

Evil Incarnate!

Part 7

It was around 1997 when I first received in the mail an attractive magazine, on coated glossy stock paper, and my interest had been such that I subscribed for a year's subscription, it was a quarterly publication. I don't recall the title of the publication but it dealt with the Hebrew Roots of the Christian faith. I renewed for a second year and then elected to not renew my subscription. I had recently purchased a life-time membership to the new Christian Television network known as "Sky Angel". It came with a small dish-antenna with instructions for mounting. The "Sky Angel" channel 1 and 2 was integrated onto the "DISH" network programming, only to cease services ten years later.

The "Sky Angel" network was an all Christian-programming network, and unable to meet the cost demands and technology requirements to stay on the "DISH" network. It was unable to employ legal remedies for its allegations that broadcasters were discriminating against its business model by preventing carriage of their channels. With the availability of having a family friendly Christian programming was great with all of our grandchildren could enjoy on weekend sleepovers! Through the programming on "Sky Angel" we received a number of "Hebrew Roots" programs.

As a pastor, and like any Bible-believing Christian, I am interested in knowing as much as I can learn about Bible history. The Hebrew Roots Movement offered a source of learning that is not found in theological seminaries, curriculum, and course offerings. This segment of "Evil Incarnate" will address all sides of the Hebrew Roots Movement, good, bad, or ugly.

Dr. Craig A. Dunning did a "profile" fact sheet on the Hebrew Roots Movement for Watchman Fellowship. Below the reader will read Dr. Dunning's profile fact sheet.

The "profile" fact sheet mentions the names of Key Figures: Monte Judah, Douglas Nicholson, Michael Rood, Dean and Susan Wheelock, Joseph Good, Tim Hegg, William F. Dankenbring, Mark Biltz, Brad Scott, Ed Chumney.

Organizational Structure: Numerous independent groups.

Group Names: Hebrew Roots, Hebraic Roots, Jewish Roots, Nazarene Judaism, and others

BACKGROUND

The Hebrew Roots Movement (HRM) began in the 20th century and can be difficult to define. One Hebrew Roots (HR) congregation has defined the movement as follows:

Hebrew Roots is a movement emerging around the world that advocates returning to the understanding of the Scriptures, perspectives, and beliefs of first-century faith. We are removed from Protestant Christianity, Rabbinic Judaism, and Messianic Judaism because of core belief differences.

Unfortunately, this definition does not explain the beliefs or practices of the movement, and thus illustrates the difficulty in clearly and succinctly defining the HRM.

Without a binding doctrinal statement, membership and affiliations within the HRM are self-determined.

Members go by a variety of labels – e.g., Hebrew Roots, Hebraic Roots, and Jewish Roots – each having a nuanced emphasis in their system. Some Hebraic Roots congregations present a fairly evangelical doctrinal statement, modified with certain Hebrew words and usually a statement about the obligation to observe the seventh-day Sabbath and other Old Testament (OT) laws. Other congregations may include a much more “Hebraic” statement of faith that also includes a condemnation of the alleged pagan roots of Christian churches evidenced by their observance of Christmas and Easter. Some draw from the Sacred Name movement.

Others do not require the use of the Hebrew form of Jesus’ name. And, while there is a distinction between the two, many HR groups utilize some beliefs/practices of Messianic Judaism.

As a result of these various emphases, there is overlap between HR and non-HR groups, and there may also be a difference in beliefs/practices between HR groups. Recognizing the above caveat, Stephen Katz summarizes HR’s common beliefs this way:

The Hebraic Roots or Jewish Roots movement refers to various organizations with a common emphasis on recovering the original Jewishness of Christianity. This recovery comes through studying the Bible in its Jewish context, observing the Torah, keeping the Sabbath and festivals, avoiding the "paganism" of Christianity, affirming the existence of original Hebrew language gospels and, in some cases, denigrating the Greek text of the New Testament.

The movement seems to have borrowed key beliefs from the Sacred Name Movement, which was based primarily on the theories of A. B. Traina; various Sabbatarian groups, especially the Worldwide Church of God; Messianic Judaism; and think-tanks like the Jerusalem School of Synoptic Research.

By the mid-1980s, Hebrew Roots adherents had coalesced into a distinct movement.

Dean and Susan Wheelock trademarked the name Hebrew Roots® in 1994. By 1998, they had published the first edition of Hebrew Roots Magazine, and Joseph Good had been teaching Hebrew Roots concepts for two decades. The growing awareness of Messianic Judaism and its promotion of Jewish Roots of the faith during the 1980s and 1990s also aided the

Hebrew Roots teachers in gaining teaching venues on television stations like God's Learning Channel; on radio stations in the Midwest and Southwest; and in churches and home groups who had become interested in the Jewish Roots of the faith. Perhaps the most important vehicle for the movement's growth, then and now, is the Internet, which provided a good way to propagate their message and to network with likeminded groups/individuals.

DOCTRINES

Many HR ministries "*seek to inspire believers in Yeshua (Jesus) to study the Word of God, the Holy Scriptures, and thus make God number one in their lives and to be fully equipped with the whole armor of God ...*" Many who have been drawn to the HRM were raised in Christian churches. Perhaps in some cases, they had lost their passion or had grown bored with traditional Christianity before finding new energy and motivation to study the "deeper truths" presented by HRM.

The cultural context of a passage can aid in better understanding a passage. Good commentaries rely on cultural, religious, geographical and linguistic information as tools to more fully explain a specific text. However, critics note that, one must not become more focused on the tools than the text, which may be the overarching danger of the HRM. In addition to the criticism of misplaced emphasis, a greater criticism has been that the HRM confuses "may" with "must." Below are three examples of doctrines/practices found in some expressions of the HRM.

(1) The Use of Hebrew and Elevation of Hebrew Cultural Forms: All HR groups use Jesus' Hebrew "birth name," Yeshua, even while speaking English. Some go as far as requiring the use of "Yeshua:"

(2) We believe that the only true eternal personal Names of the Father and the Son are Yahweh-Yahveh and the Son Yahshua, Yeshua or Yehoshua.

(3) While the spelling is not important, the usage is."

The general rationale for using "Yeshua" rather than "Jesus" falls along two lines: 1) Hebrew names have meanings that are not communicated in translation; and 2) the English word Jesus comes from the compound Greek word Ie-Sous, meaning "hail Zeus," which was a pagan attempt to undermine Yeshua's identity or an effort to entice pagans to embrace Christianity. Many HR groups use Hebrew cultural forms in their meetings: "*We worship in a distinctly Hebraic style in music, dance, keeping the Shabbat [Sabbath] and the biblical Holiday's [sic] and Hebraic liturgy, ...*" This emphasis on Hebraic cultural forms usually includes Hebrew terminology, "messianic" music, and Jewish symbols.

The Obligation of Gentile Believers to Observe the OT Laws: Most HR groups are quick to concede "*no one can be saved nor made righteous by works of the law.*" Yet, Gentiles are required to keep the OT laws for the purpose of fellowship with God:

"We believe that Moshiach Yahshua taught all His true followers both Jew and non-Jew that all

The precepts of written Torah are eternally binding. Moshiach Yahshua, never negated Torah, but expects and commands us to follow Torah (Matthew-Mattityahu 5:17-19), so as to continually express and renew our love for Him by our obedience.”

For some, the explanation is that while the Law is manifest in new ways, the eternal precepts behind the previous manifestations remain because God and the Law are eternal. Others say the law “nailed to the cross” was the “Oral Traditions...”

The other primary ways HR groups obligate Gentiles to keep the Law is through two theological constructs: the One Law theory and Two House theology. One Law teaches that there is one law (Torah), and “that all Jews and Gentiles under the new covenant are called to keep the same Torah in all regards.” The primary argument of One Law is that since believing Gentiles (wild branches) are grafted into the natural branches of the olive tree (i.e., Israel) the Law (except for circumcision) applies to both, thus “One people, One Messiah, One Torah.”

The Two House Theology similarly places Gentile believers under the law, but with a twist. Many Two House proponents teach that the Assyrian captivity caused the Northern Kingdom (i.e., Ten Tribes) to lose their identity, and later dispersions caused these people to assimilate and take on a Gentile identity in their new lands. Thus, many who are coming to the Lord are unwittingly members of the “Lost Ten Tribes.” This return, they suggest, is the restoration of the Two Houses of ancient Israel: Judah and Ephraim. Evidence of this theory is the large number of “Gentiles” who have been drawn to the Hebrew Roots and Messianic Jewish movements. Emphasis on Biblical Holy days, especially Sabbath: Among HR groups the biblical calendar is important, particularly the holy days and the Sabbath outlined in Leviticus 23. The holy days are presented as both obligation (for Jew and Gentile) and prophetic teaching points. The days that are typically emphasized are: the seventh-day Sabbath, Passover, Feast of Weeks, Feast of Trumpets, Day of Atonement, and Tabernacles.

From Dr. Dunning’s Profile of the Hebrew Roots Movement, one can easily see that it reflects the movement is not a homogenous monolithic group and has a mixture of beliefs and doctrines, such as to confuse the reader. When I had “Sky Angel” programming, I was interested in what the movement was all about, and certainly felt I could learn more about the roots of the Christian faith by watching HRM programming. Over the ensuing twenty+ years of tracking the many voices that came on the scene, I sensed many issues that were problematic from a Biblical world-view. One of those troubling individuals was the person of Michael Rood, whose checkered past discredited him as being of a Jewish back-ground, yet posing as an Orthodox Jew, including the ancient dress. I can say that I have studied the HRM for twenty+ years, observed its growth, even it’s infiltrating many Protestant churches, and particularly some Christian television prophecy ministries.

The Hebrew Roots Movement is a contemporary global spiritual movement that advocates the return and adherence to the first century faith of Jesus Christ by seeking a better understanding of the culture, history, and religious-political backdrop of that era which led to the core differences with both the Jewish, and later, Christian communities. The term “Hebrew

Roots” resulted from the journey to investigate and discover the first century faith, but also to distinguish and differentiate itself from other religious organizations that may have common beliefs, which could cause identity confusion in the public eye. The premise of the Hebrew Roots movement is the belief that the Church has veered far from the true teachings and Hebrew concepts of the Bible. The movement maintains that Christianity has been indoctrinated with the culture and beliefs of Greek and Roman philosophy and that ultimately Biblical Christianity, taught in churches today, has been corrupted with a pagan imitation of the New Testament gospels. Actually, this is a “straw-man” issue. Church history shows the exact opposite occurred; however, Jews like to trip up Gentile Christians with this claim.

One of the earliest forms of the Hebrew Roots Movement is seen in the Ebionites, a sect the early church deemed to be a heretical group of Judaizers. They regarded Jesus as the Messiah, but also insisted on the necessity of following Jewish religious law and rites. Since the early 20th century, different religious organizations have been teaching a belief in Jesus Christ as one's personal Saviour and in keeping the Sabbath and the annual Feasts or Holy Days. In other words they preach Christ as Savior but you must keep laws to maintain your salvation. This is a contradiction and not a Biblical definition of salvation, which is by grace alone not by our works. These include Messianic Judaism (to a very limited degree), starting in 1916 and the Sacred Name Movement (SCM) starting in 1937, and the Worldwide Church of God (WCG) in the 1930s. Later they formed what is known today as the Hebrew Roots Movement. Thus far, the (WCG) has had the greatest impact among all organizations in teaching these beliefs, including obedience to much of the Old Testament law, both nationally and internationally. The Worldwide Church of God headed up by Herbert W. Armstrong was instrumental in advocating what is known as “British-Israelism”.

It should be noted that Hebrew Roots Movement theology includes at least seven distinct core differences from Protestantism, Seventh-day Adventism, Rabbinic Judaism, and Messianic Judaism.

The HRM teaches that both the Old and New Testaments are held as holy books, but the Old Testament takes priority over the New Testament. The "Torah" (what they typically call the first five books of the Old Testament) serves as the foundation to all subsequent understanding and interpretation of Scripture. A foundational distinction of the Hebrew Roots movement is the manner in which Scripture is translated and interpreted so that later testimony or the New Testament does not conflict with Torah commandments. It is believed by those in HRM that Jesus Christ did not come to establish a new religion or to “do away” with the law, even though the New Testament clearly teaches that Jesus was ***abolishing the law*** just as the death of a spouse abolishes a marriage -(Ephesians 2:15). They also do not believe that in the advent of the New Covenant through Jesus death on the cross, the Old covenant was made "obsolete" and with the destruction of the temple the Old Covenant would "vanish away" -(Hebrews 8:13). Followers of the Hebrew Roots movement advocate a return to total Torah/Christian Torah-submission.

The Hebrew Roots Movement also teaches that Salvation derives from the belief in Jesus Christ as personal Saviour, not from commandment/Torah keeping; however, believers are rewarded according to their fruits, works, and obedience. Hebrew Roots followers believe that sin is breaking the written Torah -(1st John 3:4), all of the purity laws such as dietary restrictions and Sabbath keeping are in the written Torah, thus it is sin to not keep Sabbath and to eat forbidden food. In the HRM the Law overwrites the Grace and the atoning work of Jesus Christ on the Cross. In other words, Law trumps Grace. It is also true, according to Hebrew Roots Movement followers, that those who are truly born of God will not continue in sin -(1st John 3:9), therefore, if you are not moved to keep Sabbath or keep dietary restrictions, you must not truly be born of God.

This movement also teaches that Old Testament and the Torah Laws teachings of the New Testament are to be obeyed by both Jews and Gentiles. This is paired with a basic lack of understanding that it is impossible to keep the Old Covenant without a tabernacle or temple. This movement relies heavily on the teaching of the law and not the grace of Christ found in the New Testament.

What are some of the basic errors in this movement's theology and teachings?

There is a multitude of errors within the Hebrew Roots Movement ranging from their misinterpreted teaching on the Law and the Gospel to not fully understanding the salvific meaning of the atonement of Christ. Another area of concern is the movement's insistence on keeping the Sabbath day. They follow very closely to the old Law of what is and is not keeping the Sabbath day holy. This while in thought may be good in practice this can lead to legalism and making following the laws of God and Idol over a relationship with Christ.

Another major area of concern is in the theology of the HRM and their understanding of what the Old Testament represents today within the body of Christianity. The HRM's emphasis on the use of the Old Testament as their guide for their religious practices and beliefs miss the entire point of the Old Testament meaning. The Old Testament is the foreshadowing which is pointing to the Messiah, Jesus Christ. Everywhere we look within the Old Testament we see foreshadowing or prophecies of Christ and His coming, death, resurrection and second coming. The Hebrew Roots Movement severely negates this quintessential purpose of the Old Testament and tries to put the use of Old Testament Law over its real purpose.

Some of the other errors in HRM is that it calls for Christians to recognize extra-biblical Jewish books, (Talmud, Zohar, etc.) which are supposed to give a fuller understanding of the Greek New Testament. In fact some within the movement go so far as to proclaim the Hebrew Scriptures are the authentic Scriptures, not the Greek text. The Canon of Scripture is closed and preserved by the Lord in the Greek language. Whether Christians are from Jewish backgrounds or not, we must all recognize the authority of God's Word, as given to us in the Canon of Holy Scripture. No other books can or should be added to this Canon. We do not need extra biblical revelation to be added to God's completed Word.

One could say that this movement by its teaching could be seeking to cast doubt on the faith once delivered to the church by challenging the very Scriptures we have been given by the Lord. They claim Christians can't fully understand the Scripture until we understand the Torah. But the opposite is true. You will not understand the Old Testament (or the Torah) until you have both the New Testament and the Old Testament working together in unison. While the Old Testament is great for pointing to the foreshadowing of the coming Messiah it is not to be our schoolmaster. We are living under the New Covenant of the New Testament.

While in theory there are aspects within the Hebrew Roots Movements teachings that certainly can be beneficial like; seeking to explore the Jewish culture and perspective, within which most of the Bible was written. We can open and enrich our understanding of the Scriptures, adding insight and depth to many of the passages, parables and idioms. There is nothing wrong with Gentiles and Jews joining together in celebrating the feasts and enjoying a Messianic style of worship, for the purpose of learning historical representation of our Christian heritage. The Hebrew Roots Movement itself is riddled with false teachings and misrepresentations of the essentials of the Christian faith under the teachings of the New Covenant of Jesus Christ which we are under today.

We live in some of the most exciting days in human history! One only has to read the newspapers or listen to the news daily to see prophecy being fulfilled. At the same time, Christians around the world are engaging in the quest to restore the foundations of their faith that is the Hebraic faith of Yeshua (Jesus). The movement to restore the Hebrew Roots of Christianity is exploding.

According to Dr. John Garr, Ph.D., publisher of 'Restore' Magazine, *"This reawakening is occurring independently in the lives of believers throughout the world. It is bringing the restoration of the knowledge, practice and study of the biblical, Hebraic roots of Christianity into the faith. This renewed interest in the Hebrew roots of Christianity is one of the greatest and most universal works that the Holy Spirit is producing in the church in this generation. This is affecting the way growing numbers of Christians throughout the world are thinking and acting about their families, their community life, their church relationships, and-most importantly-their relationship with the God of the Bible."* And,, according to Dr, Robert D. Heilder, author, *'The Messianic Church Arising!'* *"The Church is rising up in power and glory that we have not seen since the first century. Jesus is preparing His Bride. The Holy Spirit of God is restoring the covenant roots of His Church."*

When we started our journey studying the Hebrew Roots of our faith, we soon realized that we were only scratching the surface in discovering the treasures hidden in the Bible, and that to better understand the depth and breadth of the Bible's message, a knowledge of what life was like 2000 plus years ago was a must. The Bible was written with a Middle Eastern mindset and we are typically trained to read reason and think from a Greco-Roman perspective. *"Because Christianity has been excised from its Hebraic matrix from which it emerged, its own self-understanding has been so significantly modified that much of the church now suffers from*

an identity crisis,” stated Dr. Garr. This restoration, we believe, will usher in the return of Yeshua for His Bride.

Studying the Scriptures in their Hebraic context not only brings new meaning and deeper understanding, but bridges the gap between Yeshua and where we are today. Realizing this, we set out to understand a culture that no longer exists and is rarely taught in the world today. We studied Israel’s geography, culture, language, family life styles, correct history, Jewish idioms (slang terms), poetry, customs, politics and much more! Our understanding of the Bible was enriched. The perplexing phrases, puzzling actions, the sometimes difficult-to-understand words of Yeshua, the unconventional Feasts and parables came alive with deeper meaning and understanding. We learned about the pattern of worship the LORD wants His people to follow, and the prophetic nature of the Feasts of the LORD. We learned many things that have made the words of Yeshua more meaningful and clearer. As a result, we changed our worship services and lifestyles to become more Biblical—the way it was intended. Our whole objective is to bring us into a closer relationship with our Saviour by learning as much about Him as we can, through the people and time period in which He lived. It binds the Old and New Testaments together and further shows the relevance of the Bible to today’s modern problems and lifestyles.

The Living Word is not alone in this change. We are part of a world-wide Holy Spirit inspired movement and join thousands of other ministries seeking to learn and restore what was originally given to the first century church—Jewish and non-Jewish believers in Jesus as Messiah. We believe that it is the fulfillment of the prophecy in Ephesians 2:14, 15—“Jew and Gentile worshiping together in Spirit and in Truth.” In fact, each year thousands of believers from over 100 nations come to Jerusalem to celebrate the Feast of Tabernacles or Succoth. The common thread among this diverse group of people is Hebrew Roots and its restoration to the church. We believe that this is part of the LORD’s plan to prepare the Church for His return. It is the fastest growing movement in the world today.

Does this mean we must become more Jewish and begin practicing the rites of Judaism? Must we wear the garments that are considered holy to the Jewish people? Should we begin to practice the Mosaic Law? No, certainly not! The book of Hebrews makes it abundantly clear that we are under a new covenant and the laws are now written on our hearts. The prophecy in Isaiah says that the law will go forth from Zion—Mosaic law springs from Mount Sinai. It is a faith issue, not a performance issue. However, in order to better understand what Yeshua was saying and to gather a deeper appreciation and understanding of the Scriptures, we study them in their original, Hebraic context.

“The wind of the Holy Spirit is truly blowing across the world bringing the Biblical understandings of the Gospels to the forefront and into the hearts of all believers. In these end times, as the church age comes to a close, this reawakening is occurring in lives of believers and cannot be traced to any single identifiable human source.”- Dr. Garr. This worldwide restoration movement of our Hebraic heritage is truly what “the Spirit is saying to the church.” We pray that the Lord will give each one of us “ears to hear and the ability to understand. Dr. Richard

Booker and Dr. John Garr are respected authors who strive to present a balanced approach to the HRM.

But others such as Theodore Shoebat point out that, if the HRM is original Christianity, then where are the historic Hebrew Roots churches in Syria and Egypt? In the Scriptures it says, ***“The apostles and elders and brethren send greeting unto the brethren which are of the Gentiles in Antioch and Syria and Cilicia.”*** -(Acts 15:23).

So we know that the Apostles put churches in Syria, so when we go to Syria to see the oldest Christian communities, how come none of them are Hebrew Roots? Some will say that that came as a result of Constantine, but show in the historical record, when and how the Hebrew Roots were replaced. You will not find it, because there is none.

Theodore Shoebat is saying, “Be careful, there is a difference between the Hebrew Roots Movement from simply Christians being Messianic. For example, Zola Levitt (who passed away) was Messianic and his teaching is different from what we call Hebrew Roots teaching.

There is no problem in connecting the relationship between our faith and the Jewish faith, but the Hebrew Roots Movement is going downhill into denial of the Trinity.

But much of what is said has already been documented in much of the Church history. Pesach (Passover) is Pasch and is known as the Paschal Mystery and has always been part of the Christian fabric. The Hebrew Roots gets into all sorts of dangerous theological errors.

Some in the HRM are way over the edge in their denial of the Trinity and seem to know Jesus only in the flesh. As we will see, this movement is an idea, a view, an attitude, or a philosophy; a shared concept that Jewish traditions and Judaism are far superior for the church, a sure fire way to a deeper sanctification and with some, possibly even salvation.

It’s hard to define the HRM because it is so diverse and made up of so many disparate groups and individuals. It’s a moving target. It’s a vast smorgasbord of everything from scholarship, as in the Jerusalem School of Synoptic Research, to so-called Third Questers, to individuals practicing subjective pop (make-it-up-as-you-go) Judaism. It can even include the medieval mystical Kabbalah, with its esoteric numerology. More often than not there are no distinctions made between the Old Covenant and the New Covenant or between the Bible and the Talmud. This movement can impose legalism with a vengeance or in some instances may simply suggest Jewish practices that they say will give us deeper insight and understanding as well as make us more “authentic” believers.

Here, then, is a loose definition of the Hebrew Roots Movement. It is a very modern movement that insists that we must resurrect first-century Judaism (our Jewish Roots) and the milieu and lifestyle of first-century Jews and impose them on both Jewish and non-Jewish believers. This is not just an academic study to better understand Scripture and its setting but is rather a movement of restoration that claims that the church has moved off its Jewish foundation and must return to a more Jewish way of life to be authentic.

Although there is great benefit in studying the archaeology, geography, sociology, religion, and customs of the ancient Biblical world, it does not follow that we must reinstitute and copy those times, replete with language, customs, and even dress.

It is obvious in much of the HRM that it's not just the study of the first century for interpretation, information, and illumination that carries the day but keeping the traditions and practices of the Jewish Talmud, which was completed long after Jesus in the years 400-500 - (*The Encyclopedia of Jewish Religion*, Holt, Rinehart and Winston, New York, 1965, pg. 374). Actually, there are two Talmuds, namely the Babylonian Talmud and the Palestinian Talmud. The two Talmuds vary in many of their customs, traditions, and practices.

Jewish believer Stephen Katz expresses his concerns when he says, *"Much of the Jewish Roots Movement is actually based on later Jewish/rabbinic tradition. More importantly, the question of whether Gentiles need to add Jewish lifestyle and return to Jewish roots was settled by the Jerusalem Council described in Acts 15. The remarkable news of the Gospel is that, in Y'shua, Jews and Gentiles have direct access to God"* -(*The Jewish Roots Movement: Flowers and Thorns,*" -(March 1, 2001).

In practice, many promoters of the HRM draw their content more from Talmudic Judaism than from Old or New Testament Judaism.

As Bible-believing Christians we can easily compare and contrast the teachings that are relevant to believers. In this segment we will examine the many areas that raise serious questions about our involvement with the Hebrew Roots Movement.

"And if ye be Christ's, then are ye Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise." – (Galatians 3:29).

You will do well to note that when Jesus started His Church, there were no gentile believers or converts. Every single one of them was a Jew. As a result, I have a deep and abiding love for the true Jewish people, descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob; and, for the only piece of ground on this earth that God has ever called holy, and that is the literal, physical nation of Israel. This should be the mindset of every true follower of Jesus.

"I shall build my church, and the gates of Hell shall not prevail against it". Jesus came to this earth as the promised Messiah to the Jews, and in accordance with the Hebrew prophets, He was rejected and put to death. Speaking of the coming Messiah, the prophet Isaiah said this:

"He is despised and rejected of men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief: and we hid as it were our faces from him; he was despised, and we esteemed him not. Surely he hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows: yet we did esteem him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted. But he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities: the

chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed." –(Isaiah 53:1-3).

"By His stripes we are healed..."

So when He was rejected, as He must be, He turned to the gentiles...and the gentiles received His word with gladness. Thus was born the Church, made up of both Jewish and Gentile believers, following not the Law of Moses, but rather the teaching of Jesus. Because of their rejection, God hit the "pause button" on the Jews, and did not allow the final week of Daniel's prophecy of the 70 weeks to continue. Paul talks about this mystery in the book of Romans where he says this: ***"I say then, Have they stumbled that they should fall? God forbid: but [rather] through their fall salvation [is come] unto the Gentiles, for to provoke them to jealousy."*** –(Romans 11:11).

Paul further goes on to say that the day would come when God would once again turn His full attention back to Israel, and redeem them:

"For I would not, brethren, that ye should be ignorant of this mystery, lest ye should be wise in your own conceits; that blindness in part is happened to Israel, until the fulness of the Gentiles be come in. And so all Israel shall be saved: as it is written, There shall come out of Sion the Deliverer, and shall turn away ungodliness from Jacob: For this [is] my covenant unto them, when I shall take away their sins." –(Romans 11:25, 26).

These are the true roots of Christianity and the Christian's relationship to the Jew. But there are those who seek to pervert that relationship, and add layers of law and works to it where none exists in the Scriptures. This new movement is called Hebrew Roots, and while it uses words and phrases from the Bible and Jewish culture, there is nothing either Jewish or Christian about this group as you will see.

Many of you will naturally ask, why haven't I heard about the Hebrew Roots movement?

As a rule, this spreading wave of false doctrine is not being addressed by the church. This is due to several reasons:

- There is a fear of appearing anti-Semitic
- The depth of the movement's doctrinal heresies is not generally known
- There is within the church in general a reluctance to address false doctrine of any type

The movement usually hides their beliefs and presents itself as simply seeking to educate Christians concerning their Jewish heritage. As they become acclimated to the Jewish orientation the more aberrant doctrines are slowly introduced. It does not take long for the warning signs to surface.

Some of the warning signs include:

- All Christians must adhere to a kosher diet
- The Sabbath can only be observed on Saturdays
- The Jewish festivals and holidays must still be observed today

The root of their symptomatic heresies is hermeneutic (having to do with the methodology used to interpret Scripture) in nature. The Protestant Reformers used a grammatical-literal hermeneutic when interpreting Scripture. In other words, it means what it says unless there is a significant reason to believe otherwise. This movement uses a grammatical-historical hermeneutic with a twist. Their underlying assumptions when approaching any scripture are:

- Whatever God has ever commanded of those who seek Him (i.e., the Jews, their ancestors, their descendants, and Christians) is still in effect today (including the Levitical law)
- Gentile followers of Christ were "grafted into" the Jews which they interpret to mean that Gentiles must assume Jewish customs if they really want to mature and please God
- Like all cults, the Hebrew Roots Movement has their own "version" of the Bible, which of course, is the only version you are allowed to use.

Based on those unquestionable assumptions, they then decide how they can best interpret a given Scripture to support those beliefs. The farther down this rabbit hole they go, the more bizarre their doctrines become. Many see the New Testament as inferior to the Old (or a conspiracy by the Catholic Church). More still say that Paul's teachings are contrary to Christ (since they have trouble with his obvious statements against their beliefs) and, therefore, reject his epistles as Scripture. Paul's letters are major issues for the (HRM) Some say that the only reason we aren't still sacrificing animals and stoning people for their sins is because there is no Temple and no Sanhedrin. But when they are restored then these will resume. Others go so far as to eventually reject Jesus as the Messiah and simply say that He was just a Rabbi. The inevitable outcome of following this train of thought is to put people back into bondage to the Law.

The proof is in the Scripture they point out:

"But there rose up certain of the sect of the Pharisees which believed, saying, That it was needful to circumcise them, and to command [them] to keep the law of Moses. And the apostles and elders came together for to consider of this matter." –(Acts 15:5)

The issue of how to treat the gentile believers is not a new question in our day, the Apostles themselves dealt with this issue on more than one occasion. Acts 15 shines ample light on not only the question, but the answer as well. As we read in Acts 15, we see the Bible "heavyweights" like Paul and Barnabas called on the carpet along with the rest of the apostles

to figure this out. And as with most issues in the church, the whole problem started with a small handful of troublemakers:

"And certain men which came down from Judaea taught the brethren, [and said], Except ye be circumcised after the manner of Moses, ye cannot be saved." –(Acts 15:1)

A few bad apples... Now, we are not told who these troublemakers are, but it was sufficient to throw a monkey wrench into the whole deal:

"When therefore Paul and Barnabas had no small dissension and disputation with them, they determined that Paul and Barnabas, and certain other of them, should go up to Jerusalem unto the apostles and elders about this question." –(Acts 15:2)

And deal with it they did... ***"And when there had been much disputing, Peter rose up, and said unto them, Men [and] brethren, ye know how that a good while ago God made choice among us, that the Gentiles by my mouth should hear the word of the gospel, and believe. –(Act 15:8) "And God, which knoweth the hearts, bare them witness, giving them the Holy Ghost, even as [he did] unto us;" –(Act 15:9) "And put no difference between us and them, purifying their hearts by faith."*** –(Acts 15:7-9)

They acknowledged that while the gentile does not become a Jew when believing on the Messiah, the line of division between them no longer exists. From God's perspective then, there is no difference between a Jewish and Gentile believer in Christ. But they didn't stop there, they continued on to answer this question in a most resolute and final way. The Apostles settle this question once and for all:

"Now therefore why tempt ye God, to put a yoke upon the neck of the disciples, which neither our fathers nor we were able to bear? But we believe that through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ we shall be saved, even as they. Then all the multitude kept silence, and gave audience to Barnabas and Paul, declaring what miracles and wonders God had wrought among the Gentiles by them." –(Acts 15:10-12)

Peter is so bold that he stuns them all into silence, and uses this time to allow Paul and Barnabas to recount all the awesome 'miracles and wonders that God had wrought among the Gentiles by them'. Just when you think it can't get any more intense that it already is, James steps in begins to wrap it up:

"And after they had held their peace, James answered, saying, Men [and] brethren, hearken unto me: Simeon hath declared how God at the first did visit the Gentiles, to take out of them a people for his name. And to this agree the words of the prophets; as it is written, After this I will return, and will build again the tabernacle of David, which is fallen down; and I will build again the ruins thereof, and I will set it up: That the residue of men might seek after the Lord, and all the Gentiles, upon whom my name is called, saith the Lord, who doeth all these things. Known unto God are all his works from the beginning of the world." –(Acts 15:13-18)

Then, the knockout blow:

"Wherefore my sentence is, that we trouble not them, which from among the Gentiles are turned to God: But that we write unto them, that they abstain from pollutions of idols, and [from] fornication, and [from] things strangled, and [from] blood. For Moses of old time hath in every city them that preach him, being read in the synagogues every Sabbath day." -(Acts 15:19-21)

In an amazing display, James through the Holy Spirit, tells us once and for all what God expects from Gentile believers...and it is not to be placed under the Law of Moses. There exists no evidence in the New Testament that mandates that any Gentile believer observe Jewish holidays, eat kosher foods or worship only on the Sabbath day. What was the reaction from the entire assembled group of elders? They said this:

"Forasmuch as we have heard, that certain which went out from us have troubled you with words, subverting your souls, saying, [Ye must] be circumcised, and keep the law: to whom we gave no [such] commandment: It seemed good unto us, being assembled with one accord, to send chosen men unto you with our beloved Barnabas and Paul, Men that have hazarded their lives for the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. We have sent therefore Judas and Silas, who shall also tell [you] the same things by mouth. For it seemed good to the Holy Ghost, and to us, to lay upon you no greater burden than these necessary things; That ye abstain from meats offered to idols, and from blood, and from things strangled, and from fornication: from which if ye keep yourselves, ye shall do well. Fare ye well." -(Acts 15:24-29)

Did you catch that line? Go back and reread the Apostles themselves saying that they never gave any such commandment for Gentiles to be placed under the Law of Moses. Never ever. Do you believe the Bible? Don't take my word for it, look it up and read it for yourself...

The believer in Christ is not called to law, but to freedom in Jesus. And for those who still need further proof, Paul provides it in Galatians 2:

"But when Peter was come to Antioch, I withstood him to the face, because he was to be blamed. For before that certain came from James, he did eat with the Gentiles: but when they were come, he withdrew and separated himself, fearing them which were of the circumcision. And the other Jews dissembled likewise with him; insomuch that Barnabas also was carried away with their dissimulation. But when I saw that they walked not uprightly according to the truth of the gospel, I said unto Peter before [them] all, If thou, being a Jew, livest after the manner of Gentiles, and not as do the Jews, why compellest thou the Gentiles to live as do the Jews? We [who are] Jews by nature, and not sinners of the Gentiles, Knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law, but by the faith of Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Jesus Christ, that we might be justified by the faith of Christ, and not by the works of the law: for by the works of the law shall no flesh be justified." -(Galatians 2:11-16)

The roots of Christianity grow deep in Jewish culture, and it is highly recommended that all Christians learn about the Jewish feast days, holy days and other customs. They will only deepen our appreciation and understanding of our common ancestry that we have, Gentiles together with Jews. But to suggest that any Gentile believer who follows Jesus must be placed under Old Testament law is nothing but bondage, and it's a bondage that the Bible speaks against not only in the verses quoted here, but in many other places as well. Regarding the freedom we have in Christ, let me leave you with this verse from the Master himself:

"If the Son therefore shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed." –(John 8:36)

Four years ago, G. Richard Fisher of "The Berean Call" took time to address the growing Hebrew Roots Movement. His words follow and help us to clarify if not step into the mind fields of the HRM.

"The old hymn "I Would Be Like Jesus" has a chorus that has the hymn singers assert, "Be like Jesus, this my song, in the home and in the throng; Be like Jesus all day long! I would be like Jesus."

Many Christians don't realize that there is a battle being waged between Jewish externals and rituals as a means of spirituality and sanctification and truly biblical means that are internal heart issues. None would argue that being more like Jesus is a very commendable goal. After all, we are to constantly look to Him -(Hebrews 12:2) and see Him as our ultimate example -(1st Peter 2:21).

But with every journey in life we must decide how we are going to get there. The larger issue of being like Jesus is: What does it really mean? What does it look like? and Just how is it accomplished?

The late Jewish scholar and researcher of first century life in Israel, David Flusser, said rightly; *"Jesus was a Jew in every way"* (Jewish Sources in Early Christianity, Adama Books, New York, 1987, pg.7). There is absolutely no denying that Jesus was born a Jew and lived an observant Jewish life. He did this to fulfill completely every demand of the law, He did it for us - (Romans 8:1-4) and He continues to do it in us if we are true believers.

So if we want to be like Jesus, does that mean that we must become observant Jews, as some allege? Is that what being like Jesus really means? Should Gentile believers try to be Messianic Jews? Can they? Should Gentiles don a yarmulke, worship in a synagogue, blow a shofar, wear a prayer shawl, call Jesus Yeshua or Yeshu, keep the Old Testament feasts and dietary laws, and give their pastors the title of Rabbi, even though Matthew:23:8 says otherwise? Are Jewish ceremonies and practices efficacious?

Do we need to restore first century or later Jewish practices to really be good Christians? The Pharisees practiced all the ceremonies, but theirs is a cautionary tale since Jesus told them that they did these things in vain -(Matthew 15:7-9, See also Matthew 23).

So, is Jewishness next to godliness? One very modern movement would answer the question with a loud—“yes, more or less!” This growing movement is called the Hebrew Roots Movement (HRM). Unfortunately, it lacks a shared, coherent, consistent theology, an internal mechanism of doctrinal control, and it is filled with mavericks that seem to be making it up as they go along in terms of attachment to Jewish accoutrements.

Messianic Jewish believer Stan Telchin sees the imposition of Jewish law and practice on Gentiles as one of the more troubling aspects of the Messianic Jewish Movement: “I know that the overwhelming majority of Jewish believers do not attend Messianic synagogues. It has been suggested that less than five percent of the Jewish believers in the United States attend them....Many Jewish people who I have brought to such synagogues have told me they felt as though they were looking at a caricature—an imitation and not the real thing” (Messianic Judaism Is Not Christianity, Chosen Books, Grand Rapids, MI, 2004, pg. 83).

If Telchin’s statistics are even close, it means that up to 95 percent of the attendees at Messianic synagogues are Gentiles and only 5 percent are Jews. This tells us that Gentiles are being “converted” to forms of Judaism that even many Jews reject. That turns Acts 15 on its head. The really big question that Hebrew Roots teachers must answer is, “Why are there far more Gentile believers than Jews in Messianic synagogues and Messianic fellowships?”

This imposition of Jewish practice on non-Jewish believers really does constitute a serious issue that promotes elitism, unnecessary division, wide confusion, and unbiblical practices. We can almost understand Jews who convert to Christ who still try to keep some of the cultural aspects and celebrations of their familial heritage. If their intentions and motives are not legalistic, and if these things are not done for salvation or out of religious elitism, there may be some minor benefit. Yet to impose them on Gentiles (as is the case, more often than not) is a direct violation of Paul’s words to the Colossians: “So let no one judge you in food or drink, or regarding a festival or a new moon or Sabbaths, which are a shadow of things to come, but the substance is of Christ” -(2:16-17). So Paul tells the Gentiles at Colossi that they are not to let anyone force Judaism on them. Didn’t Paul tell the Ephesians that saved Jews and Gentiles were now one new body and one new man—the church -(Ephesians 3:1-8)?

We have already mentioned the very confusing practice of superimposing the later Talmud and Talmudic traditions on New Testament believers (Jew or Gentile). Isn’t this as serious as any of the extra-biblical books imposed on cult followers? Some of the Talmud has nothing to do with the New Testament and only reflects later Judaism without a land, a temple, a priesthood, or a sacrifice.

The Hebrew Roots Movement is cavalier and does nothing as far as the above cautions. The use of later rabbinical material must be done with much care, that is, sparingly and judiciously. We must be sure that it can be verified and corroborated by earlier or contemporary sources. It is our only safety. If we are unsure of a later source, would it not be dangerous to add it to the Bible -(Revelation 22:18-19)?

One very important and urgent issue that the Hebrew Roots Movement never addresses is— which Judaism? This is the elephant in the room.

It would be more correct to speak of Judaisms. There were different streams of Judaism in the first century. Is it to be the religious Pharisees? And, if so, is it the school of Shammai or Hillel? Or is it the religion of the Sadducees? Why not the Judaism of the Zealots or the Herodians? Is it to be the Judaism of John the Baptist? Better yet, the purists—the separatists called the Essenes. As has been mentioned, any first-century Judaism of any stripe cannot be fully practiced since there is no temple, no priesthood, and no animal sacrifices. Some in the Hebrew Roots Movement seem to be enamored with modern Orthodox Jews. But the large and unanswered question is: which Orthodox group?

In the complex world of Jewish Orthodoxy, there are a myriad of competing groups with different dress and different traditions, all claiming to have their corner on the truth. A few of the somewhat cloistered groups in Jerusalem are the Ger Hassidic Dynasty, the Belz Hassidic Dynasty, the Karlin Stoliner Hassidic sect, the Breslav Hassidic Dynasty, the Samar Hassidic Dynasty, the Chabad Hassidic sect, and the Neturi Karta. (For details, differences, and dynamics of these groups, see *The Mysteries of Jerusalem*, Adam Ackerman, Multipress, Jerusalem, 2007, pgs. 61-77). Which one is right?

There is an almost total ignoring by the Hebrew Roots Movement teachers of two-thirds of the New Testament, namely the Epistles of Paul (as well as the other Epistles). There is some tipping of the hat to selective pieces of Romans that in their view speak of Abraham and also of being grafted into Judaism, or Jewish Roots. It is clear that being grafted into Israel has to do with Abrahamic and Messianic blessings—not cloning or trying to act like Jews. These spiritual privileges are real spiritual and eternal blessings. They do not mean dressing up and pretending to be of some other nationality or religion.

Gentile believers have received the Word of God, the Messiah, and His salvation. Being grafted into Abraham's blessings is as beautiful and as simple as Gib Martin and Larry Richards explain: ***"The olive tree...is a familiar and beautiful part of the landscape of Israel. It is a symbol of both strength and blessing."*** David penned in Psalm 52:8

"I am like a green olive tree in the house of God; I trust in the mercy of God forever and ever'....Paul uses the branch of an olive tree to picture what God has done in grafting in the gentiles, the 'wild olive tree" -(Romans 11:17) "into the cultivated olive tree, Israel". In Paul's metaphor, some of the olive tree's branches were broken off and wild shoots were grafted into the tree. God was turning the Gentiles into fruit-bearing people....Paul is pointing them to the very source of their lives: God. God is the Keeper of the vineyard, the ultimate Gardener (The Book of Romans, Thomas Nelson, Nashville, TN, 2007, pg. 168).

Ignoring the Epistles is one way to avoid a deluge of material about New Testament church life, church structure, church officers, church practices, and beliefs. It's no wonder that those in Hebrew Roots have a truncated and skewed message. I say this with sadness.

What we are dealing with is both foundational and fundamental. Is it to be synagogue or church? The Jews had a practice that if anyone professed Christ they were to be thrown out of the synagogue -(John:9:22). Yet those in the HRM would try to pretend that synagogues are good places to be—or at least to emulate or push their way back in. Can we merge church and synagogue? Should we? We need to remember that Jesus said clearly, ***“On this rock I will build my church.”*** He did not say, “I will build my synagogue.”

Is it to be law or grace? The Book of Galatians deals with that in great detail. However, as I said, the Epistles are neglected and ignored, and Galatians is skipped over. It is interesting to note that Paul told the Galatians that a trip back to Judaism indicated that they had become both ***“foolish”*** and ***“bewitched”*** -(Galatians 3:1). The word ***“bewitched”*** is the Greek root ***baskano***, and it means to be allured and drawn into false doctrine.

Is it Old Covenant or New Covenant? If it was anything but New Covenant, Jesus would have never said at His last supper, ***“For this is My blood of the new covenant which is shed for many for the remission of sins”*** (Matthew 26:28). This is repeated in Mark 14:24 and Luke 22:20.

The repetition must be there for a good reason. Jesus must have known that some would ignore much of the New Covenant or get the two covenants confused. Is it the Passover or the Lord's Supper? Paul reminded the Corinthians what the Passover stood for and what was really central: ***“For indeed Christ our Passover was sacrificed for us”*** -(1 Corinthians 5:7). It's clear that all the Old Testament ceremonies, symbols, and feasts were types and shadows pointing to Jesus -(Colossians 2:16-23, Hebrews:10:1-10).

Is it Saturday or Sunday? Saturday (the seventh day) was clearly attached to the finishing of the Old Creation -(Genesis 2:1-3). Sunday, the first day of the new week celebrates the Resurrection and the new creation in Christ. Christians are a new creation -(2nd Corinthians:5:17).

Is it Jewish externals and superficial ritual purity or internal cleansing and heart purity? Psalm 51 answers that question clearly: ***“Sacrifice you did not desire or I would give it; You do not delight in burnt offering. The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit, a broken and a contrite heart—these, O God, You will not despise”*** (verses 16-17).

This brief article is not intended to be an exhaustive analysis of the Hebrew Roots Movement. For now we are just asking questions. We hope to offer corrections to many aberrant practices and deal more fully with some of the issues raised in this piece. Earlier I mentioned Michael Rood, who has made himself a life and income passing off as a rabbi. Another one we need to be cautious of is Jonathan Cahn. Stay tuned.

Pastor Bob,
EvanTeachr@aol.com