 58-60. See <https://iamcs.org/about-us/position-papers-resources>.

<sup>63</sup> See <https://www.umjc.org/statement-of-faith>. Cf. Daniel Juster and Russ Resnik, “One Law Movements: A Challenge to the Messianic Jewish Community,” 28 January 2005. This provides an extended biblical-theological engagement with One Law thought.

<sup>64</sup> Adler, “Gentiles Within the Messianic Jewish Community,” 118-20; Hillary Kaell, “Born-again seeking: explaining the gentile majority in messianic Judaism,” *Religion* 45:1 (2015): 17-19; Sarah Imhoff and Hillary Kaell, “Lineage Matters: DNA, Race, and Gene Talk in Judaism and Messianic Judaism,” *Religion and American Culture* 27:1 (2017): 95-127; Evert W. Van de Poll, “Gentile Christian Interest in Biblical and Jewish Holidays,” in *Messianic Jews and Their Holiday Practice: History, Analysis and Gentile Christian Interest* (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2015), 292-93; Alan L. C. Campbell, “Messianic Gentiles and the Effect of Communicative Influences,” in *The Non-Conversions of Jews and Gentiles to Messianic Judaism: A Sense-Making Analysis of Interpersonal and Mass Communicative Influence on Spiritual Transformations* (Ph.D. diss., Regent University, 2010), 188-255, 273-75; Kevin Pittle, “Theological Transvestites, Duplicitous Imposters, or Just a Bunch of Wannabees? Messianic Judaism’s Ambivalent Relationships with Mainstream Jewry and Evangelicalism” (paper presented at the Society for the Anthropology of Religion, Asilomar, California, 2009), 1-20.

<sup>65</sup> E.g., Tikkun International, “The Status of Gentiles in Messianic Judaism: New Covenant Halacha of Tikkun International,” 23 September 2009, 1-3; Juster, “Jewish and Gentile Distinction in Messianic Congregations,” 1-17; Daniel Juster, “A Discipling Chapter Especially for Gentiles Called to Messianic Jewish Congregations,” Supplement for *Growing to Maturity*, 2020, 1-10; Daniel Juster, “Should Gentiles Keep the Feasts of Israel?” *Tikkun Global Weekly*, 12 September 2019. Online: <https://tikkun.tv/should-gentiles-keep-the-feasts-of-israel>; Daniel Juster, “The Danger of Jewish Roots Movements,” *International Coalition of Apostolic Leaders (ICAL)*, 22 June 2019. Online: <https://www.icaleaders.com/news/2019/7/22/the-danger-of-jewish-roots-movements-by-daniel-juster>; Eitan Shishkoff, “Is the Torah for Gentiles?” in *“What About Us?”: The End-Time Calling of Gentiles in Israel’s Revival* (Bedford: Burkhart, 2013), 97-120; David J. Rudolph, “Bilateral (Jew-Gentile) Ecclesiology and Ethics,” *Verge* 1:2 (2009): 4; Troy Wallace, “The Seven Recognitions of Healthy Gentiles in Messianic Jewish Congregations” (Baruch HaShem Yeshiva, 6 April 2019); Ron Cantor, “Should Gentiles Keep Torah?” *Ron Cantor: Messianic Communicator*, 12 August 2013. Online: <https://messiahsmadate.org/should-gentiles-keep-torah>; H. Bruce Stokes, “Gentiles in the Messianic Movement” (paper presented at the International Messianic Jewish Alliance Conference, Puerto Vallarta, 1997), 1-5.

with their Jewish brothers and sisters in Yeshua through the Spirit of God, but remain as Gentiles in identity. Together we comprise a glorious witness of the “one new man” (Eph. 2:15). We do not believe that One Law Theology or the doctrinal positions associated with the “Two-House” Movement reflect biblical teaching about Gentile identity in the Messiah. This position is in accordance with our parent organizations, the Messianic Jewish Alliance of America (MJAA) and the International Alliance of Messianic Congregations and Synagogues (IAMCS).<sup>66</sup>

Consider that Gentile believers now comprise the majority of members in most Messianic synagogues in the Diaspora, sometimes as high as seventy percent or more.<sup>67</sup> The lack of educational resources in the Messianic community that teach about Jewish and Gentile identity in Messiah, from a Jerusalem Council/One New Man perspective, adds to the challenge of providing solid discipleship in this area.

Another factor contributing to the problem is First Fruits of Zion. Despite their motto “Messianic Judaism for all nations,” FFOZ does not represent Messianic Judaism. They depart from the IAMCS stance (noted above) in their *Partial One Law View* that all Gentile believers should be encouraged to keep the Jewish festivals. Since national umbrella organizations like the MJAA/IAMCS and UMJC have been slow to address this issue, FFOZ has effectively filled the discipleship gap in the Messianic community with educational resources written to a Gentile audience. FFOZ’s books and articles are easy to read, nicely bound, affordable, and filled with a lot of good content, *while teaching that God’s ideal for all Gentile believers is to keep the biblical calendar*.<sup>68</sup> Through their resources and Torah Clubs, FFOZ has gained a corner on the market in the Messianic community when it comes to teaching Gentile believers about their relationship to the Torah.<sup>69</sup> All of this is to say that we need to see an alternative to FFOZ emerge in the coming years if we are going to turn the tide of *Hebrew Roots/One Law* influence in the Messianic Jewish community.

### *The Balance: Keys to Avoiding Weirdness*

Below is practical advice that can help Gentile believers avoid the pitfalls of the *Hebrew Roots/One Law View*.

1. *One New Man*. The Church is fully and authentically the One New Man described in Ephesians 2 only when it is made up of Jewish and Gentile followers of the Messiah who are affirmed in their respective identities, and who relate to one another in a spirit of interdependence, mutual blessing, and mutual humbling.

2. *Jerusalem Council Decision*. Acts 15 describes an apostolic ruling that addresses the question of whether Gentile believers have to become Jews, or take on Jewish life, in order to be part of the people of God. The Jerusalem Council decided that Gentile followers of Jesus were exempt

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<sup>66</sup> See <https://www.koldodi.org>.

<sup>67</sup> Kaell, “Born-again seeking,” 2.

<sup>68</sup> Lancaster, *The Holy Days*, 3, 5, 7, 9-12, 15; Lambert, “The Unifying Judaizer,” 60; Lancaster, “Distinction Theology and Diversity in the Communities of Yeshua,” 32, 39; Lancaster, *From Sabbath to Sabbath*, 1-11.

<sup>69</sup> In business theory terms, it has been a disruptive innovation.

from circumcision and ipso facto other boundary markers of Jewish identity. However, the four requirements in Acts 15:20, 28-29 and Paul's letters demonstrate that Gentile believers were expected to keep universal Torah ethics (e.g., 1 Cor 5-10). By contrast, Jewish followers of Jesus continue to have a covenantal responsibility to remain true to their identity as Jews.

3. *Jewish Community/Ministry Context.* The key to everything being healthy and avoiding weirdness is making sure that Gentile believers participating in Jewish life are doing so alongside their Jewish brothers and sisters and in a Jewish community/ministry context with a rabbi or Jewish pastor. When this happens, and Jewish and Gentile identity is affirmed, and personal calling is affirmed, we can see Paul's vision of the One New Man realized and there is much blessing.

4. *Jewish Life in the Home.* Gentile Christian celebration of Jewish life in the home is also best done when it is in conjunction with being a part of a Messianic synagogue or a church's Jewish ministry. What a Gentile believer does in the home is then an extension of their worship with Jews on a communal level.

5. *Purposes of the Torah.* The Torah is relevant to all Gentile Christians. There are at least twenty purposes of the Torah. They include:

- To serve as the foundational revelation of God
- To remind us of God's love, grace and power
- To teach us how to love God and our neighbor
- To teach us how to worship God
- To establish the oneness and sovereignty of God
- To teach us to be holy as God is holy
- To point out sin so that we might return to God
- To train us to exercise faith in God
- To train us to be obedient to God
- To reveal the heart and priorities of God
- To reveal the wisdom and knowledge of God
- To uphold the order of God's creation
- To uphold God's standards of compassion and justice
- To draw the nations to God
- To foster unity among God's people
- To give our children a heritage from the Lord
- To prepare God's people for priestly service
- To point us to Jesus the Messiah
- To train us to hear the voice of God
- To demarcate Israel as a distinct and enduring nation by God's design

The Torah serves all of these purposes and most of them are directly applicable to Gentile Christians. A Gentile believer's love for God's commandments should include above all a commitment to universal Torah ethics. These are centered on the Shema—love for God and love for neighbor.

While affirming the above, Gentile believers do not have a covenantal responsibility to keep those aspects of Torah that were given by God to serve as boundary markers of identity for the Jewish people. This relates to the last point on the list—to demarcate Israel as a distinct and enduring nation by God’s design.

6. *Gentile Exemption and Callings*. While the Scriptures do not provide a complete list of God’s commandments that are applicable to Gentile believers, it is the historic view of the Jewish community, including the Messianic Jewish community, that God does not expect Gentiles to be circumcised, keep the Sabbath on the seventh day, celebrate Israel’s festivals or observe all of the food laws, among other distinctly Jewish commandments.<sup>70</sup> They are exempt. This has been the majority view within Judaism for centuries. Moreover, this approach is consistent with the Jerusalem Council decision in Acts 15 (cf. 21:25) and Paul’s “rule in all the Churches” (1 Cor 7:17-24).

What about Gentile believers who sense that God is calling them to worship in Jewish ways? Gentile believers who are led by the Lord to be members of Messianic Jewish congregations or to be involved in Jewish ministries are called to embrace the rhythm of Jewish life in these settings, not as Messianic Jews but as Gentile followers of the Messiah. “Called” is the operative term since the overwhelming majority of Gentile believers do not sense a calling to live out Jewish lifestyle.

The corollary to this is that Christian churches are not violating God’s will or falling short of God’s ideal if they do not observe the Jewish festivals, etc. While the Gentile wing of the Church should appreciate its Jewish origins, its Jewish Scriptures (Old and New), its ecclesial identity in relation to the Jewish people, its Jewish Messiah, and learn about all aspects of Jewish life described in the Bible, Christian churches are not deficient if they do not follow distinctly Jewish customs.

7. *Leading of the Spirit*. If a Gentile believer is drawn to live out Jewish-specific aspects of the Torah (e.g., celebrating Jewish festivals or keeping kosher), this should derive from their being led by the Spirit and not from a sense of covenantal responsibility, which is unique to the Jewish people. For the Gentile believer, it is a personal calling. Also, the individual should view this as something the Spirit is leading *them* to do and not something that God expects all Gentiles in the world to do (see Rom 14:5–6).

8. *Jewish Identity Markers*. Finally, given Jewish concerns about covenant-related traditions and cultural appropriation, it is wisdom to walk out all of the above with sensitivity to Jewish community norms and in consultation with a Messianic rabbi or Jewish pastor who is familiar with halakhic issues (1 Cor 10:32-33).<sup>71</sup>

## **The Replacement Theology View**

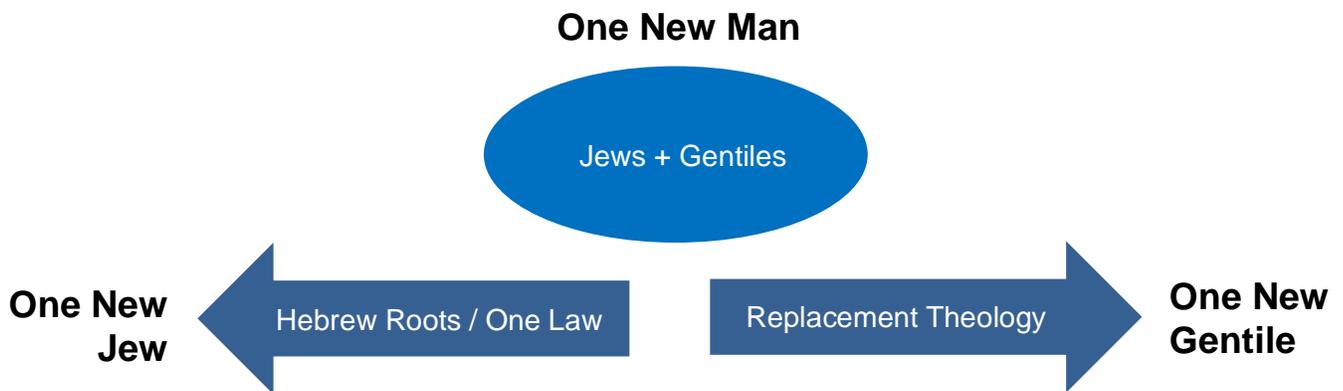
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<sup>70</sup> For a detailed discussion of God’s commandments in the Torah and how they apply to Jews and Gentiles respectively, see Michael Rudolph with Daniel C. Juster, *The Law of Messiah: Torah from a New Covenant Perspective I and II* (Montgomery Village: Tikkun International, 2019).

<sup>71</sup> This section is adapted from David Rudolph, foreword to *At the Foot of the Mountain: Two Views on Torah and the Spirit*, by Jennifer M. Rosner and Joshua M. Lessard (Eugene: Resource, 2021), vii-xxvii.

Central to restoring the Jewish roots of the Christian faith is restoring Jewish believers to the Church. The Church needs to be a place where Jews are welcome, affirmed in their Jewish identity, and invited to partner in ministry.<sup>72</sup> As Markus Barth put it, “The Church is the bride of Christ only when it is the Church of Jews and Gentiles . . . the existence, building, and growth of the Church are identified with the common existence, structure, and growth of Jews and Gentiles.”<sup>73</sup>

Paul’s vision of the Church in Ephesians 2 is the One New Man *made up of Jews and Gentiles*. The *Hebrew Roots/One Law View* by contrast leads to the One New Jew—a community in which Gentile identity disappears. On the opposite end of the spectrum, the *Replacement Theology View* leads to the One New Gentile—a community in which Jewish identity disappears. Why is this? What is it about *Replacement Theology* that causes the erasure of Jews?<sup>74</sup>



When we talk about *Replacement Theology*, we are talking about a theology in which the Church (intentionally or unintentionally) replaces the Jewish people as the people of God.<sup>75</sup> The academic term for *Replacement Theology* is *Supersessionism*, which comes from the Latin *supersedere*: to sit above or be superior to. As Kendall Soulen explains:

In general parlance, to supersede means to take the place of someone or something, while to be superseded means to be set aside as useless or obsolete in favor of someone or something that is regarded as superior. In recent decades, the term “supersessionism” has gained currency among theologians and biblical scholars to refer to the traditional Christian belief that since Christ’s coming the Church has taken the place of the Jewish

<sup>72</sup> This is not to diminish the importance of Messianic synagogues. My point is simply that every congregation in the body of Messiah should be a place where Jews are welcome and encouraged to walk out their calling as Jews.

<sup>73</sup> Markus Barth, *Israel and the Church: Contributions for a Dialogue Vital for Peace* (Richmond: John Knox, 1969), 90-91.

<sup>74</sup> Jews in churches that promote *Replacement Theology* tend to assimilate and not pass on Jewish identity to their children. See Jonathan Allen, *A Profile of Jewish Believers in the UK Church* (Eugene: Wipf & Stock, 2018), 211-31. They typically do not have grandchildren who identify as Jews.

<sup>75</sup> See Joel Willitts, “Jewish fish (ΙΧΘΥΣ) in post-supersessionist water: Messianic Judaism within a post-supersessionistic paradigm,” *HTS Teologiese Studies/Theological Studies* 72:4 (2016): a3331.

people as God's chosen community, and that God's covenant with the Jews is now over and done.<sup>76</sup>

### *Hard Supersessionism*

There are two kinds of *Replacement Theology* that result in the elimination of Jewish presence in the Church. The first type we will call *Hard Supersessionism*.<sup>77</sup> This refers to the idea that God has cursed the Jewish people because they rejected Christ. According to this view, God revoked his covenant with Israel, removed their elect status, terminated their boundary markers of distinction, destroyed Jerusalem, sent Israel into exile, and transferred Israel's blessings to the Church. As a classic example of *Hard Supersessionism*, Luther wrote in his book *On the Jews and Their Lies*:

“Listen, Jew, are you aware that Jerusalem and your sovereignty, together with your temple and priesthood, have been destroyed for over 1,460 years?” . . . For such ruthless wrath of God is sufficient evidence that they assuredly have erred and gone astray. . . . Therefore this work of wrath is proof that the Jews, surely rejected by God, are no longer his people, and neither is he any longer their God.<sup>78</sup>

*Hard Supersessionism* often leads to Christian *antisemitism*. We see this in Luther's proposal concerning how Jewish people should be treated in the Germany of his day:

What shall we do with this rejected and condemned people, the Jews? . . . I shall give you my sincere advice: First, to set fire to their synagogues or schools and to bury and cover with dirt whatever will not burn, so that no man will ever again see a stone or cinder of them. This is to be done in honor of our Lord and of Christendom, so that God might see that we are Christians . . . Second, I advise that their houses also be razed and destroyed . . . Third, I advise that all their prayer books and Talmudic writings, in which such idolatry, lies, cursing, and blasphemy are taught,

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<sup>76</sup> R. Kendall Soulen, “Supersessionism,” in *A Dictionary of Jewish-Christian Relations*, ed. Edward Kessler and Neil Wenborn (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 413.

<sup>77</sup> What I am calling *Hard* and *Soft Supersessionism* is the equivalent of what Soulen refers to as *Punitive* and *Economic Supersessionism* respectively (R. Kendall Soulen, *The God of Israel and Christian Theology* [Minneapolis: Fortress, 1996], 29-31). I am also using the terms *Hard* and *Soft Supersessionism* in a different way than David Novak does in “Supersessionism Hard and Soft,” *First Things*, February 2019. Soulen refers to a third type of *Replacement Theology* that he calls *Structural Supersessionism*. As Matthew Tapie points out, this is “an approach to the biblical narrative that renders the Old Testament largely indecisive for shaping conclusions about how God's redemptive purposes in Christ engage creation in universal and enduring ways. Israel's history is nothing more than a particular prefigurative moment sandwiched between more important, universal and spiritual aims of God's creation and redemption of humankind. However, structural supersessionism is more a consequence of supersessionism than supersessionism itself. That Israel's narrative no longer shapes God's purposes in engaging creation in a decisive way seems to be a conclusion that follows from the economically supersessionist premise that God's only purpose for Israel was to foreshadow universal redemption in Christ” (Matthew A. Tapie, *Aquinas on Israel and the Church: The Question of Supersessionism in the Theology of Thomas Aquinas* [Eugene: Pickwick, 2014], 20 n. 56).

<sup>78</sup> Martin Luther, “On the Jews and Their Lies,” in *Luther's Works*, ed. Franklin Sherman (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1971), 47:138-39.

be taken from them. Fourth, I advise that their rabbis be forbidden to teach henceforth on pain of loss of life and limb . . . Fifth, I advise that safe-conduct on the highways be abolished completely for the Jews. For they have no business in the countryside, since they are not lords, officials, tradesmen, or the like. Let them stay at home . . . Sixth, I advise that usury be prohibited to them, and that all cash and treasure of silver and gold be taken from them and put aside for safekeeping . . . Seventh, I recommend putting a flail, an ax, a hoe, a spade, a distaff, or a spindle into the hands of young, strong Jews and Jewesses and letting them earn their bread in the sweat of their brow . . . In brief, dear princes and lords, those of you who have Jews under your rule—if my counsel does not please you, find better advice, so that you and we all can be rid of the unbearable, devilish burden of the Jews . . . Such a desperate, thoroughly evil, poisonous, and devilish lot are these Jews, who for these fourteen hundred years have been and still are our plague, pestilence, and our misfortune . . . In my opinion the problem must be resolved thus: If we wish to wash our hands of the Jews’ blasphemy and not share in their guilt, we have to part company with them. They must be driven from our country.<sup>79</sup>

This is just one example among many in Christian history of how *Hard Supersessionism* results in a desire to get rid of Jews and anything Jewish. Most churches in Nazi Germany did not oppose the government’s persecution and murder of Jews (including Christian Jews) in part because the Churches were steeped in *Hard Supersessionism*.<sup>80</sup> When *Hard Supersessionism* exists within a local church context, it will suppress and stigmatize Jews and Jewishness.

### *Soft Supersessionism*

The second type of *Replacement Theology* we will call *Soft Supersessionism*. Here the Church replaces the Jewish people as the people of God; however, the reason is not because the Jewish

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<sup>79</sup> Luther, “On the Jews and Their Lies,” 268-75, 287-88. The reception history of Luther’s supersessionism and antisemitism in the Nazi era is described in Christopher J. Probst, *Demonizing the Jews: Luther and the Protestant Church in Nazi Germany* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2012).

<sup>80</sup> “When no major Christian institution, from the Confessing Church to the German Catholic bishops to the Vatican, could find itself willing to condemn Nazi mistreatment of Jews, why would Christians be held back in their participation? . . . I am not certain ordinary Germans would have participated so willingly and ruthlessly in the killing without what appeared to be religious sanction to do so” (Robert P. Erickson, “Consent and Collaboration: The Churches Through 1945,” in *Complicity in the Holocaust: Churches and Universities in Nazi Germany* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012], 138). Cf. William Skyles, “‘The Bearers of Unholy Potential’: Confessing Church Sermons on the Jews and Judaism,” *Studies in Christian-Jewish Relations* 11:1 (2016): 1-29; Susannah Heschel, *The Aryan Jesus: Christian Theologians and the Bible in Nazi Germany* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010), 80-87; Steven Haynes, “Who Needs Enemies: Jews and Judaism in Anti-Nazi Religious Discourse,” *Church History* 71:2 (2002): 341-67; Wolfgang Gerlach, *And the Witnesses Were Silent: The Confessing Church and the Persecution of the Jews* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2000), 176-86; Susannah Heschel, “When Jesus Was an Aryan: The Protestant Church and Antisemitic Propaganda,” in *Betrayal: German Churches and the Holocaust*, ed. Robert P. Erickson and Susannah Heschel (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1999), 68-89; Victoria Barnett, “The Confessing Church and the Jews,” in *For the Soul of the People: Protestant Protest Against Hitler* (Oxford: Oxford University press, 1992), 122-54; Gerhard Lindemann, “The Fate of Christian Pastors of Jewish Descent in Hanover, 1925-1947,” *Kirchliche Zeitgeschichte* 10:2 (1997): 359-63; Doris Bergen, “Non-Aryans in the People’s Church,” in *Twisted Cross: The German Christian Movement in the Third Reich* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina, 1996), 82-100.

people rejected Jesus but because it was God’s plan from the beginning for Jewish election and Jewish law to expire when God sent the Messiah. Another way of putting it is that “with the advent of Christ, Jewish Law is fulfilled and obsolete, with the result that God replaces Israel with the Church.”<sup>81</sup>

It is important to understand that *Soft Supersessionism* “inevitably undermines the theological rationale of Jewish existence.”<sup>82</sup> The implications of *Soft Supersessionism* are apparent in the questions: If Jewish Law is fulfilled and obsolete, shouldn’t Jews no longer live as Jews? Since the Jewish people have finished their role in salvation history, why should they stay around? As Stuart Dauermann puts it, “In Christian imagining, the Jewish people are too often simply a preparation for God’s work with the Church. Such theologizing positions the Jews as the Parcel Post People of God, who deliver the package of salvation to the Church, only to then recede from view.”<sup>83</sup>

But it is more. *Soft Supersessionism* is ultimately a form of identity appropriation. In this theological construct, the Church is the “new Israel,” the “spiritual Israel,” and Christians are the “true Jews.” All of Israel’s privileges transfer to the Church. N. T. Wright’s theology of the Church is a good example of modern day *Soft Supersessionism*. He writes:

[I]n Rom. 5-8 Paul develops the picture of the Church in terms belonging to Israel. This *transfer* is achieved in two stages. First, Israel’s calling, responsibilities and privileges have been taken over by the Messiah himself, alone: second, what is true of the Messiah is reckoned to be true of his people . . . . In him all believers, without distinction of race, *inherit all that was Israel’s* . . . . Paul, in line with Old Testament prophecy, claims that God’s glory has been *taken away from Israel according to the flesh and given to the community of the new covenant* . . . . *The Christian is the true Jew*. . . . The first five verses of the chapter [Rom 5:1-5] thus set out the grounds of assurance in terms of the *transfer* of Israel’s privileges to the Church. . . . what Israel should have done, the Messiah has done alone. Having therefore taken Israel’s task, he (and hence his people) *inherit Israel’s privileges* . . . . We have seen that Paul explicitly and consciously *transfers* blessings from Israel according to the flesh to the Messiah, and thence to the Church . . . . In the same way, Gal. 2-4 argues precisely that the worldwide believing church is the true family of Abraham, and that those who remain as “Israel according to the flesh” are in fact the theological descendants of Hagar and Ishmael, *with no title to the promises* . . . . It is not therefore without a touch of bitter irony, reminiscent of Phil. 3.2ff., that he [Paul] *transfers* the name “Israel” to the Church.<sup>84</sup>

Many Christians appreciate Wright’s scholarship because he explains the New Testament in light of its Old Testament background and Second Temple Jewish context. He emphasizes the Jewish roots of the Christian faith but—and this is key—*it is all spiritualization and memory, past tense, not a continuing One New Man reality as described in Ephesians 2 where Jews and Gentiles are affirmed in their respective identities to the extent that it results in interdependence and mutual*

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<sup>81</sup> Tapie, *Aquinas on Israel and the Church*, 23-24.

<sup>82</sup> Tapie, *Aquinas on Israel and the Church*, 21.

<sup>83</sup> Stuart Dauermann, *Converging Destinies: Jews, Christians, and the Mission of God* (Eugene: Cascade, 2017), 48.

<sup>84</sup> N. T. Wright, “The Messiah and the People of God: A Study in Pauline Theology with Particular Reference to the Argument of the Epistle to the Romans” (DPhil thesis, University of Oxford, 1980), 135-37, 139-40, 193, 196. Italics mine.

*blessing*. As an example of what I mean, consider how Wright describes the meaning of the land of Israel and Jerusalem from a *Replacement Theology* perspective. Everything gets spiritualized and universalized, resulting in the supplanting of a central pillar of Jewish identity:

In Romans 4:13 Paul says, startlingly, “The promise to Abraham and his seed, that they should inherit the world.” Surely the promises of inheritance were that Abraham’s family would inherit the land of Israel, not the world? Paul’s horizon, however, is bigger. The Land, like the Torah, was a temporary stage in the long purpose of the God of Abraham. *It was not a bad thing now done away with, but a good and necessary thing now fulfilled in Christ and the Spirit . . .* The Temple had been superseded by the Church. If this is so for the Temple, and in Romans 4 for the Land, then it must *a fortiori* be the case for Jerusalem . . . Jesus’ whole claim is to do and be what the city and the temple were and did. As a result, both claims, the claim of Jesus and the claim of “holy land,” can never be sustained simultaneously . . . the attempt to “carry over” some Old Testament promises about Jerusalem, the Land or the Temple for fulfilment in our own day has the same theological shape as the attempt in pre-Reformation Catholicism to think of Christ as being recrucified in every Mass. . . . *the attempt to say that there are some parts of the Old Testament (relating to Jerusalem, Land or Temple) which have not yet been “fulfilled” and so need a historical and literal “fulfillment” now, or at some other time, is an explicit attempt to take something away from the achievement of Christ in his death and resurrection, and to reserve it for the work of human beings in a different time and place. The work of Christ is once again “incomplete” . . . the only appropriate attitude in subsequent generations towards Jews, the Temple, the Land or Jerusalem must be one of sorrow or pity.*<sup>85</sup>

In sum, the second kind of *Replacement Theology*—*Soft Supersessionism*—is another weird way in which Christians attempt to restore the Jewish roots of their faith. By Gentile Christians appropriating the emblems of Jewish identity (Israel, Jew, Jerusalem, Land of Israel, etc.) and disregarding the covenantal meanings of these symbols for authentic Jews, Gentile Christians ultimately replace Jews in the Church. This displacement dynamic prompts the question: If every Christian is a true Jew, why does the Church need genealogical Jews? In the end, this second kind of *Replacement Theology* assimilates real Jews in the local church context. It leads to the expropriation, spiritualization, stigmatization, and deterritorialization of authentic Jewish

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<sup>85</sup> N. T. Wright, “Jerusalem in the New Testament,” in *Jerusalem Past and Present in the Purposes of God*, ed. P. W. L. Walker (Cambridge: Tyndale House, 1992), 67, 70, 73-74. Italics mine. Cf. N. T. Wright, *Paul and the Faithfulness of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2013), 366-67. For a post-supersessionist interpretation of Rom 4:13, see Rudolph, “Zionism in Pauline Literature,” 167-94. Cf. Mark S. Kinzer, *Jerusalem Crucified, Jerusalem Risen: The Resurrected Messiah, the Jewish People, and the Land of Promise* (Eugene: Cascade, 2018); Mark S. Kinzer and Russell L. Resnik, *Besorah: The Resurrection of Jerusalem and the Healing of a Fractured Gospel* (Eugene: Cascade, 2021); Gerald McDermott, *Israel Matters: Why Christians Must Think Differently about the People and the Land* (Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2017). Wright’s argument assumes that in Paul’s thought when something takes on new or additional meaning in Messiah the fulfillment cancels out the validity of the prior practice or institution. However, Paul never puts forward this principle and a number of texts call this criterion into question, e.g., marriage points to the relationship between Messiah and the Church and yet marriage is not invalidated through the coming of Messiah (2 Cor 11:2; Eph 5:22-33). There is much in Paul’s letters that envision the universal and particular coexisting in God’s kingdom, a view consistent with the eschatology of Israel’s Scriptures.

identity.<sup>86</sup> When the smoke and mirrors are removed, the One New Man becomes the One New Gentile in churches that teach *Soft Supersessionism*.<sup>87</sup>

*“You will be assimilated”*

Have you ever watched a Star Trek episode where the Borg suddenly appears? If so, you may recall that they introduce themselves with the alien greeting, “We are the Borg. You will be assimilated.” *Replacement Theology*, in its hard and soft forms, has a Borg-like dimension to it when it comes to Jews and Jewish identity.<sup>88</sup> The message that most Jews hear is, “We are the Gentile Christian church. You will be assimilated.” And it is no exaggeration.<sup>89</sup> Throughout history, this is the legacy of *Replacement Theology*. After the Council of Nicaea and throughout the Middle Ages, Jews who requested baptism were required to renounce their Jewish identity. Here is an example of a baptismal confession that Jews had to say if they wanted to become followers of Jesus:

I renounce all customs, rites, legalisms, unleavened breads and sacrifices of lambs of the Hebrews, and all the other feasts of the Hebrews, sacrifices, prayers, aspersions, purifications, sanctifications and propitiations, and fasts, and new moons, and Sabbaths, and superstitions, and hymns and chants and observances and synagogues, and the food

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<sup>86</sup> David Rudolph, Messianic Jewish response essay in *God’s Israel and the Israel of God: A Conversation on Pauline Supersessionism*, ed. Mike Bird and Scot McKnight (Bellingham: Lexham, 2022).

<sup>87</sup> *Soft One Law* and *Soft Supersessionism* are de facto Trojan horse theologies that claim to make room for Jew-Gentile distinction even while trying to win others to a way of life that subverts distinction. *Soft One Law* results in the eventual assimilation of Gentile identity while *Soft Supersessionism* results in the eventual assimilation of Jewish identity.

<sup>88</sup> See Dauermann, *Converging Destinies*, 54-55

<sup>89</sup> As an example of what I mean, Wright’s theology of Israel holds that Jews who believe in Jesus are “weak” in faith if they observe Israel’s dietary laws, while eating *treif* (non-kosher food) is a sign of Christian “maturity” (Wright, *Paul and the Faithfulness of God*, 1429, 1442). As Wright puts it, “it would appear not only that Paul was advising Gentile Christians in Corinth to eat non-kosher food but that he was happy to see other ‘Jewish Christians’ following this pattern” (Ibid., 1429). Wright also describes keeping the Sabbath and Jewish festivals as “irrelevant” and “a matter of ‘indifference’” to Paul (Ibid., 363-64, 1428). Circumcision is also repudiated, “Paul is indicating a messianic identity and way of life which he sees as genuine worship of the God of Israel – only without circumcision and Torah-badges” (Ibid., 985-86, 1430). Wright maintains that Paul opposed the perpetuation of all boundary markers of Jewish identity, “Paul is saying, as strongly as possible, that these identity-markers no longer matter” (Ibid., 1429 n. 66). *If Jewish boundary markers of identity no longer matter in God’s kingdom, the implication is that the Church no longer needs Jews who identify as Jews*. How do Jews in churches respond to this message? The evidence of more than fifteen centuries of church history indicates that when the Church stigmatizes normative Jewish practice, Jews assimilate rather than perpetuate Jewish identity. From Wright’s perspective, there is nothing wrong with this since Paul himself assimilated, “And at this point some today might say, as some of [Paul’s] contemporaries certainly did, that he had stopped being a ‘Jew’ altogether. He had abandoned the most basic markers of Jewish identity. So is that how he saw himself, too? Once more there are signals pointing in that direction” (Ibid., 1429). For a broader discussion of *Soft Supersessionism* and its relation to Jewish assimilation, see David J. Rudolph, “Messianic Jews and Christian Theology: Restoring an Historical Voice to the Contemporary Discussion,” *Pro Ecclesia* 14:1 (2005): 58-84.

and drink of the Hebrews; in one word, I renounce absolutely everything Jewish, every law, rite and custom . . .<sup>90</sup>

The Second Council of Nicaea in 787 CE, one of seven ecumenical councils, in canon 8, forbids Jewish believers in Jesus from continuing to live as Jews. Canon 8 is still on the books:

Since some of those who come from the religion of the Hebrews mistakenly think to make a mockery of Christ who is God, pretending to become Christians, but denying Christ in private by both secretly continuing to observe the sabbath and maintaining other Jewish practices, we decree that they shall not be received to communion or at prayer or into the Church, but rather let them openly be Hebrews according to their own religion; they should not baptize their children or buy, or enter into possession of, a slave. But if one of them makes his conversion with a sincere faith and heart, and pronounces his confession wholeheartedly, disclosing their practices and objects in the hope that others may be refuted and corrected, *such a person should be welcomed and baptized along with his children, and care should be taken that they abandon Hebrew practices. However if they are not of this sort, they should certainly not be welcomed.*<sup>91</sup>

We have explored why *Replacement Theology*, in its hard and soft forms, leads to the erasure of Jewish presence in the local church. This leads to our final question: Why has *Replacement Theology* captured the minds and hearts of Christians throughout the centuries?

“*We do not need Jews*”

Behind replacement theology is a *spiritual issue*. It is a pride and arrogance that says, “We do not need Jews and we should part ways with them.” Constantine communicated this perspective at the Council of Nicaea in 325 CE when he said:

*Let us then have nothing in common with the detestable Jewish crowd; for we have received from our Saviour a different way...For their boast is absurd indeed, that it is not in our power without instruction from them to observe these things. For how should they be capable of forming a sound judgment, who, since their parricidal guilt in slaying their Lord, have been subject to the direction, not of reason, but of ungoverned passion, and are swayed by every impulse of the mad spirit that is in them.*<sup>92</sup>

The 318 or so bishops who were present at the council agreed with Constantine. This consent set the trajectory for a church culture of spiritual independence that was fully at peace with the idea of a church and world without Jews.<sup>93</sup>

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<sup>90</sup> Assemani, *Cod. Lit.* 1:105. See James Parkes, “Appendix 3: Professions of Faith Extracted from Jews on Baptism,” in *The Conflict of the Church and the Synagogue: A Study in the Origins of Antisemitism* (New York: Atheneum, 1985), 397.

<sup>91</sup> Online: <https://berkleycenter.georgetown.edu/quotes/the-bishops-at-the-second-council-of-nicaea-canon-8-on-the-treatment-of-jews-converted-to-christianity-787-ce>.

<sup>92</sup> Eusebius, *Vit. Const.* 3.18.

<sup>93</sup> See David J. Rudolph, “The Science of Worship: Astronomy, Intercalation, and the Church’s Dependence on the Jewish People,” *Bulletin of Ecclesial Theology* 4:1 (2017): 41-46.

## *Third Race Theology*

*Replacement Theology* is like a pair of glasses. When we put them on, the Bible and everything related to Jewish identity is read through this distorted lens. This is why Christians often see *Third Race Theology* in Paul's letters.<sup>94</sup> What is *Third Race Theology*? It is the idea that there are three categories of people in the world—Jews, Gentiles, and Christians—and Christians are made up of former Jews and former Gentiles. In *Third Race Theology*, Jews and Gentiles who become followers of Jesus are no longer Jews and Gentiles but new creations and members of the Church. Or to put it another way, the Borg-like church assimilates Jews and Gentiles into a third identity (i.e., a third race). See Appendix A for a discussion of biblical texts used to support third race arguments, such as 1 Corinthians 7:19; 10:32; Galatians 3:28; 5:6; 6:15 and Ephesians 2:15.

In sum, the *Replacement Theology View* leads to the erasure of Jewish presence in churches. This is because *Hard Supersessionism* displays contempt for Jews and Jewishness while *Soft Supersessionism* emphasizes the expropriation, spiritualization, stigmatization, and deterritorialization of Jewish identity. Both kinds of *Replacement Theology* give rise to a Borg-like assimilation of Jews, an attitude of “we do not need Jews,” and *Third Race Theology* that justifies all of the above with Scripture.

### *How to Restore the Jewish Roots of the Christian Faith Without Getting Weird: Tips for Pastors and Other Ministry Leaders*

Thanks to Pastor Jack and Pastor Robert, we have learned a few things at The King's University about what it means to be a learning community of Jews and Gentiles in Messiah, who affirm each other in their respective identities and relate to each another in a spirit of interdependence, mutual blessing, and mutual humbling.

I have argued in this article that we need to work toward realizing Paul's Ephesians 2 vision of the One New Man and view the *Hebrew Roots/One Law View* and the *Replacement Theology View* as competing communal visions. The former leads to the One New Jew and erases Gentile identity, while the latter leads to the One New Gentile and erases Jewish identity. If we understand this, whether we are involved in a church or a Messianic synagogue, we can chart a course that avoids these extremes.

In this section, I would like to offer practical advice for how to pastorally care for Jews in the Church, and restore Jewish roots more generally, without getting weird.

1. If you have Jews and Gentiles in your church, then your church is called to pastor Jews and Gentiles. Your pastoral team needs to learn how to disciple Jews in Jewish identity and Gentiles in Gentile identity. This is what Pastor Jack learned at The Church on the Way and what Pastor Robert has learned at Gateway Church.

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<sup>94</sup> See Wright's defense of “third race” theology in *Paul and the Faithfulness of God*, 1443-49. Cf. Michael F. Bird, *An Anomalous Jew: Paul among Jews, Greeks, and Romans* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2016), 54.

2. Provide pastoral care for Jews in your church in a way that affirms their Jewish identity and helps them to become better Jews. Since Jewish identity is a matter of divine calling (as Paul puts it in 1 Cor 7:17-18 and Rom 11:29), Jews should stay true to their identity as Jews and not opt out. Also, Jewish life in the Diaspora solely motivated by culture or evangelism does not sustain Jewish identity in the long term. The history of the Hebrew Christian movement of the 19th and 20th centuries demonstrates this.
3. Most Jews in churches are reluctant to express their Jewish identity. There is no need to encourage them to be super Jews. It is enough to encourage them to seek the Holy Spirit and embrace the journey of discovering more about their Jewish identity and calling. Encourage them to be involved in the Jewish community and to be a blessing within it. If a Jewish person has not participated in the Jewish world, invite them to explore this part of their identity.
4. Pastors need to be realistic that the local church has its limitations in being able to provide a Jewish community experience. Even Gateway Church, with all of its resources, cannot offer certain Jewish worship and lifecycle events that a Jewish member may want to experience (e.g., a weekly Shabbat service or a bar/bat mitzvah). How does Gateway handle this? It looks at the bigger picture and partners with local Messianic synagogues to provide these experiences when a Jewish family wants to grow in these areas. This is part of the interdependence that we talked about earlier.
5. When there are little to no Jews in a local church, the Church should all the more try to partner with a Messianic synagogue, so that on a macro level it is experiencing Jew-Gentile fellowship. Otherwise, it tends toward thinking of the Church as the One New Gentile rather than the One New Man of Ephesians 2.
6. Develop relationships with local Messianic synagogues that are affiliated with national organizations like the IAMCS, UMJC, and Tikkun. Explore the possibility of joint events. Avoid *Hebrew Roots/One Law* groups.
7. Jews in churches can experience an existential loneliness because of the lack of regular fellowship with other Jewish believers. In addition to encouraging Jewish followers of Jesus to connect with healthy Messianic synagogues, pastors can also connect their Jewish members with international networks of Jewish believers like the MJAA and [Yachad BeYeshua](#) (Together in Jesus).
8. Emphasize the Old Testament in preaching and teaching. Foster a love for this part of the Bible in your community. This will translate into a love for the Jewish people, as was the case with Corrie ten Boom and her family and other Christians who rescued Jews during the Holocaust. *They sensed a special kinship with Jews* because they loved the Old Testament and understood that Jesus was and is “the Messiah, the son of David, the son of Abraham” (Matt 1:1).<sup>95</sup>

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<sup>95</sup> David Gushee, “Compelled by Faith: Religious Motivations for Rescue,” in *The Righteous Gentiles of the Holocaust: A Christian Interpretation* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1994), 117-48.

9. Give sustained attention to the Jewish context of the New Testament in preaching and teaching. Explain God's covenant love and faithfulness to the Jewish people (Rom 11), Paul's vision for the One New Man made up of Jews and Gentiles (Eph 2), and the importance of avoiding *Hebrew Roots/One Law* and *Replacement Theology* pitfalls. Help the community to develop a clear picture of the Romans 11 olive tree, and to view Jewish people who do not believe in Jesus as part of the family of God.
10. Evaluate the Sunday school curriculum for what it teaches about Jews and Judaism and see if there is content that should be added, subtracted or revised.
11. Develop relationships with mainstream rabbis in your area and explore ways that you can partner together to serve the local community. Involve your church in Jewish advocacy organizations like American Jewish Committee (AJC) that fight antisemitism.
12. Teach the importance of the gospel being "to the Jew first" (Rom 1:16). Give the community vision to share this life-giving story of Israel's Messiah with Jewish people, and to explain it with love, respect and honor.
13. Support Jewish ministries. Gateway Church gives a tithe of its total budget to missions and a tithe of its missions budget to Jewish ministries. In addition to being a financial gift, this is also a way of expressing interdependence and mutual blessing with the Jewish wing of the body of Messiah and the wider Jewish world.
14. Talk with your church about signing the [Toward Jerusalem Council II Seven Affirmations](#) and get involved in the TJCII network that includes many like-minded churches and ministries around the world. The Seven Affirmations state:

Consistent with the principle established in the original Jerusalem Council of Acts Chapter 15 regarding respect for diversity in the Body of Christ concerning Jewish and Gentile identity, we do make the following affirmations:

- 1) We affirm the election of Israel, its irrevocable nature and God's unfinished work with the Jewish people regarding salvation and the role of Israel as a blessing to the nations.
- 2) We affirm that Jews who come to faith in the Messiah, Jesus, are called to retain their Jewish identity and live as part of their people in ways consistent with the New Covenant.
- 3) We affirm the formation of Messianic Jewish congregations as a significant and effective way to express Jewish collective identity (in Jesus) and as a means of witnessing to Jesus before the Jewish community. We also affirm Jewish individuals and groups that are part of churches and encourage them in their commitment to Jewish life and identity.
- 4) We affirm our willingness as an ecclesiastical body to build bridges to the Messianic Jewish community; to extend the hand of friendship and to pray for their growth and vitality.

- 5) We affirm our willingness to share our resources with Messianic Jewish congregations, mission organizations and theological training institutes so as to empower them to fulfill their God-given purpose.
- 6) We affirm our willingness to be a voice within our own ecclesiastical structures and spheres of influence against all forms of anti-Semitism, replacement theology (supersessionism) and teaching that precludes the expression of Jewish identity in Jesus.
- 7) Finally, we affirm that as Jewish and Gentile expressions of life in Jesus grow organically side by side with distinct identities that God will be glorified; that the Kingdom of Heaven will be advanced and that the vision of “the one new man” in Ephesians 2 will unfold as part of the original Abrahamic blessing to the nations.<sup>96</sup>

15. Connect with [Gateway Center for Israel](#), which helps pastors and churches develop a healthy understanding of Israel. They have excellent resources and would love to serve you.

16. Assign at least one person on your ministry team to study areas related to the Church and the Jewish people. That person can help the rest of the staff catch a vision for how to move forward in these areas and strike the right balance in preaching and discipleship. Without someone tapped for this role, it may never happen. You can send them to [The King’s University](#) and we will give them a solid foundation. They can take all of our Messianic Jewish Studies courses online or on-campus.

17. Lead your church in regular prayer for the salvation of Israel and the forming of the One New Man that Paul describes in Ephesians 2.

## **Recommended Resources**

### One New Man

Robert F. Wolff, ed., *Unity: Awakening the One New Man*. Chambersburg: Drawbaugh, 2014.

Johannes Fichtenbauer, *The Mystery of the Olive Tree: Uniting Jews and Gentiles for Christ’s Return*. Bedfordshire: New Life, 2019.

Peter Hocken, *Azusa, Rome, and Zion: Pentecostal Faith, Catholic Reform, and Jewish Roots*. Eugene: Pickwick, 2016.

Peter Hocken, *The Challenges of the Pentecostal, Charismatic and Messianic Jewish Movements: The Tensions of the Spirit*. New York: Routledge, 2009.

Samuel Whitefield, *One King: A Jesus-Centered Answer to the Question of Zion and the People of God*. Kansas City: Forerunner, 2016.

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<sup>96</sup> Online: <https://www.tjci.org/7-affirmations/>.

David Hoffbrand, *The Jewish Jesus: Reconnecting with the Truth about Jesus, Israel, and the Church*. Shippensburg: Destiny Image, 2017.

David H. Stern, *Restoring the Jewishness of the Gospel: A Message for Christians*. Clarksville: Lederer, 2009.

David B. Woods, "[Jew-Gentile Distinction in the One New Man of Ephesians 2:15](#)," *Conspectus* 18 (September 2014): 1-41.

### Messianic Judaism

David Rudolph and Joel Willitts, ed., *Introduction to Messianic Judaism: Its Ecclesial Context and Biblical Foundations*. Zondervan: Grand Rapids, 2013.

Mark S. Kinzer, *Postmissionary Messianic Judaism: Redefining Christian Engagement with the Jewish People*. Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2005.

Mark S. Kinzer, *Israel's Messiah and the People of God: A Vision for Messianic Jewish Covenant Fidelity*, ed. Jennifer M. Rosner. Eugene: Cascade, 2011.

David H. Stern, *Messianic Judaism: A Modern Movement with an Ancient Past*. Second Edition. Clarksville: Lederer Messianic, 2007.

Daniel C. Juster, *Jewish Roots: Understanding Your Jewish Faith*. Revised Edition. Shippensburg: Destiny Image, 2013.

### Jews, Gentiles and Torah

Michael Rudolph with Daniel C. Juster, *The Law of Messiah: Torah from a New Covenant Perspective*. 2 vols. Montgomery Village: Tikkun International, 2020.

Eitan Shishkoff, "*What About Us?*": *The End-Time Calling of Gentiles in Israel's Revival*. Bedford: Burkhart, 2013.

Jennifer M. Rosner and Joshua M. Lessard, *At the Foot of the Mountain: Two Views on Torah and the Spirit*. Eugene: Resource, 2021.

International Alliance of Messianic Congregations and Synagogues (IAMCS), "[One Law, Two Sticks: A Critical Look at the Hebrew Roots Movement](#)," 2014.

Daniel Juster and Russ Resnik, "[One Law Movements: A Challenge to the Messianic Jewish Community](#)," January 2005.

## Replacement Theology

Michael Vlach, *Has the Church Replaced Israel? A Theological Evaluation*. Nashville: B&H, 2010.

Daniel C. Juster, *The Irrevocable Calling: Israel's Role as a Light to the Nations*. Clarksville: Lederer, 2007.

Stuart Dauermann, *Converging Destinies: Jews, Christians, and the Mission of God*. Eugene: Cascade, 2017.

Gerald R. McDermott, *Israel Matters: Why Christians Must Think Differently about the People and the Land*. Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2017.

Ronald E. Diprose, *Israel and the Church: The Origins and Effects of Replacement Theology*. Rome: Instituto Biblico Evangelico Italiano, 2000.

Edjan Westerman, *Learning Messiah: Israel and the Nations: Learning to Read God's Way Anew*. Eugene: Wipf and Stock, 2018.

R. Kendall Soulen, *The God of Israel and Christian Theology*. Minneapolis: Fortress, 1996.

Matthew A. Tapie, *Aquinas on Israel and the Church: The Question of Supersessionism in the Theology of Thomas Aquinas*. Eugene: Pickwick, 2014.

Mark S. Kinzer, *Searching Her Own Mystery: Nostra Aetate, the Jewish People, and the Identity of the Church*. Eugene: Cascade, 2015.

Jennifer M. Rosner, *Healing the Schism: Barth, Rosenzweig, and the New Jewish-Christian Encounter*. Minneapolis: Fortress, 2015.

## Post-Supersessionist Interpretation of the New Testament

J. Brian Tucker, *Reading Romans after Supersessionism: The Continuation of Jewish Covenantal Identity*. Eugene: Cascade, 2018.

Lionel J. Windsor, *Reading Ephesians and Colossians after Supersessionism: Christ's Mission through Israel to the Nations*. Eugene: Cascade, 2017.

Ralph J. Korner, *Reading Revelation after Supersessionism: An Apocalyptic Journey of Socially Identifying John's Multi-Ethnic Ekklesiāi with the Ekklesiāi of Israel*. Eugene: Cascade, 2020.

Christopher Zoccali, *Reading Philippians after Supersessionism: Jews, Gentiles, and Covenant Identity*. Eugene: Cascade, 2017.

David J. Rudolph, *A Jew to the Jews: Jewish Contours of Pauline Flexibility in 1 Corinthians 9:19-23*. Eugene: Pickwick, 2016.

Mark D. Nanos and Magnus Zetterholm, ed., *Paul within Judaism: Restoring the First-Century Context to the Apostle*. Minneapolis: Fortress, 2015.

Mark S. Kinzer, *Jerusalem Crucified, Jerusalem Risen: The Resurrected Messiah, the Jewish People, and the Land of Promise*. Eugene: Cascade, 2018.

Mark S. Kinzer and Russell L. Resnik, *Besorah: The Resurrection of Jerusalem and the Healing of a Fractured Gospel*. Eugene: Cascade, 2021.

Isaac W. Oliver, *Luke's Jewish Eschatology: The National Restoration of Israel in Luke-Acts*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2021.

Isaac W. Oliver, *Torah Praxis after 70 CE: Reading Matthew and Luke-Acts as Jewish Texts*. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2013.

Gerald R. McDermott, *The New Christian Zionism: Fresh Perspectives on Israel and the Land*. Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2016.

Gerald R. McDermott, ed., *Understanding the Jewish Roots of Christianity: Biblical, Theological, and Historical Essays on the Relationship Between Christianity and Judaism*. Bellingham: Lexham, 2021.

#### Organizations and Websites

[The Center for Israel and Jewish Studies at The King's University](#)

[Gateway Center for Israel](#)

[Toward Jerusalem Council II](#)

[Messianic Jewish Alliance of America \(MJAA\)](#)

[International Alliance of Messianic Congregations and Synagogues \(IAMCS\)](#)

[Union of Messianic Jewish Congregations \(UMJC\)](#)

[Jewish Voice](#)

[Tikkun](#)

[Yachad BeYeshua](#)

[Post-Supersessionism.com](#)

[MessianicStudies.com](#)

[Kesher](#)

## Appendix A: Addressing Third Race Theology

*1 Corinthians 7:19 and Galatians 5:6; 6:15*

Christian leaders have historically regarded the below three texts as providing a biblical basis for *Third Race Theology*:<sup>97</sup>

Circumcision is nothing, and uncircumcision is nothing; but obeying the commandments of God is everything (1 Cor 7:19)

For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision counts for anything; the only thing that counts is faith working through love (Gal 5:6)

For neither circumcision nor uncircumcision is anything; but a new creation is everything! (Gal 6:15)

*Replacement Theology* advocates assume that Paul's use of the terms "nothing" or "not anything" in these passages indicates that Jewishness is unimportant.<sup>98</sup> But given the context, Paul is more likely saying that "neither circumcision nor the lack of circumcision has ultimate bearing on one's salvation."<sup>99</sup> In other words, before the judgment seat of God, being Jewish is irrelevant since God does not show favoritism (Rom 2:9-11).

Paul is not saying that Jewish identity is unimportant. Rather, he is using hyperbole in these passages to stress that being "in Christ" is *more important than* being Jewish.<sup>100</sup> He is simply relativizing A to B. In support of this interpretation, there are several occasions when Paul uses "nothing" or "not anything" language in a clearly hyperbolic way. First, with respect to the work of planting the Corinthian congregation, Paul describes himself as nothing compared to the Lord:

What then is Apollos? What is Paul? Servants through whom you came to believe, as the Lord assigned to each. I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth. *So neither the one who plants nor the one who waters is anything*, but only God who gives the growth (1 Cor 3:5-7).

Are Paul and Apollos truly nothing? Did they really do no work of any significance? On the contrary, their work was vital to the establishment of the Corinthian congregation. But *relative to*

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<sup>97</sup> This section is adapted from Rudolph, "Zionism in Pauline Literature," 177-82.

<sup>98</sup> David G. Horrell, "'No Longer Jew or Greek': Paul's Corporate Christology and the Construction of Christian Community," in *Christology, Controversy and Community: New Testament Essays in Honour of David R. Catchpole*, ed. David G. Horrell and Christopher M. Tuckett (Leiden: Brill, 2000), 343; David G. Horrell, *Solidarity and Difference: A Contemporary Reading of Paul's Ethics* (London: T & T Clark International, 2005), 18, 260 n. 50.

<sup>99</sup> Raymond F. Collins, *First Corinthians* (Collegeville: Liturgical, 1999), 284. Also Peter J. Tomson, "Paul's Jewish Background in View of His Law Teaching in 1 Cor 7," in *Paul and the Mosaic Law*, ed. James D. G. Dunn (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001), 266; Anthony C. Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians: A Commentary on the Greek Text* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 550.

<sup>100</sup> Cf. Charles E. Cruise, *Writing on the Edge: Paul's Use of Hyperbole in Galatians* (Eugene: Pickwick, 2019), 158-60; Caroline Johnson Hodge, *If Sons, Then Heirs: A Study of Kinship and Ethnicity in the Letters of Paul* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 131-34.

what God did, the miracle of changing lives, their work was nothing. Similarly, Paul writes in 2 Cor 12:11, “I am not at all inferior to these super-apostles, even though I am nothing.” Again, was Paul – the apostle to the Gentiles – truly “nothing”? Or is he saying that, *relative to* the Lord, he is nothing, even as *relative to* the super-apostles he is something?

Another example of Paul relativizing two important works of God is 2 Cor 3:6-11. Here Paul contrasts the glory of Moses’ ministry with the ministry of the Spirit. Though God performed miracles through Moses’ ministry that were unparalleled in history, Paul refers to Moses’ ministry as having no glory now, for “what once had splendour has come to have no splendour at all, because of the splendour that surpasses it.” It all pales in comparison. Moreover, three times Paul uses a *kal vachomer* (“how much more”) argument to compare old covenant and new covenant experiences of the presence and power of God (vv. 8, 9, 11). *Both* are truly glorious revelations of the God of Israel, but one is more glorious than the other. To emphasize the “surpassing glory,” Paul uses language that downplays the Sinai revelation. But it is wrong to mistake this as trivialization of the old covenant glory.<sup>101</sup> It is instead a rhetorical device intended to highlight the greater glory. He refers to something genuinely important to emphasize what is *even more important*. It is likely that Paul used the same rhetorical device when he refers to circumcision and uncircumcision as “nothing.”

Second, Paul’s manner of expression in 1 Cor 7:19, Gal 5:6 and 6:15 is actually very Jewish.<sup>102</sup> Consider, for example, how the prophet Hosea makes the same kind of hyperbolic-comparison statement when he speaks in the name of the Lord, “For I desire steadfast love and not sacrifice, the knowledge of God rather than burnt offerings” (Hos 6:6). Sacrifices were important, for the Lord commanded them, but “steadfast love” was *even more important*. To emphasize this, the Lord states that he does *not* desire sacrifice. The negative statement should be taken as hyperbole; it is a Hebrew rhetorical device.<sup>103</sup>

Third, Paul’s anti-circumcision language (directed at Gentiles) in Galatians can be understood as upholding Jew-Gentile diversity rather than collapsing it, “Circumcising Gentiles would have made Jews and Gentiles all the same. Paul’s vehement rejection of circumcision demonstrates his commitment to maintaining Jews and Gentiles as different and distinct, and militates strongly against seeing Paul’s goal as creating human homogeneity.”<sup>104</sup>

### *Galatians 3:28*

*Replacement Theology* also places much weight on Galatians 3:28 (“There is no longer Jew or Greek . . . for all of you are one in Christ Jesus”), viewing it as evidence that Paul considered

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<sup>101</sup> Scott Hafemann, *Paul, Moses, and the History of Israel: The Letter/Spirit Contrast and the Argument from Scripture in 2 Corinthians 3* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1995), 321-27.

<sup>102</sup> James D. G. Dunn, *Jesus, Paul and the Law: Studies in Mark and Galatians* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 1990), 51. Cf. E. P. Sanders, *Jesus and Judaism* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1985), 260-64; Roger P. Booth, *Jesus and the Laws of Purity: Tradition History and Legal History in Mark 7* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1986), 69-70.

<sup>103</sup> A variation of this is found in the *Letter of Aristeas* 234. Cf. Mark 2:17; 7:15.

<sup>104</sup> Paula Fredriksen, “Judaizing the Nations: The Ritual Demands of Paul’s Gospel,” *New Testament Studies* 56 (2010): 249-50. Also Pamela Eisenbaum, “Paul as the New Abraham,” in *Paul and Politics: Ekklesia, Israel, Imperium, Interpretation*, ed. Richard A. Horsley (Harrisburg: Trinity Press International, 2000), 518; Mark D. Nanos, *The Mystery of Romans: The Jewish Context of Paul’s Letter* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1996), 116 n. 84.

Jewish and Gentile identity to be passé in the Church.<sup>105</sup> But examined more closely, there are numerous holes in this argument.<sup>106</sup> First, the Galatians 3 context has more to do with the justification of Jesus-believing Jews and Gentiles than the erasure of Jewish and Gentile identity (see verses 24-27).<sup>107</sup> Paul makes the same point in Romans 10:10-12, “For one believes with the heart and so is justified and one confesses with the mouth and so is saved . . . . For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek.”<sup>108</sup>

Second, Paul states in Galatians 3:28b that “there is no longer male and female.” But does this mean that male and female distinctions are erased in Christ? On the contrary, Paul distinguishes between men and women in his congregations (1 Cor 11:1-16; 14:34; Eph 5:22-24; Col 3:18; 1 Tim 2:12). The created order with respect to “male and female” (Gen 1:27-28) is not overturned in Christ. This raises the question: if in Paul’s thought the third pair (male and female) is not erased, why should it be concluded that the first pair (Jew and Greek) is erased?

Third, the Greek text of Galatians 3:28 includes the word *heis* (“one”). The NRSV translates verse 28b “for all of you are *one* in Christ Jesus.” What is this oneness from Paul’s perspective? Replacement theologians interpret it as the eradication of all distinction. But there is no direct evidence in the letter to support this. If “male and female” in Galatians 3:28 alludes to “male and female” in Genesis 1:27 where the Torah describes God as the creator of these distinctions, then “one in Christ Jesus” may be compared to the *basar echad* (“one flesh”) between male and female in Genesis 2:24.<sup>109</sup> Here *echad* describes a composite unity (two that are distinct but one). Paul was likely thinking of a Genesis 2 *echad*-like unity in Galatians 3:28. In other words, the relationship between Jew and Gentile in Galatians 3:28 is one of “unity with distinction,” not sameness.

Fourth, Paul refers to Jews and Gentiles (Greeks) in his letters.<sup>110</sup> To Peter, who withdrew from eating with Jesus-believing “Gentiles” (Gal 2:12), he says, “You are a Jew” (Gal 2:14). In Colossians 4:10–11, he refers to Aristarchus, Mark and Justus as “the only ones of the circumcision among my co-workers for the kingdom of God.” By contrast, Titus is a “Greek” (Gal 2:3). In Romans 11:13, Paul writes, “Now I am speaking to you Gentiles” (cf. Rom 4:11–12; Acts 15:23). In 1 Corinthians 7:17-24, Paul describes his “rule in all the Churches”—Jews (the “circumcised”) should remain in their calling as Jews and not assimilate; Gentiles (the “uncircumcised”) should remain in their calling as Gentiles and not take on Jewish identity.

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<sup>105</sup> See Daniel Boyarin, *A Radical Jew: Paul and the Politics of Identity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), 19-23; J. Louis Martyn, *Galatians: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (New York: Doubleday, 1997), 376-77.

<sup>106</sup> See Rudolph, *A Jew to the Jews*, 27-32; Justin K. Hardin, “Equality in the Church,” in *Introduction to Messianic Judaism: Its Ecclesial Context and Biblical Foundations*, ed. David Rudolph and Joel Willitts (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2013), 224-29.

<sup>107</sup> Judith M. Gundry-Volf, “Beyond Difference? Paul’s Vision of a New Humanity in Galatians 3.28,” in *Gospel and Gender: A Trinitarian Engagement with being Male and Female in Christ*, ed. Douglas A. Campbell (London: T & T Clark, 2003), 18-19. Also Pamela Eisenbaum, “Is Paul the Father of Misogyny and Antisemitism?” *Cross Currents* 50:4 (2000–01): 515; Troy W. Martin, “The Covenant of Circumcision (Genesis 17:9-14) and the Situational Antitheses in Galatians 3:28,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 122:1 (2003): 121.

<sup>108</sup> See William S. Campbell, “No Distinction or No Discrimination? The Translation of Διαστολή in Romans 3:22 and 10:12,” *Theologische Zeitschrift* 4:69 (2013): 353-71.

<sup>109</sup> Gundry-Volf, “Beyond Difference?” 31-34; cf. Richard W. Hove, *Equality in Christ? Galatians 3:28 and the Gender Dispute* (Wheaton: Crossway, 1999), 69-76, 107–109; Eisenbaum, “Is Paul the Father of Misogyny and Antisemitism?” 520-21.

<sup>110</sup> See Christopher D. Stanley, “‘Neither Jew Nor Greek’: Ethnic Conflict in Graeco-Roman Society,” *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 64 (1996): 101-24, for a discussion of the term “Greeks.”

Finally, Paul declares in Acts 21:39 (and 22:3), “I am a Jew.” All of this suggests that, for Paul, the Jew-Gentile distinction is preserved, not erased in Christ.<sup>111</sup>

### *1 Corinthians 10:32*

*Replacement Theology* advocates contend that Paul describes the Church in *Third Race* terms in 1 Corinthians 10:32:<sup>112</sup>

Give no offence to Jews or to Greeks or to the Church of God.

An underlying presupposition of this interpretation is the existence of hermetically sealed boundaries between Jews, Gentiles and members of the Church; no overlap is possible.<sup>113</sup>



While the *Third Race* reading has the advantage of being clearly defined, the viability of the model is significantly weakened by Paul’s references to Jesus-believing Jews as “Jews” and Jesus-believing Gentiles as “Gentiles” (1 Cor 1:22, 24; 12:13; Gal 2:3, 12, 14; Rom 11:13; Eph 2:11; Col 4:10–11; Acts 21:39; 22:3).<sup>114</sup> He does not speak of them as “former Jews” and “former Gentiles.” Moreover, there is no direct evidence that the third entity in 1 Cor 10:32 is independent of Jews and Gentiles. It is just as possible, if not more likely given the context, that Paul viewed the third entity as a body of Jews and Gentiles who believed in Jesus.<sup>115</sup> The overlap between the first two categories could be depicted in the following manner:

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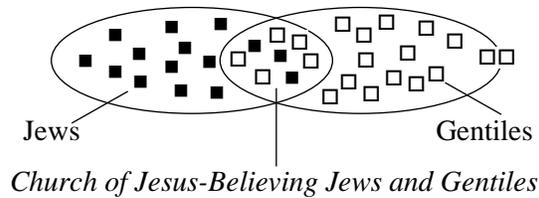
<sup>111</sup> Denise K. Buell, *Why This New Race: Ethnic Reasoning in Early Christianity* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005), 76; Denise K. Buell and Caroline Johnson Hodge, “The Politics of Interpretation: The Rhetoric of Race and Ethnicity in Paul,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 123:2 (2004): 247-50; Kathy Ehrensperger, *Paul and the Dynamics of Power: Communication and Interaction in the Early Christ-Movement* (London: T & T Clark, 2007), 192–93; Gundry-Volf, “Beyond Difference?” 21; Hodge, *If Sons, Then Heirs*, 126-31.

<sup>112</sup> See Wright, *Paul and the Faithfulness of God*, 1447; Bird, *An Anomalous Jew*, 54; Love L. Sechrest, *A Former Jew: Paul and the Dialectics of Race* (London: T & T Clark International, 2009), 156, 161; E. P. Sanders, *Paul, the Law, and the Jewish People* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1983), 173–75.

<sup>113</sup> This section is adapted from Rudolph, *A Jew to the Jews*, 33-35.

<sup>114</sup> See also Paul’s “rule in all the Churches” (1 Cor 7:17-24) which calls the circumcised (Jews) and uncircumcised (Gentiles) to remain in their respective callings. This should inform our reading of 1 Cor 10:32.

<sup>115</sup> See J. Brian Tucker, “Gentiles Identifying with Moses and Israel’s Story in 1 Cor 10:1-13: Evaluating Aspects of the Wright-Hays Interpretive Framework,” in *The Message of Paul the Apostle within Second Temple Judaism*, ed. František Ábel (Lanham: Lexington, 2020), 224; J. Brian Tucker, *You Belong to Christ: Paul and the Formation of Social Identity in 1 Corinthians 1–4* (Eugene: Pickwick, 2010), 81; Peter Richardson, *Israel in the Apostolic Church* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1969), 123.



Viewed in this way, Paul would have seen himself as part of the first category (“Jews”) and the third category (“the Church of God”). Soulen describes this alternative model in the following way:

Traditionally, the Church has understood itself as a spiritual fellowship in which the carnal distinction between Jew and Gentile no longer applies. The Church has declared itself a third and final “race” that transcends and replaces the difference between Israel and the nations . . . The proper therapy for this misunderstanding is a recovery of the Church’s basic character as a table fellowship of those who are – and remain – different. The distinction between Jew and Gentile, being intrinsic to God’s work as the Consummator of creation, is not erased but realized in a new way in the sphere of the Church.<sup>116</sup>

#### *Ephesians 2:15*

Another text often used to validate *Third Race Theology* is Ephesians 2:15. The NRSV translates it:

. . . that he might create in himself *one new humanity in place of the two*, thus making peace.<sup>117</sup>

The NIV renders it:

His purpose was to create in himself *one new man out of the two*, thus making peace . . .

Note that the NRSV translation (“in place of the two”) reflects a *Replacement Theology View* while the NIV rendering (“out of the two”) is consistent with a *One New Man/Jerusalem Council View*. How do we know which translation is more accurate? We need to look at the context and the Greek.

In Ephesians 2-3, there are at least two ways that the writer highlights the continuation of Jewish and Gentile identity in the Church. One is by using “the second person plural pronoun and verb as a way of identifying *Gentiles* in contrast to Jews (Eph 2:11, 12, 13, 17, 19; see also

<sup>116</sup> Soulen, *The God of Israel and Christian Theology*, 169–70.

<sup>117</sup> For a discussion of the first part of the verse—“He has abolished the law with its commandments and ordinances . . .” (Eph 2:15a)—see Lionel J. Windsor, *Reading Ephesians and Colossians after Supersessionism: Christ’s Mission through Israel to the Nations* (Eugene: Cascade, 2017), 134-42; Hardin, “Equality in the Church,” 232; Richard R. Rillera, “Tertium Genus or Dyadic Unity? Investigating Sociopolitical Salvation in Ephesians,” *Biblical Research* (forthcoming). A discussion of the “Paul and the Law” debate is beyond the scope of this essay. See Rudolph, “Was Paul Championing a New Freedom from—or End to—Jewish Law?” 38-50.

3:1).<sup>118</sup> The author of Ephesians also uses the first person plural and *amphoterōi* (“both”) to refer to Jews and Gentiles in Messiah who remain Jews and Gentiles:

...and might reconcile *both groups* to God in one body through the cross, thus putting to death that hostility through it (Eph 2:16).

...for through him *both of us* have access in one Spirit to the Father (Eph 2:18).<sup>119</sup>

The verb in Ephesians 2:18 is present tense, indicating that *both (amphoterōi)* Jewish and Gentile believers continue in their respective identities in the One New Man.

A second way that the writer highlights Jew-Gentile diversity in the Church is by using *sun-/sum-* prefixes in Ephesians 2:19-22, which can be translated as “fellow-,” “together with” or “co-.”<sup>120</sup> The *sun-/sum-* prefixes also occur in Ephesians 3:6, along with *sus-*, to describe Gentile followers of the Messiah who join the people of God as Gentiles. Mark Kinzer translates 3:6 as “the gentiles have become *co-heirs, co-members-of-the-Body, and co-sharers* of the promise in Messiah Jesus through the good news.”<sup>121</sup> In this passage, as well as in Ephesians 2:19, 21 and 22, the *co-* prefix points back to the antecedent, Israel. In other words, the *co-* prefix clarifies that Gentile believers are closely related to Israel without replacing Israel.<sup>122</sup>

It is important to point out that the author of Ephesians did not have to use these prefixes. He could have written that Gentile believers become citizens, heirs, members-of-the-Body and recipients of the promise in Messiah Jesus. However, he wanted to emphasize that all of these blessings are realized in association with the Jewish people. To put it another way, as Lionel Windsor nicely states it, “they were once gentiles *contra* Israel; now they are gentiles *blessed alongside* Israel.”<sup>123</sup>

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<sup>118</sup> Mark S. Kinzer, *Searching Her Own Mystery: Nostra Aetate, the Jewish People, and the Identity of the Church* (Eugene: Cascade, 2015), 67. Cf. David B. Woods, “Jew-Gentile Distinction in the One New Man of Ephesians 2:15,” *Conspectus* 18 (September 2014): 1-41; William S. Campbell, “Unity and Diversity in the Church: Transformed Identities and the Peace of Christ in Ephesians,” *Irish Biblical Studies* 27 (2007): 4-19.

<sup>119</sup> Cf. Eph 2:14.

<sup>120</sup> See Windsor, *Reading Ephesians and Colossians after Supersessionism*, 150-51. Cf. Carl B. Hoch, “The Significance of the *Syn-*Compounds for Jew-Gentile Relationships in the Body of Christ,” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 25:2 (June 1982): 175-83.

<sup>121</sup> Kinzer, *Searching Her Own Mystery*, 80.

<sup>122</sup> See David Rudolph, “Describing the Church in Relation to Israel: The Language of George Lindbeck and Ephesians 2-3” (paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Society of Biblical Literature, Theological Interpretation of Scripture Seminar, San Diego, CA, 23 November 2019), 1-15. Of the 77 times that the term *Israēl* (or “Israelites”) appears in the New Testament, 76 times it contextually refers to the Jewish people. Setting aside Wright’s strained interpretation of Rom 11:26, there is only one instance where the meaning of Israel is in doubt—Gal 6:16. However, it is also not clear from this text that by *Israēl* Paul means the Church. First of all, it might be an example of restrained language since Paul does not write simply *Israēl* but *Israel of God*. In other words, the nuance might be similar to Eph 2:12—a reference to Israel proper (without expropriation) and its eschatologically extended commonwealth (McDermott, *Israel Matters*, 26-28). Alternatively, Paul might be referring to all Israel, the faithful Jewish remnant or even a sub-group of Jewish Christ followers from Jerusalem as Ralph Korner argues. See Ralph J. Korner, *The Origin and Meaning of Ekklesiā in the Early Jesus Movement* (Leiden: Brill, 2017), 221-29; Susan G. Eastman, “Israel and the Mercy of God: A Re-reading of Galatians 6:16 and Romans 9-11,” *New Testament Studies* 56:3 (2010): 367-95; Hans Dieter Betz, *Galatians: A Commentary on Paul’s Letter to the Churches in Galatia* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1979), 323; W. D. Davies, “Paul and the People of Israel,” *New Testament Studies* 24 (1977): 4-39, esp. 10; Peter Richardson, *Israel in the Apostolic Church* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1969), 82-83.

<sup>123</sup> Windsor, *Reading Ephesians and Colossians after Supersessionism*, 226.

Ephesians 2-3 teaches us that the Church is a community of Jews and Gentiles in Messiah who are called to relate to one another in a spirit of interdependence and mutual blessing. In the words of Barth, “The new man is ‘one . . . out of the two’ . . . the new creation is not an annihilation or replacement of the first creation but the glorification of God’s work . . . this man consists of two, that is, of Jews and Gentiles . . . Their historic distinction remains true and recognized even within their communion.”<sup>124</sup>

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<sup>124</sup> Markus Barth, *Ephesians: Introduction, Translation, and Commentary on Chapters 1-3* (Garden City: Doubleday, 1974), 309-10.