



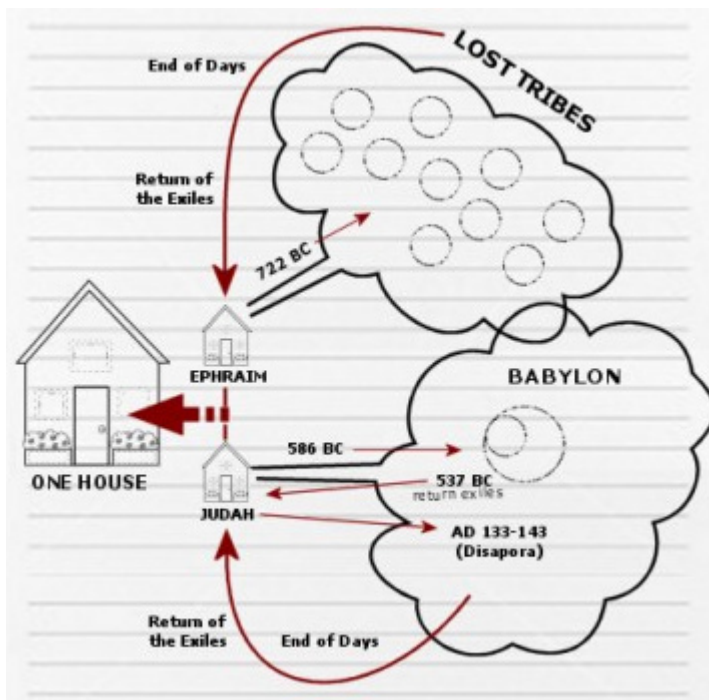
# Two House Theology

## Are Christians the “lost tribes” of Israel?

Generally speaking, the so-called “Two House Theory” (sometimes called the “Ephraimite Movement”) thinks that Christians are actually members of the “lost tribes” of Israel (Ephraim is used as a synonym for the Northern Kingdom of Israel that was taken into captivity in 722 BC). Based on readings from the prophets Ezekiel (Ezek. 37:15-28) and Jeremiah (Jer. 31:31), this doctrine maintains that one day the lost tribes (i.e., the church) will be reunited with the “house” of Judah (i.e., the Jewish people) under the terms of the New Covenant.



For point of reference, here’s a simple drawing I made to illustrate the idea:



How did the linkage between Christians and the “lost tribes” take place? Well, according to Two House Theology, the phrase *zaro yeyeh melo hagoyim* (זָרְעוֹ יִהְיֶה מִלֵּאֲהוּגִים) [“his seed shall become a multitude of nations,” Gen. 48:19] meant that Ephraim would become a multitude of “goyim” (nations). Ephraim eventually became the Northern Kingdom that was taken captive by the Assyrians in 722 BC and dispersed as the “lost tribes” of Israel. Somewhere along the line (no one knows how), these lost tribes became “Christianized,” and therefore these Christians are the “lost tribes” of Israel in disguise.



## A Brief Evaluation...

At the outset it should be noted that the very concept of a “lost tribe” is at best questionable. Scripture is clear that the Jewish people would one day be scattered (Moses prophesied as such: Deut. 4:27-28, 30:1; see also Jer. 30:11; Micah 5:7-8), but is equally clear that they would one day all be *regathered* (Isa. 11:11-12; Jer. 16:14-15; 23:3-8; 31:10; Ezek. 11:17-19; 39:28; Zeph. 3:20). *Before* the exile of the Northern Kingdom, there was significant intermingling of the twelve tribes (2 Chron. 11:3,16, 15:9), so much so that after the Babylonian Exile the term Jew and Israel were used *interchangeably* (Ezra 8:35; 10:25; Neh. 12:47). The idea that the Northern Kingdom of Israel somehow became “Gentiles” after the Assyrian captivity is therefore false. In fact, Ezekiel prophesied that Israel (Ephraim) would be regathered from among the nations in the latter days (Ezek. 37:21), but how does that make sense if the nations (*goyim*) are to be understood as Ephraim? In the New Testament, as well, the term “Israelite” and “Jew” are used interchangeably. Paul calls himself both. When contrasting Israel with the Gentiles in Romans 11, for example, Paul’s doctrine is made incoherent using Two House assumptions. James, the half-brother of Yeshua, also wrote to the “Twelve Tribes” scattered - not to the “Ten Tribes” or to “Ephraim” (James 1:1).

The idea that Ephraim would be a multitude of peoples needs to be compared to Abraham, who was likewise given this blessing and told: *Av-hamon goyim* (אֲבֹת הַגּוֹיִם) -- a play on words to form the name “Abraham.” The “goyim” that issued from Abraham include Midianites, Ammonites, Edomites, Moabites, and other Semitic peoples. If taken literally, we wouldn’t think that these various tribes are “really” part of ethnic Israel. Nor does the word “goy” pertain *exclusively* to Gentile nations. Israel is frequently called *goy kadosh* - “a holy nation” - that will be (ethnically) preserved (as a goy) forever. The LORD says that only if the sun and stars change their fixed order will Israel cease being a nation (*goy*) before Him (see Jer. 31:36). The premise, then, that “goy” always means “Gentile” is simply incorrect.

The Two House doctrine is sort of “Replacement Theology” *in reverse*. In it’s zeal to correct the false teaching that the Church replaces Israel, Two House doctrine goes to the other extreme to claim that Israel replaces the Church. Since Gentiles (*goyim*) within the Church are “really” Ephramites (i.e., Israelites), the end game is to have both “houses” reunited as one in the plan and purposes of God (Ezek. 37:15-28). This, say the Two House followers, is the “mystery” of the “one new man,” which is understood eschatologically rather than presently (i.e., the one house will come in the future).





## Tentative Summary...

Two House Doctrine confuses the idea of “grafting in” of Gentiles into the commonwealth of Israel with the idea of *replacing* the tribes of Israel, which essentially undermines the true unity of the Body of Messiah where there is “neither Jew nor Greek, male nor female,” etc. Though the Church (*ekklesia* of Yeshua) is called “mystery” (i.e., previously unrevealed until the advent of Messiah) and Christians are *partakers* of the covenantal blessings of Abraham, this does not mean that they are literally incorporated into the ethnic nation of Israel. Being spiritually born again doesn’t mean you are *physically* a descendant of a lost tribe of Israel. The *ekklesia* of Yeshua is not physical Israel but a new (καινος) spiritual entity: Messiah’s Kingdom is a spiritual kingdom “not of this world” (John 18:36) and his followers would rule and reign with Him there. God has a plan for both national Israel as well as His church. His promises made to ethnic Israel, beloved on account of the fathers (see Rom. 11:28), will be fulfilled literally in the coming millennial Kingdom of God on earth. The exact role of the “church” during this time is unclear, but it is certain that the church will not be inheriting real estate in the Mideast at that time....

Lastly, the question must be made regarding the *relevance* of this teaching. What practical difference does it make for the follower of the Messiah to believe that he/she is part of ethnic Israel? Will such a belief help you in your daily walk of faith with the LORD?

I would venture to guess that the underlying motivation for the Two House Theology is for its advocates to feel more *identified* with Israel and her destiny. After all, if the promises found in the Hebrew Scriptures are *exclusively* for national, ethnic Israel, the Christian might feel a bit left out of the plan... By equating, then, Christians with the supposed lost tribes, a sense of belonging and inheritance is given -- as well as a deeper appreciation for God’s sovereign plans for the nation of Israel.

