

## **Jewish Roots Movement Concerns**

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*For by wise guidance you can wage your war,  
and in abundance of counselors there is victory.  
(Proverbs 24.6)*

### **JEWISH ROOTS COLLOQUIUM**

A consortium of scholars, pastors and educators, gathered near Fayetteville, Arkansas, recently for three days of intense discussions related to the restorationist agenda of God's Spirit in the church called the "Jewish Roots" or "Hebrew Heritage" movement. Nearly thirty gifted men and women traveled from several states and even from abroad to attend the invitation-only event, including from Mexico, India, Israel, Germany, Netherlands and England.

Keren and I were privileged to participate in this unique event called by Dr. John Garr of Restoration Foundation and hosted by Rev. Ed Bachman and friends of the Association of Jewish & Christian Believers. We really enjoyed the stimulating fellowship with like-minded believers, and renewed old and made many new friendships. We benefited from the formal dialogue as well as the informal discussions around meals that occurred throughout the weekend.

The meetings were intense (from 8 in the morning till 10 at night) and the viewpoints diverse. But a spirit of unity was evident, borne of humility and a passion for building up the Body of Messiah. It was refreshing to see such lively give and take, where issues of substance could be discussed and differences aired without rancor or self-interest. Both the wisdom and the spirit of Christ were in evidence.

The discussions were wide-ranging and cannot adequately be covered in a brief report like this. It is anticipated, however, that a position paper of sorts will be forthcoming through Restoration Foundation reporting on the collective views of those present.

### **COLLOQUIUM INSIGHTS**

Some points emerged clearly in the discussions:

- That the Hebrew Heritage renewal movement demonstrates burgeoning interest around the world, crossing denominational and church lines.
- That the movement, though growing, has little influence as yet in established churches and minimal impact upon seminaries and evangelical Christian scholarship.
- That a growing recognition is seen, however, among scholars regarding the importance of the Jewish backgrounds to the life and teachings of Jesus, as well as to the Jewish Apostle to the Gentile world, Paul.

- That if this movement is to grow and cultivate young scholars, pastors and teachers, the need is increasing for a scholarly, Hebraic-oriented institute or college or seminary to train them in the breadth and depth of Jewish and Christian studies.
- That examining the patterns and principles of “Hebraic Ecclesiology” (the Jewish backgrounds to the origin, organization and functions of the early church) can be catalytic for our contemporary church life.
- That Hebraic models for church renewal, while important and valuable, are not always clear nor easy to apply to current congregational and pastoral realities.
- That home assemblies and home schooling seem especially fertile ground for the dissemination and implementation of Hebraic insights into family and church life.
- That one of the best strategies for introducing Hebrew Heritage teaching into a church is to celebrate the biblical feasts, such as Passover and Tabernacles.
- That many believers in Jesus have found their lives enormously enriched and even transformed by discipling themselves to the Rabbi from Nazareth and being nourished by the rich sap of the olive tree connection that we have in Him.
- That one of the most significant changes and positive benefits to those digging into the Jewish roots of their faith is in their attitude toward and study of the Torah and the Hebrew Scriptures, and their remembrance of the Sabbath and the *Mo’edim* (Feasts).
- That the relationship of the New Covenant believer in Yeshua to the Mosaic covenant and the Torah remains one of the most complex and knotty issues to sort out if we eschew the simplistic and biased answers of the past and look positively but soberly at the complexity of the matter.
- That even among leaders and scholars in this movement, quite a variance of views and practices exists on a number of important Hebraic issues—due sometimes to our varying backgrounds, or to the complexity of a biblical topic, or perhaps in some cases simply to the freedom we have in the Holy Spirit as to how we apply certain principles and practices of the Scriptures and Jewish traditions.
- That all present shared a growing concern that some of the great truths of the Jewish Roots Movement are being pushed too far by some, toward imbalance scripturally or even heresy theologically. Some of the concerns expressed, and the symptoms often accompanying them, are the following:

### **COLLOQUIUM CONCERNS**

- That this restorationist move of God’s Spirit not degenerate into separatism from the church, sectarianism, elitism or exclusivity.
- That those who have embraced the Jewish roots of their faith not manifest arrogance and judgmentalism against other Christians who do not share these concepts.
- That legalism (the idea that status before God is either gained or maintained by works of obedience to the Torah or other ecclesiastical codes) not creep in under the guise of Hebraic Heritage restoration.

- That “Judaizing” be opposed in all its forms, attempting to persuade followers of Yeshua to accept and practice Torah or Jewish traditions as the means either of achieving or maintaining salvation or superior spiritual status before God.
- That believers not be caught up in any soulish attachments to Jewish ethnicity or *Yiddishkeit*, thinking that their faith is made more authentic by cultural Jewishness.
- That believers affirming their Hebrew heritage in Yeshua not become so occupied or even prideful regarding Jewish things that may be more external and symbolic in nature that they overlook the “weightier matters” of the Torah and the centrality of Christ to their faith and life.
- That those who seek to restore the Jewish roots of the Christian faith not be victimized by the danger of attempting to establish genetic connections with Israel as a means of asserting their inclusion in the covenants of Israel; but with the apostles, affirm that Christian chosenness is predicated solely upon faith in Jesus as Messiah and Lord.
- That the following be seen as warning signs that believers may be departing from the foundations of the earliest Christian faith:
  1. Questioning the Messiahship and Deity of Yeshua, the Word made flesh;
  2. Compromising on the atoning significance of Jesus’ death, burial & resurrection;
  3. Questioning the inspiration and authority of the Apostle Paul’s writings, and driving a wedge between Jesus and Paul, between the Gospels and the Epistles;
  4. Asserting the primacy of the Torah over the New Testament scriptures;
  5. Asserting the authority of Rabbinic literature over the Apostolic Writings (NT), and defining our faith in terms of Torah-centricity more than Christocentricity;
  6. Deeming the desire to become more Jewish or the love of Judaica or Jewish customs to be the highest goal for Christians;
  7. Believing that the seven universal Noahide laws are the basis of salvation instead of the sacrificial death of Jesus as set forth in the New Testament.

As you can tell even from this synopsis of some of the issues addressed and concerns raised, there is much work to be done to keep this move of God in the church on track, and bearing much fruit, wisdom and maturity in the lives of those touched by it. More colloquia of this sort are planned for the future, with the next one in Houston, Texas.