

# **Toward Paul's Ephesians 2 Vision of the One New Man: Navigating Around Hebrew Roots and Replacement Theologies**

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Tens of thousands of Gentile followers of Yeshua have participated in the Messianic movement since the 1970s and have embraced aspects of Jewish life. Often it begins with a visit to a Shabbat service and then a Jewish festival. Next, wearing a *tallit*, keeping kosher, and hanging a *mezuzah* by the front door. How are these life-changing decisions made? What are the motivations involved? And what principles guide the Gentile believer's approach to observing Jewish traditions? My ad hoc experience has been that few Gentile believers receive from Messianic synagogue leaders the theological and practical guidance necessary to help them navigate Jewish life as non-Jews. As a result, many Messianic Gentiles turn to Hebrew Roots/One Law teachers for answers to their questions.<sup>1</sup> Hebrew Roots/One Law will be explained below. For now, think in terms of slogans: "We should walk in the way of the Master who kept Torah!" "They are not Jewish festivals; they are God's festivals!" "The Church's days of worship are pagan!" "We should be celebrating God's feasts today since everyone will be doing so in the future!" This popular way of thinking among non-Jews in the Messianic movement, and our lack of addressing it in a consistent way as Messianic Jewish leaders, has naturally (and unintentionally) resulted in judaizing Gentiles.<sup>2</sup>

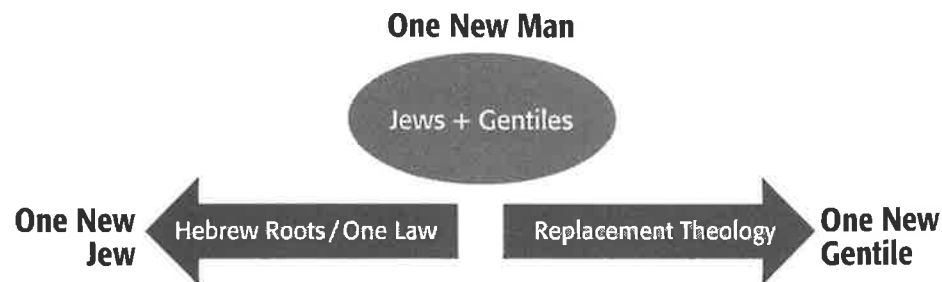
On the church side, Gentile Christians have trended in the opposite direction due to the pervasiveness of Replacement Theology in the pulpit. Contempt for Judaism has been integral to Christian theology for almost two millennia, and reassessments prompted by post-Holocaust Jewish-Christian dialogue and renewalist Christianity are in developmental stages. Gentile Christians today often appropriate emblems of Jewish identity in their worship and interpretation of Scripture, and disregard the covenantal meanings of these symbols for Jews. In this way, Gentile Christians (often without realizing it) replace Jews. This displacement dynamic prompts the question: If every Christian is a true Jew, why does the Church need genealogical Jews? The on-the-ground reality is that Replacement Theology leads to gentilizing Jews through the expropriation,

<sup>1</sup> There are also many Gentile believers who visit Messianic synagogues after being influenced by Hebrew Roots/One Law Theology.

<sup>2</sup> Judaizing is defined here as encouraging Gentile Christians to take on Jewish-specific customs, especially those that have been historically regarded as Jewish boundary markers of identity (e.g., the seventh-day Sabbath, festivals, and dietary laws), because it is God's will or ideal to do so.

spiritualization, stigmatization, and deterritorialization of authentic Jewish identity. As a result, it is unusual to see pastoral care for Jews in the local church in a way that affirms their Jewish identity and helps them to become better Jews.

As a Messianic Jew who has been actively involved in the Messianic movement for over 45 years and works as a professor of New Testament and Jewish Studies at a Christian university, I long to see Jewish and Gentile identity affirmed in both wings of the body of Messiah. The aim of this article is to argue that we should avoid the aforementioned extremes—Hebrew Roots/One Law and Replacement Theologies—and instead work toward realizing Paul’s Ephesians 2 vision of the One New Man,<sup>3</sup> made up of Jews and Gentiles in Messiah, who affirm each other in their respective identities, and as brothers and sisters in the Lord.<sup>4</sup> This leads to much partnership, fruitfulness and peace in the kingdom of God. I also want to show how Hebrew Roots/One Law and Replacement Theologies 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.



Why is the One New Man an overarching vision we should be working toward? Consider that Paul spotlights the One New Man in Ephesians 2:11–22. By graphically describing Yeshua’s death on the cross breaking down barriers between Jews and Gentiles, and “making *shalom*,”<sup>5</sup> Paul encourages Gentile believers to see their new identity, and their destiny, as joined to Israel. As in a marriage, the two become one and yet remain distinctly two.<sup>6</sup> The One New Man represents the reconciliation of Jew and Gentile in Messiah, and a grand vision to build God’s “holy temple” together, a “spiritual dwelling-place of God” (vv. 16, 21–22 CJB). Second, the One New Man is the fulfillment of Yeshua’s

3 “Man” is used here in the sense of “Person” or “Humanity.” See Eph 2:15.

4 The term “Gentile” corresponds to the Hebrew word *goy*, which means “nation” or someone from a nation other than Israel (i.e., the Jewish people), in most cases.

5 See Barney Kasdan, *Rabbi Paul Enlightens the Ephesians on Walking with Messiah Yeshua: A Messianic Commentary* (Clarksville: Lederer Books, 2015), 41–42; Stephen E. Fowl, *Ephesians: A Commentary* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2012), 90–96.

6 Replacement Theology maintains that the One New Man replaces the two. “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. . . . [A]lthough there is a ‘new humanity,’ there is no reference to the replacement of Israel. On the contrary, the new humanity is comprised of ‘both’ (ἀμφότεροι [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).

prayer in John 17, “Father, the time has come. . . . I am not praying only on their behalf, but also on behalf of those who believe in me through their testimony, that they will all be one . . . I in them and you in me—that they may be completely one, so that the world will know that you sent me” (John 17:1, 20–23 NET).

### Unity and Diversity in God’s Kingdom

Besides Ephesians 2, other texts in the New Testament remind us that God desires unity and diversity in his kingdom. Acts 15 is the most foundational passage because it tells us about a council convened by the apostles in c. 49 CE that directly addressed the question of whether Gentiles had 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>7</sup> and Paul’s letters, demonstrate that Gentile believers were expected to keep universal Torah ethics (e.g., 1 Cor 5–10).<sup>8</sup>

The Jerusalem Council in Acts 15 also has implications for Jewish followers of Yeshua. After all, if the apostles considered Jewish life optional for Jews, why did they debate the question of whether Gentiles had to keep the Torah? Acts 15, when read in light of its mirror text—Acts 21:17–26—assumes that Jewish disciples of Yeshua would remain faithful to their covenant with God, which included keeping boundary markers of Jewish identity like circumcision (Gen 17).<sup>9</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>10</sup> Jews are “the circumcised” as distinct from “the 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>11</sup>

In 1 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

7 Acts 16:4; 21:25.

8 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*, eds. 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).

9 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.

10 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. 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 (Summer/Fall 2020): 11–25.

11 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.

for Jewish identity and lifestyle.<sup>12</sup> Paul is saying, "If you are Jewish, stay Jewish. Do not stop being Jewish (i.e., don't assimilate)."<sup>13</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 take on Jewish identity and lifestyle)." This is Paul's rule; not just in Corinth but in all of his congregations.<sup>14</sup>

In Paul's view, honoring national-ethnic identities is part of the warp and woof of the kingdom of God,<sup>15</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>16</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."

### Hebrew Roots/One Law Theologies

When we talk about Hebrew Roots/One Law and Replacement Theologies, we are not just discussing individual points of view that have no bearing on community. Rather, these perspectives, including the Acts 15 Jerusalem Council perspective, reflect differing communal visions. The Hebrew Roots/One Law view leads to the erasure of Gentile identity in the body of Messiah since Jewish life is for everyone. This means that all churches should ideally look like Messianic synagogues. 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 identifiable Jews, and it views Messianic synagogues as rebuilding the wall of partition.<sup>17</sup> Only the Acts 15 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 mutual blessing is highly valued and expressed in deeds. This results in the One New Man made up of Jews and Gentiles that Paul describes in Ephesians 2.

<sup>12</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>13</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 Varietation," *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*, 2nd 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.

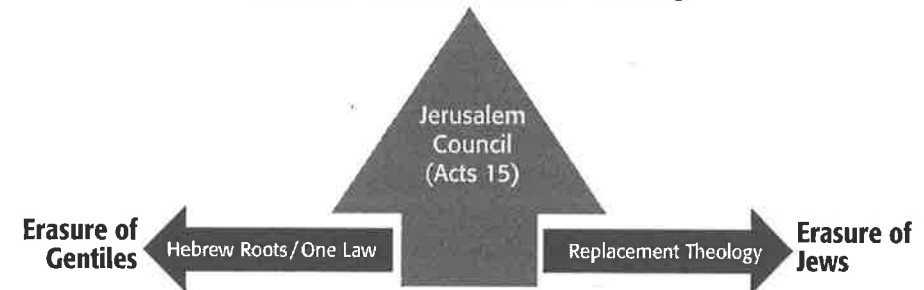
<sup>14</sup> Of course, there are exceptions to most every rule. E.g., the Messianic Jewish Rabbinical Council (MJRC) permits conversion in the case of a Gentile believer married to a Jewish believer, which contributes to *Jewish continuity from generation to generation* (l'dor v'dor).

<sup>15</sup> See Nicholas R. Brown, *For the Nation: Jesus, the Restoration of Israel and Articulating a Christian Ethic of Territorial Governance* (Eugene: Pickwick, 2016), 121–98; J. Brian Tucker and John Koessler, *All Together Different: Upholding the Church's Unity While Honoring Our Individual Identities* (Chicago: Moody, 2018).

<sup>16</sup> See esp. Rom 11:11–17, 25–26, 30–31; 15:27.

<sup>17</sup> We might say that Hebrew Roots/One Law and Replacement Theologies are two sides of the same coin. One leads to the One New Jew and the other to the One New Gentile.

### Affirms Jewish and Gentile Calling (Interdependence & Mutual Blessing)



Hebrew Roots/One Law Theologies are now widespread in the Messianic movement and the Gentile wing of the Church.<sup>18</sup> One reason for this is a renewed interest among Gentile believers in the Jewish roots of the Christian faith, which often leads to a desire to observe Jewish customs. For too long, the Church has deemphasized its Jewish origins, its Jewish Messiah, and its Jewish Scriptures. Christian leaders should acknowledge this history of anti-Judaism and restore what has been lost. But what should restoration look like? One step forward in restoration is for Christians to learn about Israel's festivals. Understanding the biblical and theological significance of Israel's festivals will deepen the Christian's understanding of who God is, what he has done, and what he plans to do in the future as the God of Israel and the nations. However, *teaching about the meaning of Israel's festivals and encouraging all Gentile Christians to observe them are two different things*. Restoration of what has been lost does not mean that the church should become a synagogue. We ought not swing the pendulum from one extreme (dejudaizing Yeshua) to another extreme (judaizing all who follow him). In what follows, my aim is to introduce three kinds of Hebrew Roots/One Law Theologies, explain their contours, briefly address some of the arguments made in support of these perspectives, and offer an evaluation.

### Three Variations: Hard, Soft, and Partial One Law

*Hard One Law* maintains that there is one Torah that applies to Jews and Gentiles in the same way. Those who hold this view are committed to living out a purely biblical faith, the signs of which are keeping the Sabbath on the seventh day, observing "God's festivals" described in Leviticus 23, and not eating unclean foods described in Leviticus 11. On the flip side, they regard Christians who violate these commandments as workers of lawlessness. Hard One Law proponents view the Church as apostate, and they see this as confirmed in the Christian embrace of pagan practices such as worshiping on

<sup>18</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; Lorena O'Neil, "Hebrew roots rising: Not quite Christians, not quite Jews," USA Today, 13 March 2014; 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.

Sunday, bowing down to Christmas trees on December 25<sup>th</sup>, and celebrating Easter.<sup>19</sup> Since the Hard One Law view is suspicious of church teaching, this sometimes leads to a reassessment of the divinity of Yeshua, the triunity of God,<sup>20</sup> and the trustworthiness of Paul's writings. Daniel Lang's *Reviving the Reformation* and Jeffrey Dandoy's *Our Bible Too* are examples of works that move in this direction.<sup>21</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 it is typically a reaction to seeing too much craziness in the Hebrew Roots movement. Soft One Law advocates adopt the perspective that you can catch more flies with honey than with vinegar. Therefore, instead of demonizing the Church for celebrating Easter, and calling Christians "law breakers" if they don't observe the Jewish festivals, Soft One Law adherents gently instruct believers about the Torah in a way that is not imposing. They emphasize the role of grace, faith, and the empowerment of the Spirit in keeping the Torah. Soft One Law teachers aim to be non-judgmental even as they seek to see all Christians embrace Jewish life. As an example of how this gets communicated to others, consider how J. K. McKee encourages all Christian men to be circumcised:

[N]on-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>22</sup>

This chart helps to see how Soft One Law advocates communicate differently than Hard One Law devotees:

Hard One Law	Soft One Law	Jerusalem Council
Gentile believers are <b>commanded</b> to keep the biblical festivals	<b>God's ideal</b> is for Gentile believers to keep the biblical festivals	Gentile believers are <b>allowed</b> to keep the biblical festivals
Gentile believers are <b>required</b> to keep the biblical festivals	<b>God desires</b> Gentile believers to keep the biblical festivals	Gentile believers are <b>free</b> to keep the biblical festivals
Gentile believers <b>have to</b> keep the biblical festivals	Gentile believers <b>ought</b> to keep the biblical festivals	Gentile believers <b>may</b> keep the biblical festivals

19 See R. L. Solberg, *Torahism: Are Christians Required to Keep the Law of Moses?* (Franklin: Williamson College Press, 2019), 115–16, 135, who offers a helpful response to the Hard One Law view of Christmas and Easter, the divinity of Yeshua, and the trinity.

20 Cf. Solberg, *Torahism*, 6, 145–46, 156.

21 Daniel Lang, *Reviving the Reformation: A Jewish Believer Peers Backward to Move Biblical Truth Forward* (Maitland: 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).

22 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.

What makes the second column Soft One Law oriented is that soft pressure is placed on the Gentile believer to keep Jewish-specific aspects of the Torah. Column 2's language communicates pressure because if something is an ought/should, one should do it and it is wrong (or the wrong direction) not to.

Soft One Law advocates sometimes combine the language of columns 2 and 3 in the above chart (or equivalents) to make their pitch more palatable. For example, Boaz Michael and D. Thomas Lancaster do this in the Torah Club commentary *Depths of the Torah*:

**Why Would I If I Don't Have To?**

Even though we do not teach that Gentile disciples have a mandate to keep the Torah in the same manner as Jewish believers, we encourage Gentile disciples to take on the commandments as they are able. We push the envelope and choose to err on the side of obedience to God. There is life and reward in God's commandments. The more we apply the commandments, the more life we experience. The more a Gentile believer aligns his life with Torah, the more relevant the Scriptures become for him. Obedience to Torah offers blessing. Our Master says, "Whoever does [even the least of the commandments] and teaches them will be called great in the kingdom of heaven" (Matthew 5:19). That "whoever" includes the Gentile believer. Therefore, we tell Gentile believers, "There is blessing in the whole of Torah. Keep it all; live it all, but do not condemn other Gentile believers who are not keeping all the same particulars."

However, one might ask, "If a Gentile believer does not have a divine mandate to keep the particulars of Torah specifically associated with Jewish expression, why would he bother with them? Why keep a Sabbath at all? Why trouble oneself with affixing a mezuzah or keeping a kosher diet?"

Beyond the general promises of blessing and reward, we find several compelling reasons for Gentile Torah observance:

1. Love for God
2. Discipleship to Yeshua
3. Kingdom Expression
4. Return to Apostolic-Era Practice
5. Solidarity with Greater Israel<sup>23</sup>

While someone could say this teaching reflects an Acts 15 Jerusalem Council view because of the focus on freedom, the *overarching point or thrust of the appeal* is to persuade Gentile believers that they should ideally be observing the Torah, and the writers couch the argument in the language of columns 2 and 3 to make it more attractive.

*Partial One Law* is a scaled back form of Soft One Law. It emphasizes grace, faith, and the *Ruach* in keeping the Torah while maintaining that Gentile believers are not responsible for keeping the "sign commandments," which include circumcision, *tzitzit*,

23 Boaz Michael and D. Thomas Lancaster, "One Law and the Messianic Gentile," in *Depths of the Torah* (Marshfield: FFOZ, 2017), Appendix A, A72. The publication notes that it was "Updated and revised from the original article published in *Messiah Journal* 101" (A55). My impression is that Michael and Lancaster, since 2017, have moved more toward a Partial One Law view. However, the same kind of mixed messaging can be found in recent FFOZ publications. See D. Thomas Lancaster, *The Holy Days: Returning the Biblical Festivals to the Disciples of Jesus* (Marshfield: First Fruits of Zion, 2021), 3–15; Boaz Michael, "Christian Seder Haters," *Messiah* 27 (2022): 34.

*tefillin*, and *mezuzah*. Partial One Law holds that the sign commandments are incumbent upon Jews alone. What distinguishes Partial One Law from mainstream Messianic Judaism is that Partial One Law holds that all Gentile Christians should observe the seventh-day Sabbath and festivals described in Leviticus 23.<sup>24</sup> The biblical calendar is seen as God's universal ideal for Israel and the nations and, therefore, Gentile believers ought to adopt these calendar celebrations. In my experience, excitement about calling the Church to celebrate "God's festivals" is the engine that drives the Soft and Partial One Law view.<sup>25</sup>

Notably, many Gentile believers caught up in the Hebrew Roots/One Law movement follow a common journey over the course of years in which their view shifts from Hard One Law to Soft One Law to Partial One Law, until finally concluding that the Acts 15 Jerusalem Council view best represents what the pillar apostles and Paul advocate in the New Testament.<sup>26</sup>

### Hebrew Roots/One Law Arguments

There are seven arguments that seem to represent the primary reasons for why people adopt a Hebrew Roots/One Law view today. Below, I will describe the seven arguments and explain some of their shortcomings.

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

"Since the Gospels describe Yeshua as Torah observant, and since Christians are by definition followers of Yeshua, Christians should also be Torah observant." The main problem with this logic is that Yeshua was Torah observant *because he was a Jew and God calls Jews to keep the Torah*. If the Hebrew Roots/One Law argument were correct, we would have to say that because Yeshua was circumcised, all Gentile Christians should be circumcised.<sup>27</sup> 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>24</sup> See International Alliance of Messianic Congregations and Synagogues (IAMCS), "One Law, Two Sticks: A Critical Look at the Hebrew Roots Movement," 2014. Online: <https://iamcs.org/about-us/position-papers-resources>.

<sup>25</sup> E.g., Lancaster, *The Holy Days*, 3–15; D. Thomas Lancaster, *From Sabbath to Sabbath: Returning the Holy Sabbath to the Disciples of Jesus* (Marshfield: First Fruits of Zion, 2016), 1–11; D. Thomas Lancaster, "Distinction Theology and Diversity in the Communities of Yeshua," *Messiah Journal* 134 (Summer 2019): 32, 39; Robert D. Heidler, *The Messianic Church Arising! Restoring the Church to Our Covenant Roots!* (Denton: Glory of Zion International, 2006), 97–105, 166–214.

<sup>26</sup> First Fruits of Zion (FFOZ) has promoted all three kinds of One Law Theology. Since 1992, this flagship organization has zigzagged across the Hebrew Roots/One Law spectrum, shifting from Soft to Hard to Partial One Law positions. First it described its approach as Divine Permission, then Divine Mandate, then Divine Invitation, and now Divine Distinction. 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): 45–62; 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: 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; 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>27</sup> The implication of Paul's instruction 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.

In other words, the Hebrew Roots/One Law argument is not consistent with New Testament teaching.

But what about Yeshua's instruction 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.?<sup>28</sup> Once again, context is key. Yeshua spoke these words to his disciples, *all of whom were Jews*. Gentiles are not in view in this passage. Gentile Christians should walk like Yeshua walked when it comes to Torah ethics (universal commandments) and being led by the Spirit. However, there is no indication in Scripture that Gentile followers of Yeshua are supposed to keep distinctly Jewish customs because Yeshua did.

#### 2. We should be celebrating God's festivals today, since everyone will be observing them in the future.

"Zechariah 14:16–19 indicates that in the age to come the nations will observe Israel's festivals. Therefore, the biblical ideal is for all Gentile believers to observe them today." There are several problems with this argument. To begin with, 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 and not everyone in the world, which does not seem possible. Also, in the Bible, there are no examples of Gentiles observing other annual festivals in the *olam haba* (world to come). Second, even if God calls the nations to observe Israel's festivals in the future, why would that mean Gentile believers should celebrate them today? Are we supposed to do everything now that will be done in the eschaton? Where do we see this principle in the Scriptures? Consider Yeshua's 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 Hebrew Roots/One Law argument is an over-realized eschatology.<sup>29</sup> Third, 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>30</sup>

He gives Gentile believers (his primary audience in this letter) a wide latitude of freedom with respect to the Jewish calendar.

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

"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

<sup>28</sup> For a discussion on Gentiles and Israel's dietary laws, see David Rudolph, "Jesus and the Food Laws: A Reassessment of Mark 7:19b," *Evangelical Quarterly* 74:4 (2002): 291–311.

<sup>29</sup> See Erik Mattson, "Should Christians Celebrate Sukkot? A Messianic Jewish Response to Hebrew Roots" (Two Messianic Jews YouTube channel, 15 September 2021).

<sup>30</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*, eds. Carlos A. Segovia and Gabriele Boccaccini (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2016), 151–81.

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, and to celebrate all of Israel's festivals. The Torah simply does not say this. We ultimately 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.

"Families don't have different customs for natural born children and adopted children. 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 of 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?

"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 a form of cultural appropriation.<sup>31</sup> Around Passover time, it is common for Jewish news organizations to publish opinion pieces that highlight

<sup>31</sup> Hillary Kaell, "Pastors wrapped in Torah: Why many Christians are appropriating Jewish ritual," *Forward*, 18 October 2020.

the problem of Gentile Christians hosting Passover seders.<sup>32</sup> Hebrew Roots/One Law groups are typically tone deaf to the concerns of the Jewish community expressed in these articles. 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>33</sup> The fact is that Jews think highly of Gentile Christians who honor church traditions, respect Jewish sensitivities about cultural appropriation, and have a sincere love for 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 way to avoid cultural appropriation (as I explain below) is to do Jewish things with Jewish people.

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

"James' declaration 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 on the seventh day and go to synagogue since this will eventually lead to a fully Torah observant life." There are numerous problems with this interpretation.

To begin with, 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.

Second, 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" (v. 23) into the community, with the freedom not to 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>34</sup> In other words, "As Jews, we know our covenant responsibilities

<sup>32</sup> E.g., 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. Cf. 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; Marianne Moyaert, "Christianizing Judaism? On the Problem of Christian Seder Meals," in *Is there a Judeo-Christian Tradition? A European Perspective*, ed. Emmanuel Nathan and Anya Topolski (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2016), 137–63.

<sup>33</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.

<sup>34</sup> Cf. Craig S. Keener, *Acts: An Exegetical Commentary: Volume 3* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2014), 2279; Carl R. Holladay, *Acts: A Commentary* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2016), 303–304.

and we are reminded of them every week.” This interpretation flows well with the narrative context, while the Hebrew Roots/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 Theology of the Pharisee believers.

There are *three contextual reasons* to support this proposed “concern about assimilation” reading of verse 21: (1) The Pharisee Messianic Jews must have presented 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 them, would inevitably result in assimilation of the Jewish believers; (2) James was strictly Torah observant<sup>35</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 to avoid assimilation, it makes sense that James would have felt it necessary in Acts 15 to address the issue of assimilation;<sup>36</sup> and (3) 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 v. 21 reflected an intra-Jewish concern about Israel’s covenant responsibilities and they did not want to make the Gentiles feel that they were a threat to Jewish continuity.

- b) Another way of interpreting Acts 15:21 is that, after listing the four requirements of 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 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>37</sup>
- c) One more 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 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>38</sup>

35 Eusebius, *Hist. eccl.*, 2.23.3–4.

36 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*, eds. Isaac W. Oliver and Gabriele Boccaccini with Joshua Scott (London: T & T Clark, 2018), 192–205.

37 See Daniel Juster, “Jewish and Gentile Distinction in Messianic Congregations,” *Tikkun International*, 1 April 2006, 5.

38 Russell Resnik, “Is the Torah Only for Jews? The Relationship of Jew and Non-Jew in God’s Covenant: A Response by Russ Resnik,” in *Bikurei Tziyon*, a publication of First Fruits of Zion, 2003.

Third, 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>39</sup> This difference in response reflects 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 when 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>40</sup>

Fourth, 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.

Fifth, if 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 immediately, we 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.

Sixth, 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. The wording “no further burden” puts the nail in the coffin of the Hebrew Roots/One Law view.

#### 7. During the New Testament period, all Gentile believers observed the Jewish festivals.

The Hebrew Roots/One Law narrative that all first-century Gentile believers kept the Jewish festivals and abandoned their own festivals is a revisionist history. To begin with, Paul indicates that Gentile believers in Rome had differing views on special days, “Some judge one day to be better than another, while others judge all days to be alike. Let all be fully convinced in their own minds. Those who observe the day, observe it in honor of the Lord” (Rom 14:5–6). This does not sound like someone

39 The rumor was probably 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.

40 James may be reassuring 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.”

advocating that Gentile believers observe all the Jewish festivals.<sup>41</sup>

Second, Paul's portrayal of the Gentile members of his churches in his letters does not support the Hebrew Roots/One Law contention that they kept Jewish holy days. On the contrary, Paul's 1 Corinthians 7 "rule in all the churches" that the uncircumcised should "not seek circumcision" (a metonymy for "should *not* take on Jewish identity and lifestyle" [v. 18]), but instead should "remain in the calling" in which they were called (v. 20), seems to suggest that Paul did not encourage Gentile believers in the direction of keeping the Jewish festivals, which were widely recognized boundary markers of Jewish identity.

What about Paul's statement in 1 Corinthians 5:8 ("let us celebrate the feast")? The context suggests that Paul is calling his community to take seriously *the spiritual meaning* of Passover:

- a) The two verses before 1 Corinthians 5:8 include various metaphors to describe a man who committed incest and how the community has responded ("Do you not know that a little yeast leavens the whole batch of dough? Clean out the old yeast so that you may be a new batch, as you really are unleavened"). Paul's point is that they should expel the man from the community.
- b) The wording after verse 8 includes metaphor ("not with the old yeast, the yeast of malice and evil, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth").
- c) Verse 8 ("let us celebrate the feast") is sandwiched between all of these metaphors.
- d) The wider context does not suggest that a literal celebration of Passover is in view. Paul sums up his point in verses 9–13 ("I wrote to you in my letter not to associate with sexually immoral persons. . . . Do not even eat with such a one. . . . 'Drive out the wicked person from among you'").
- e) As Gordon Fee notes, "the present tense [in verse 8] is significant, implying the continual celebration of the Feast."<sup>42</sup> Paul seems to be saying, "Let us continually celebrate the meaning of Passover in our lives and in the community with respect to being pure and free of sexual immorality."
- f) Paul is likely invoking Paschal imagery because he has in mind various passages in the Hebrew Scriptures that speak of celebrating Passover after cleansing the temple from idols (2 Chron 29:5; 35; 30; 35:1–19; 2 Kings 23:1–23). This is consistent with Paul's description of the community in 1 Cor 3:17 ("For God's temple is holy, and you yourselves are that temple"), another metaphor.
- g) Paul assumes that the Gentile believers in Corinth understand his Passover/matzah metaphor. This could be because Paul taught them about Passover and its meaning, or perhaps they visited the homes of their Jewish brothers and sisters during the Passover season. The Jewish believers included Crispus and his family, Aquila and Priscilla, and Apollos (Acts 18:2, 4, 8; 19:1; 1 Cor 3:4–6). Some of the Gentile believers may have learned about Passover at the

<sup>41</sup> See Rudolph, "Paul and the Food Laws," 151–81.

<sup>42</sup> Gordon D. Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987), 218 n. 18.

synagogue next door (Acts 18:4–8) or from having heard the Scriptures read at their church gathering.

- h) We do not have any example in the New Testament of Gentile believers celebrating Passover.
- i) In 1 Corinthians 16:8, Paul refers to Shavuot/Pentecost coming up. This suggests that the festival season was on his mind and may be another reason why he used the Passover metaphor in 1 Corinthians 5.
- j) Even if Paul meant "let us celebrate the festival" in a literal sense,<sup>43</sup> this would not mean that all Gentile churches should observe Passover, or that it was normative in the apostolic period for Gentile churches to celebrate all the Jewish festivals.

Third, if Paul taught his predominantly Gentile communities to celebrate all the Jewish festivals, why is there no evidence of this tradition in the next generation of these churches? Even the Quartodeciman controversy reflects a lack of concern for the Jewish festival cycle as a whole.<sup>44</sup> Why is there no historical footprint of Gentile churches celebrating the festivals in toto in the second and third centuries CE?

Fourth, the Hebrew Roots/One Law argument that all Gentile believers must have observed "God's festivals" since otherwise they would not have had any festivals,<sup>45</sup> is at variance with the social context of the early Christians in the Mediterranean world. The Gentile believers in Paul's congregations remained integrally connected to their extended families and the wider society. They could not opt out of all Greco-Roman calendar traditions, including dozens of celebrations, commemorations, and competitions (for example, the Isthmian Games). They would have had to participate in at least some of these festal events due to socio-economic realities.

How did they navigate this as followers of the Messiah? Notably, the Jerusalem Council decision in Acts 15 does not prohibit Gentile believers from celebrating their own festivals. The apostolic decree says:

For it has seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us to impose on you no further burden than these essentials: that you abstain from what has been sacrificed to idols . . . (Acts 15:28–29; cf. 21:25).

Paul calls Gentile believers to "flee from the worship of idols" (1 Cor 10:14), not flee from Gentile festivals. Some understand Galatians 4:9–10 ("how can you turn back again to the weak and beggarly elemental spirits? . . . You are observing special days,

<sup>43</sup> David Rudolph, "Passover in Corinth (1 Cor 5:7–8)," *Verge* 2:9 (2010): 4.

<sup>44</sup> 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): 37–41; David Rudolph, "The Celebration of Passover by Gentile Christians in the Patristic Period," *Verge* 2:3 (2010): 4. Gentile Christian versions of *Pascha* (Passover) in the patristic period departed from normative Jewish practice and involved fasting. See Clemens Leonhard, *The Jewish Pesach and the Origins of the Christian Easter: Open Questions in Current Research* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2006), 268–85, 435–36; Paul F. Bradshaw, "The Origins of Easter," in *Passover and Easter: Origin and History to Modern Times*, eds. Paul F. Bradshaw and Lawrence A. Hoffman (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1999) 81–97; Raniero Cantalamessa, *Easter in the Early Church* (Collegeville: The Liturgical Press, 1993), 10.

<sup>45</sup> Lancaster, *The Holy Days*, 10–11. Lancaster also suggests that first-century Gentile believers regularly celebrated the Sabbath and festivals at the Temple but provides no evidence to support this.



and months, and seasons, and years”) as Paul admonishing Gentile believers about celebrating Greco-Roman festivals,<sup>46</sup> but this interpretation is not consistent with the context that focuses on Gentile followers of Yeshua being pressured to adopt Jewish identity and customs.

So, what is Paul referring to? In his monograph *Regression in Galatians: Paul and the Gentile Response to Jewish Law*, Neil Martin makes a compelling case that Paul’s concern is that Gentile Christian participation in Jewish festivals is triggering pagan ways of relating to God through religious works. It is sparking “the reanimation of religious assumptions to which the Galatians had become habituated in their pagan past (Gal 4.8–11) fundamentally distorting and even eviscerating their Christian faith (4:11; 5:2–4).”<sup>47</sup> In other words, Paul is disturbed by “the Galatians’ reception of Jewish law,” and specifically in Galatians 4:9–10 their pagan approach to Jewish festivals.<sup>48</sup>

In 1 Corinthians 8–10, Paul provides guidance to Gentile believers about how to deal with the idolatry around them, especially in meal/feast-related settings. He writes that they can eat meat sold at the market and food set before them at dinner parties (which could have been sacrificed to idols) without raising questions of conscience:

Eat whatever is sold in the meat market without raising any question on the ground of conscience, for “the earth and its fullness are the Lord’s.” If an unbeliever invites you to a meal and you are disposed to go, eat whatever is set before you without raising any question on the ground of conscience. (1 Cor 10:25–27)

Paul also explains that if they are explicitly told that the food in question was sacrificed to idols, they should not eat it (1 Cor 10:21, 28). Though knowingly eating idol food was prohibited, eating with idolaters was permitted and even encouraged to try to win them to the faith (1 Cor 5:9f; 9:21).<sup>49</sup> Similarly, Paul instructed believers not to separate themselves from polytheistic spouses (1 Cor 7:10–16). Consider the implications of this for a Christian woman married to an idolater! She was to continue to eat with her husband and share the same bed. This reflects Paul’s vision for the Gentile believers to stay within their Gentile culture, and actively participate in it, drawing the line at the altar and sexual immorality (1 Cor 5:9–11). In this way, they could bear witness to Messiah from within their polytheistic communities.

Most first-century Gentile believers did not leave behind the pagan world and join the Jewish community as proselytes. Rather, they participated in Greco-Roman

46 See D. Thomas Lancaster, *The Holy Epistle to the Galatians: Sermons on a Messianic Jewish Approach* (Marshfield: FPOZ, 2011), 204–206.

47 Neil Martin, *Regression in Galatians: Paul and the Gentile Response to Jewish Law* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2020), 4. See also Neil Martin, *Galatians Reconsidered: Jews, Gentiles, and Justification in the First and the Twenty First Centuries* (Downers Grove: IVP/Apollos, forthcoming).

48 Martin, *Regression in Galatians*, 4.

49 Rudolph, *A Jew to the Jews*, 93–101, 159–60, 204–208.

culture to the extent that they were able to navigate around idolatry and immorality.<sup>50</sup> Did Gentile believers also keep Jewish festivals? Some likely did, especially Gentiles who were Godfearers prior to becoming followers of Yeshua. However, due to the time commitment involved, it would have been challenging for most Gentile believers to keep their own ethnic festivals (within the bounds of the apostolic decree [Acts 15:28–29]), the Lord’s Day (a memorial of the resurrection of Yeshua on the first day of the week, a new custom that emerged in the churches),<sup>51</sup> plus the Sabbath and Jewish holy days. Moreover, Israel’s festivals involved taking days off work to participate in synagogue worship, Jewish community events, and food preparation, among other customs. For many Gentile believers, especially slaves, this would have been unfeasible.

### The Anti-Jewish Side of Hebrew Roots/One Law Theology

It sounds counterintuitive to say that Hebrew Roots is anti-Jewish but unfortunately there is a tendency within the movement to drift in this direction. There are several reasons for this. First, the focus on doing what is biblical, rather than honoring the “traditions of men,” leads to a negative view of Jewish tradition and the rabbis who introduced many of these traditions.

Second, the word “Jewish” takes on a negative valence in Hard One Law thought, which is why adherents refer to “Hebrew Roots” instead of “Jewish Roots.” Anti-Jewish tropes are manifest when Hebrew Roots people say things like, “Don’t call them *Jewish* festivals; they are *God’s* festivals.”<sup>52</sup>

Third, One Law proponents criticize Jews as lax in Torah observance. When Messianic Jews express concern about Gentiles acting more Jewishly than most Jews, the common response from Hebrew Roots/One Law devotees is, “If you Jews would fulfill your covenantal obligations better, it wouldn’t matter what we are doing.”<sup>53</sup> This negative evaluation of Jews is sometimes a reflection of an underlying Replacement Theology within Hebrew Roots/One Law ideology:

50 Bruce W. Winter, *After Paul Left Corinth: The Influence of Secular Ethics and Social Change* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001), 269–86. Cf. Diogn. 5.1–5 (“For the distinction between Christians and other men, is neither in country nor language nor customs. For they do not dwell in cities in some place of their own... Yet while living in Greek and Barbarian cities, according as each obtained his lot, and following the local customs, both in clothing and food and in the rest of life... they share all things as citizens, and suffer all things as strangers” [LCL]); Tertullian, *Apol.* 35 (“they [Christians] prefer to celebrate the Emperor’s festivals with a good conscience, instead of riotous behavior... For why do we keep the votive days and high rejoicing in honour of the Caesars with chastity, sobriety, and virtue[?]... [We] neither cover our door posts with laurels, nor intrude upon the day with lamps nor dress our house up like some new brothel” [trans. Winter op. cit., 285]). See Peder Borgen, “‘Yes’, ‘No’, ‘How Far?’: The Participation of Jews and Christians in Pagan Cults,” in *Early Christianity and Hellenistic Judaism* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1996), 21, 39–42. Greco-Roman festivals often involved idolatry and immorality but this does not mean that Gentile believers could not sort through the amalgam and redeem those aspects of their culture that were good, true, and beautiful.

51 See Richard Bauckham, “The Lord’s Day,” in *From Sabbath to Lord’s Day: A Biblical, Historical and Theological Investigation*, ed. D. A. Carson (Grand Rapids: Academie, 1982), 221–50.

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

53 I like the response of one Messianic Jewish leader to this argument, “This retort ignores the sociological realities of 21st century Judaism and Jewish identity (along with the damage done by 1800 years of supersessionism) for some kind of imaginary ideal. And my consistent response to this has been ‘I can’t out-Jew the Gentiles. Sorry.’”

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 “chosenness,” 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.<sup>54</sup>

Many Hebrew Roots/One Law teachers also make the bizarre Ephraimite Replacement Theology claim that the Gentile wing of the Church comprises the genealogical descendants of the lost tribes of Israel.<sup>55</sup> Therefore, every Christian should keep the law of Moses.

Finally, consider that if all Gentile followers of the Messiah 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 Hebrew Roots/One Law view is an indirect form of Replacement Theology.

### Messianic Judaism and Hebrew Roots/One Law Teaching

The International Alliance of Messianic Congregations and Synagogues (IAMCS), affiliated with the Messianic Jewish Alliance of America (MJAA), addresses 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 counter to biblical teaching:

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 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>56</sup>

The Union of Messianic Jewish Congregations (UMJC) makes clear in its Statement

54 IAMCS, “One Law, Two Sticks,” 6–7, 32–33.

55 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: PFOZ, 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.

56 IAMCS, “One Law, Two Sticks,” 58–60.

of Faith that the Torah applies to Jews and Gentiles differently.<sup>57</sup> Since 2005, a paper by Daniel Juster and Russ Resnik entitled “One Law Movements: A Challenge to the Messianic Jewish Community” has circulated among UMJC synagogues. This paper provides a biblical-theological evaluation of Hebrew Roots/One Law thought.<sup>58</sup> Juster and Resnik conclude:

The New Covenant Scriptures provide universal meanings for the festivals. Yet, they never command Gentiles to keep them in this age. In contrast, there are specific Jewish meanings in the festivals that are unique to Israel’s own identity. . . . It is good for Gentile believers to understand the practice of the Jewish people and to appreciate Jewish culture. Yet, when one combines One Law interpretation with the appropriation of extra-Biblical Jewish practice, and then models this as an example for everyone, we are very close to replacement theology and practice. . . . The letter to the Ephesians, which includes some of the strongest statements of unity within the Body of believers, never posits the idea of One Law. Instead, it calls us to maintain “the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace,” for “there is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all” (4:4–6). The beauty of this God-given unity is that it honors and preserves biblical distinctions between diverse groups, particularly Jews and Gentiles.<sup>59</sup>

While IAMCS and UMJC rabbis uphold an Acts 15 Jerusalem Council view, they face the on-the-ground reality that many Gentile believers who are drawn to Messianic synagogues come with Hebrew Roots/One Law viewpoints, and it is not possible to check this theology at the door.<sup>60</sup> As a result, Messianic synagogues typically have a large number of Gentile members who hold Hebrew Roots/One Law perspectives, unless the rabbi is vigilant and proactively addresses the matter of Jewish and Gentile identity and calling in sermons, adult education classes, and foundational documents.<sup>61</sup> As an example of how this can be done tactfully, Kol Dodi Messianic Congregation in Nashville makes available

57 See <https://www.umjc.org/statement-of-faith>. 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. 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). 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).

58 Daniel Juster and Russ Resnik, “One Law Movements: A Challenge to the Messianic Jewish Community,” 28 January 2005.

59 Juster and Resnik, “One Law Movements,” 6, 8.

60 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; 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.

61 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 Disciplining 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; Daniel Juster, “The Danger of Jewish Roots Movements,” *International Coalition of Apostolic Leaders (ICAL)*, 22 June 2019; 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; Erik Mattson, “What is a Messianic Gentile?” (Two Messianic Jews YouTube channel, 3 December 2021).

its Statement of Faith on its synagogue website. The Statement includes the 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 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>62</sup>

### Getting Practical: A One New Man Direction in Messianic Synagogue and Jewish Ministry Settings

Messianic synagogues and Jewish ministries are blessed by the presence of Gentile believers who come alongside their Jewish brothers and sisters to strengthen the Jewish wing of the body of Messiah. Gentile followers of Yeshua who hold an Acts 15 Jerusalem Council view, and who are drawn to participate in Jewish life,<sup>63</sup> can best navigate around Hebrew Roots/One Law pitfalls if they focus on personal calling and avoid cultural appropriation.

#### 1. Think in terms of personal calling, not universal ideal.

If a Gentile believer has a personal calling to celebrate the Jewish festivals, they should not assume that everyone else in the world has this calling as well (Rom 14:5–6). In fact, the vast majority of Gentile believers and churches today do not think they have this calling. By distinguishing between personal calling and universal ideal, we are able to affirm the Gentile believer who says, “I sense the Holy Spirit is leading me to celebrate the Jewish festivals,” while at the same time being clear that Jewish life is not God’s universal ideal for the nations.

#### 2. Avoid cultural appropriation. Do Jewish things with Jewish people.

The cardinal rule here is that Gentile believers and churches should seek to develop relationships with Jewish people, and not do an end run around these relationships (unintentionally) by having Jewish festival celebrations without Jewish people.<sup>64</sup> Worshiping with Jews, in a Messianic or mainstream synagogue context, helps to mitigate the concern of cultural appropriation since it is the Jews of the community who are inviting the Gentile believers to join them in worshiping together.

<sup>62</sup> See <https://www.koldodi.org>. Cf. Daniel Juster, “A Messianic Jewish Response to ‘One Law Movements.’” Tikkun America, 2022.

<sup>63</sup> The UMJC’s “Defining Messianic Judaism” statement mentions the importance of calling: “Messianic Jewish groups may also include those from non-Jewish backgrounds who have a confirmed call to participate fully in the life and destiny of the Jewish people” (Union of Messianic Jewish Congregations, “Defining Messianic Judaism: Basic Statement,” 20 July 2005). What is a confirmed call? The implication would seem to be that congregational leaders are involved in the discernment process when Gentile believers apply for membership. Cf. Adler, “Gentiles Within the Messianic Jewish Community”; David J. Rudolph, *Growing Your Olive Tree Marriage: A Guide for Couples from Two Traditions* (Clarksville: Lederer, 2003), 53–127.

<sup>64</sup> See Gateway Center for Israel, “A Christian Guide to Passover: Perspective Paper,” 2022. Online: <https://centerforisrael.com/papers/a-christian-guide-to-passover>. Of course, there are exceptions to every rule.

There are also Christian communities that hold Shabbat and festival services so that their Jewish members can continue to live as Jews in the local church context. The key to everything being healthy is making sure that the Jewish ministry has a Jewish leader and that Gentile believers participating in Jewish traditions are doing so alongside their Jewish brothers and sisters.<sup>65</sup> If a church does not have a Jewish ministry, and there is not a Messianic synagogue in the area, the pastor can teach about the biblical meaning of Israel’s festivals as they occur throughout the year, and use these teaching opportunities to pray for Israel and the Jewish people. Again, learning about the festivals and observing them in Jewish ways (without Jewish people involved) are two different things

Gentile Christian celebration of Jewish life in the home is also best done in conjunction with being part of a Messianic synagogue or a church’s Jewish ministry.<sup>66</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 so that they are not mishandling ritual objects or saying liturgies that only Jews should say because they relate to the Jewish journey.<sup>67</sup> 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>68</sup>

### Replacement Theology

In the previous section on Hebrew Roots/One Law Theology, I focused on how forming the Ephesians 2 One New Man requires a commitment not to judaize Gentiles. In this section on Replacement Theology, I contend that the vision also requires a resolve not to gentilize Jews.

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>69</sup> As Markus Barth says, “The Church is the bride of Christ only when it is the Church of Jews and Gentiles [and] . . . the existence, building, and growth of the Church are identified with the common existence, structure, and growth of Jews and Gentiles.”<sup>70</sup>

Paul’s vision of the Church is the One New Man made up of Jews and Gentiles in Messiah. 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

<sup>65</sup> See Joseph Culbertson, “Rediscovering My Gentile Roots,” *Keshher: A Journal of Messianic Judaism* 36 (2020): 89–95.

<sup>66</sup> When this is not possible, I recommend that the Gentile believer attend an online Messianic synagogue or Jewish ministry and develop a relationship with a Messianic rabbi or Jewish pastor who is familiar with halakhic issues (1 Cor 10:32–33).

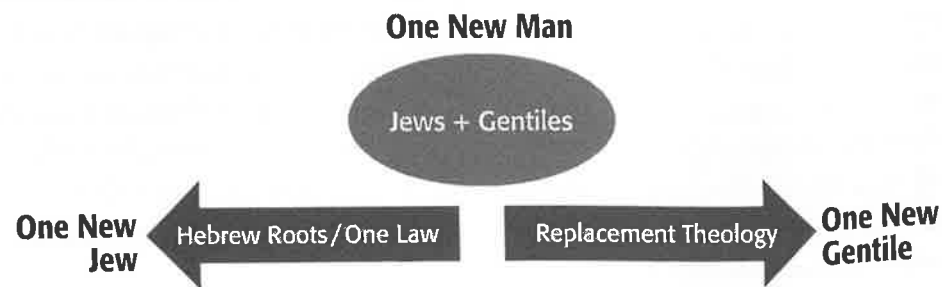
<sup>67</sup> As an example of the potential problem, see Archie Ingersoll, “As Messianic Jews, twin brothers draw stares, seek converts in Moorehead,” *Grand Forks Herald*, October 17, 2015.

<sup>68</sup> See Jon C. Olson, “Gentile Yeshua-Believers Praying in the Synagogue: Why and How,” *Keshher: A Journal of Messianic Judaism* 23 (2009): 47–69.

<sup>69</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>70</sup> Markus Barth, *Israel and the Church: Contributions for a Dialogue Vital for Peace* (Richmond: John Knox, 1969), 90–91.

Replacement Theology view leads to the One New Gentile—a community in which Jewish identity disappears.<sup>71</sup> Why is this? What is it about Replacement Theology that causes the erasure of Jews?<sup>72</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>73</sup> The academic term for Replacement Theology is Supersessionism, which comes from the Latin *supersedere*: “to be superior to, sit above or supplant.” 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 people as God’s chosen community, and that God’s covenant with the Jews is now over and done.<sup>74</sup>

### Hard Supersessionism

There are two kinds of Replacement Theology that result in the erasure of Jewish presence in the Church. The first type is Hard Supersessionism.<sup>75</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, terminated their boundary markers of distinction, sent Israel into exile, and transferred Israel’s blessings to the Church. As a classic example of Hard Supersessionism, Martin 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. . . .

71 Replacement Theology may make room for Jewish believers to live out aspects of Jewish life for the purpose of gospel ministry. However, this allowance does not affirm Jewish identity and continuity but treats Jewishness as a lure. 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.

72 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.

73 See Joel Willits, “Jewish fish (ΙΧΘΥΣ) in post-supersessionist water: Messianic Judaism within a post-supersessionist paradigm,” *HTS Theologisches Studien/Theological Studies* 72:4 (2016): a3331.

74 R. Kendall Soulen, “Supersessionism,” in *A Dictionary of Jewish-Christian Relations*, eds. Edward Kessler and Neil Wenborn (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 413.

75 My use of the terms Hard Supersessionism and Soft Supersessionism departs from the definitions proposed in David Novak, “Supersessionism Hard and Soft,” *First Things*, February 2019. Hard and Soft Supersessionism in my article correspond to Soulen’s Punitive and Economic Supersessionism respectively (R. Kendall Soulen, *The God of Israel and Christian Theology* [Minneapolis: Fortress, 1996], 29–31).

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>76</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, 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. . . . 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>77</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) because the churches were steeped in Hard Supersessionism.<sup>78</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 is Soft Supersessionism. Here the Church replaces the Jewish people as the people of God. However, the reason is not because the Jewish people rejected Yeshua but because it was God’s plan from the beginning for

76 Martin Luther, “On the Jews and Their Lies,” in *Luther’s Works*, ed. Franklin Sherman (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1971), 47:138–39.

77 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).

78 Robert P. Ericksen, “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; 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.

Jewish election and 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>79</sup>

It is important to understand that Soft Supersessionism “inevitably undermines the theological rationale of Jewish existence.”<sup>80</sup> The implications of Soft Supersessionism are apparent in the questions: If Jewish Law is obsolete, shouldn’t Jews stop living as Jews? And since Jewish people have finished their role in salvation history, why are they still around? As Stuart Dauermann asserts, “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>81</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. . . . [W]hat 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>82</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*

79 Matthew A. Tapie, *Aquinas on Israel and the Church: The Question of Supersessionism in the Theology of Thomas Aquinas* (Eugene: Pickwick, 2014), 23–24.

80 Tapie, *Aquinas on Israel and the Church*, 21.

81 Stuart Dauermann, *Converging Destinies: Jews, Christians, and the Mission of God* (Eugene: Cascade, 2017), 48.

82 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 (emphasis added).

*described in Ephesians 2 where Jews and Gentiles are called to affirm one another in their respective identities to the extent that it results in interdependence and mutual blessing expressed in deeds.* 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. . . . [T]he 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 re-crucified in every Mass. . . . [T]he 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.” . . . [T]he only appropriate attitude in subsequent generations towards Jews, the Temple, the Land or Jerusalem must be one of sorrow or pity.<sup>83</sup>

In sum, the second kind of Replacement Theology—Soft Supersessionism—is another way of gentilizing Jews. It leads to the expropriation, spiritualization, stigmatization, and deterritorialization of authentic Jewish identity.<sup>84</sup> When the smoke and mirrors are removed, the One New Man becomes the One New Gentile in churches that teach Soft Supersessionism.<sup>85</sup>

83 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 (emphasis added); 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, *Besora: 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 does not put forward this principle, and a number of texts call this criterion into question. E.g., marriage prophetically points to the nuptial relationship between Messiah and the Church, and yet marriage between a man and a woman is not invalidated through the coming of Messiah (2 Cor 11:2; Eph 5:22–33). Paul’s letters envision the universal and particular coexisting in God’s kingdom, a view consonant with biblical prophetic literature. See Malka Z. Simkovich, *The Making of Jewish Universalism: From Exile to Alexandria* (Lanham: Lexington, 2017), 27–46; Terence L. Donaldson, *Judaism and the Gentiles: Jewish Patterns of Universalism (to 135 CE)* (Waco: Baylor University Press, 2007), 503–505.

84 David Rudolph, Messianic Jewish response essay in *God’s Israel and the Israel of God: A Conversation on Pauline Supersessionism*, eds. Mike Bird and Scot McKnight (Bellingham: Lexham, forthcoming).

85 Soft One Law and Soft Supersessionism are theologies that claim to make room for Jew-Gentile distinction even while subverting difference. Soft One Law results in the assimilation of Gentile identity while Soft Supersessionism results in the assimilation of Jewish identity.

**“You will be assimilated”**

Have you ever watched Star Trek and the Borg suddenly appear? If so, you may recall that they introduce themselves with the greeting, “We are the Borg. You will be assimilated.” Replacement Theology has a Borg-like dimension to it when it comes to Jewish identity.<sup>86</sup> The message that most Jews hear is, “We are the Christian Church. You will be assimilated.” And it is no exaggeration.<sup>87</sup> Throughout history, this has been the legacy of Replacement Theology. After the First Council of Nicaea (325 CE) 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 were required to say if they wanted to become followers of Yeshua:

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 and drink of the Hebrews; in one word, I renounce absolutely everything Jewish, every law, rite and custom.<sup>88</sup>

The Second Council of Nicaea (787 CE), one of seven ecumenical councils, in canon 8, forbids Jewish believers in Yeshua 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>89</sup>

We have explored why Replacement Theology leads to the erasure of Jewish presence in the 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 First Council of Nicaea when he said:

<sup>86</sup> See Dauermann, *Converging Destinies*, 54–55.

<sup>87</sup> For a broader discussion of 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.

<sup>88</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>89</sup> See <https://berkeleycenter.georgetown.edu> (emphasis added).

*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>90</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 independence that was fully at peace with the idea of a church and world without Jews.<sup>91</sup>

**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>92</sup> Third Race Theology 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.

**Third Race Theology**

In Third Race Theology, Jews and Gentiles who become followers of Yeshua are no longer Jews and Gentiles but new creations and members of the Church. To put it another way, the Borg-like Church assimilates Jews and Gentiles into a third identity (Third Race).

In sum, the Replacement Theology view leads to the erasure of Jewish presence in the Church. 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.<sup>93</sup>

<sup>90</sup> Eusebius, *Vit. Const.* 3.18 (emphasis added).

<sup>91</sup> See Rudolph, “The Science of Worship,” 41–46.

<sup>92</sup> E.g., Wright’s defense of Third Race Theology in *Paul and the Faithfulness of God*, 1443–449; cf. Michael F. Bird, *An Anomalous Jew: Paul among Jews, Greeks, and Romans* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2016), 54.

<sup>93</sup> 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, see Rudolph, “Zionism in Pauline Literature,” 177–82; Rudolph, *A Jew to the Jews*, 27–35; David Rudolph, “Describing the Church in Relation to Israel: The Language of George Lindbeck and Ephesians 2–3,” in *Covenant and the People of God: Essays Presented to Mark S. Kinzer on His Seventieth Birthday*, eds. Jonathan Kaplan, Jennifer M. Rosner, and David J. Rudolph (Eugene, Pickwick, forthcoming); and the *New Testament After Supersessionism (NTAS) Series* published by Pickwick. See also [www.post-supersessionism.com](http://www.post-supersessionism.com) where I track the academic study of the Church’s theology of Israel.

## Getting Practical: A One New Man Direction in Church Ministry Contexts

Gentile Christians who are called to be bridges between the Church and the Jewish people have a vital role to play within the local church. Gentile believers who hold an Acts 15 Jerusalem Council view can best address Replacement Theology in church settings by affirming Jewish believers in their Jewish identity and helping fellow Christians catch a vision for the One New Man.

### 1. Think in terms of affirming Jewish believers in their Jewish identity

When there are Jews and Gentiles in a church, the church is called to pastor Jews and Gentiles. The pastoral team needs to learn how to disciple Jews in Jewish identity and help them to become better Jews. Since Jewish identity is a matter of God's calling, Jews should stay true to their identity as Jews and not opt out (1 Cor 7:17–18; Rom 11:29).

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 leading of God's Spirit and embrace the journey of discovering more about their Jewish identity and calling. They should be encouraged 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, they should be invited to explore this part of their identity. 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 Yeshua to visit healthy Messianic synagogues, pastors can also connect their Jewish members with international networks of Jewish believers like *Yachad BeYeshua* (Together in Jesus), the Union of Messianic Jewish Congregations (UMJC), and the Messianic Jewish Alliance of America (MJAA).<sup>94</sup>

Pastors need to be realistic that the local church has its limitations in being able to provide Jewish community experiences (e.g., Shabbat and festival services, *brit milah* [circumcision] ceremonies, bar/bat mitzvahs, Jewish weddings and funerals). Churches need to think in terms of the *guf haMashiach* (body of Messiah) and partner with Messianic synagogues to provide these experiences for Jewish families. This is part of the interdependence that we talked about earlier.

### 2. Help the church catch a vision for the One New Man.

In preaching and teaching, church leaders should look for opportune moments to highlight Jesus' Jewishness, God's faithfulness to the Jewish people, how the Romans 11 olive tree describes the family of God in a differentiated way, Paul's vision for the One New Man, and the importance of avoiding Replacement Theology.

The church's ministry of the Word should draw out the treasures of the *Tanakh*/

Old Testament (Matt 13:52), which comprises three-quarters of the Christian Bible. This will naturally lead to a love for the Jewish people, as was the case with Corrie ten Boom and her family who rescued Jews during the Holocaust. They sensed a special kinship with Jews because they loved the Old Testament and understood that Yeshua was and is "the Messiah, the son of David, the son of Abraham" (Matt 1:1).<sup>95</sup>

When there are few 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 will tend toward thinking of the Church as the One New Gentile. Intercessors should lead their communities in regular times of prayer for Israel and the Jewish people. Finally, churches moving in a One New Man direction should network with other churches that have the same vision.<sup>96</sup>

## Conclusion

The Messianic Jewish community and the Gentile wing of the Church need to band together to realize Paul's Ephesians 2 vision of the One New Man, and regard Hebrew Roots/One Law and Replacement Theologies 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. By contrast, *Paul's vision of the One New Man is a table fellowship of Jews and Gentiles in Messiah, who affirm each other as Jews and Gentiles, and truly relate to one another in a spirit of interdependence, mutual blessing, and mutual humbling*. Why did the Lord bring into being this Jew-Gentile fellowship known as the One New Man? Paul's answer to this question has echoed through the ages, "[You are] growing into a *holy temple* in union with the Lord. Yes, in union with him [Yeshua the Messiah, the cornerstone], you yourselves are being *built together into a spiritual dwelling-place for God!*" (Eph 2:21–22 CJB). May the Lord speedily and soon build his holy temple, made up of Jews and Gentiles, in our days!

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<sup>94</sup> See [www.yachad-beyeshua.org](http://www.yachad-beyeshua.org).

<sup>95</sup> David Gushee, *The Righteous Gentiles of the Holocaust: A Christian Interpretation* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1994), 117–48.

<sup>96</sup> I recommend connecting with Gateway Center for Israel ([www.centerforisrael.com](http://www.centerforisrael.com)) and Toward Jerusalem Council II ([www.tjcii.org](http://www.tjcii.org)).

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