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Dear Brethren:

It is not uncommon within Church of God circles to encounter individuals who have adopted certain Jewish customs, even though they were never raised in a Jewish community. It might be seen in their outward appearance, like the wearing of a Star of David pendant, uncut beards, a prayer shawl, or displaying tassels hanging from the waist. It also might be found in their speaking—choices of expressions—including the use of particular words from the Hebrew language, like *Shabbat Shalom* instead of *Happy Sabbath*, *Torah* instead of *the Law*, or the decision to use the names *Yahweh*, *Yeshua*, or *Messiah*, instead of saying *God* or *Jesus Christ*.

Why would someone who was never brought up in the religion of Judaism or in the Jewish culture suddenly choose to incorporate *a few particular* tokens into their worship? Why would people with a Church of God background *in particular* be doing so today? Within Church of God, The Eternal, we do not do this. In fact, we strongly encourage that God's people *not do this*. Are we wrong? Are we missing something important that others are doing to become closer to God? Perhaps we should also get on the bandwagon and become "more Jewish"? Maybe God is not pleased with us because we are failing to incorporate certain physical Jewish customs into our rituals, our attire, and our language? Are you concerned about this? How can you know what God really thinks, and what He considers to be respectful *and needful* in spiritual worship?

### **What Is the Jewish Roots Movement?**

There are a host of "Christian" religious organizations incorporating various degrees of "Jewishness" into their worship. In fact, these groups have exploded in popularity over the last fifty years, especially within North America. Why is that true, and what are these groups all about?

Trying to discern the nature and attributes of these churches can be daunting, especially because of the many and varied labels they use to define themselves. These monikers include *Jewish Roots*, *Hebrew Roots*, *Hebraic Roots*, *Messianic Judaism*, *Hebrew Christians*, *Messianic Christians*, *Torah Christians*, and a number of others. To those of us outside of the movement, it all sounds like a hodgepodge of vegetables in the same soup, but individuals involved in it are very quick to point out important distinctions. And *there are* specific distinctions that are valuable for us to understand. A number of explanations that

will be provided here are taken from a very good summary written by Michael G. Bacon, entitled, *The Hebrew Roots Movement: An Awakening! History, Beliefs, Apologetics, Criticisms, Issues*. This reference work is available for free on the internet, and the author—being one who is part of the movement himself—has done an excellent job in addressing the true history, philosophies, and challenges facing these groups today. (It is also interesting that he is a former member of the Worldwide Church of God, and that fact adds significance to his comments on the reason that he and many other former WCG members have gravitated to the movement.) For our purposes, rather than cite specific texts from Mr. Bacon's book, a general summary of overall concepts will be provided, but you can easily access the 300-page reference work on your own for more specific detail and verification.

### **The Real Root of "Jewish Roots"**

Where did it all start? Who was first, who followed, and why are they not all unified in one cohesive assembly today?

First, take note that *Hebrew/Jewish Roots* groups are distinct from *Messianic Jewish* groups. Messianic Jewish groups were mostly created by *Protestant Christians* as a way to try to convert "actual Jews" in accepting Jesus Christ as Savior. (Judaism recognizes that Jesus Christ was a real historical figure, and even that He was a prophet of God, but not that He was the promised Messiah.) This means that the real purpose of the movement was to save *practicing Jews* (or even atheistic Jews) from damnation, according to the false notion of evangelical Christians about heaven and hell, and their attempts to get *the unsaved* to "say the magic words" before death: "I accept Jesus Christ as my personal Savior." With that in mind, who then were the original converts that they targeted? Jews—not Christians!

The first modern emergence of organized *Jewish Christians* (traditional Jews who later embraced Christ) seems to have been in Britain about 1860. Then, in 1895, the first organized effort in the USA was spawned in New York City, including a new term for their movement—*Messianic Judaism*. By the mid-1920s, there were more organized groups of Jews who were embracing Christianity in the USA. They were still practicing much of the religion of Judaism, including the keeping of Sabbaths and Holy Days, howbeit now embracing Jesus Christ as the prophesied Messiah. During that same time (and probably not coincidentally), certain members of Church of God, Seventh Day (non-Jews already keeping Saturday instead of Sunday), also began to gravitate in small numbers toward the Messianic Jewish movement. In particular, the *Sacred Name Movement* (SNM) emerged in the 1930s out of this non-Jewish Church of God faction, and began to teach that Christians should embrace the Jewish superstition of not pronouncing "God's name" in any language except Hebrew. That faction is still extant today in the *Assemblies of Yahweh*.

If you want to understand the key issues that affect God's true Church—which is the whole point of providing this summary for you—we cannot emphasize enough (as stated above) that the *Hebrew Roots* adherents are not Messianic Jews (although they will often assemble with them for lack of a better alternative)! Do not lose track of the fact that many of these *Hebrew/Jewish Roots* participants were *already Christian* in orientation, but then subsequently adopted *Jewish elements* into their *existing Christian worship*—like belief in keeping the seventh-day Sabbath instead of Sunday, the annual Holy Days, and the conviction that the Ten Commandments were not done away. This also explains why there is a real attraction to the *Jewish Roots* movement among some who were *strongly influenced* by the teachings of Herbert Armstrong but who later became disenchanted with the Worldwide Church of God (much more on this later).

So then, both Messianic Jews and Jewish Roots groups respect the seventh-day Sabbath and Holy Days, but are coming to it from very different origins. On one hand, you have Jews choosing to embrace *some amount* of Christian practices, and on the other hand, you have Christians choosing to embrace *some amount* of Jewish practices. If you take a snapshot of their *actual practices* today, they may look similar, but knowing how they each got to that point—where they each originated—helps clarify the *real difference* in emphasis when we get to more specific doctrines.

As with all human religions, there is no real agreement, because every human being has his own ideas about what is true vs. false, right vs. wrong. That is why there are hundreds of different groups in this Jewish Roots/Messianic Jewish movement (even as there are hundreds of groups in the Church of God family of churches), because many splits of splits have resulted over the years out of the original ideologies in question. There is just as much chaos and splintering happening today in the Messianic community as there is in the Church of God community.

Before tackling some additional definitions and then drilling down into the details, what should be clear about the foundation of the Jewish Roots and Messianic Jewish groups? They are both *apostates* out of and away from *the real Truth of God!* On one hand, you have Trinitarian believers in the false *immortal soul doctrine*, and they are seeking to "save the Jews" through evangelical outreach from the damnation of hell fire. On the other hand, you have Sabbath-keeping "Christians" who have embraced various amounts of the faith once delivered by God to His Church, but nonetheless still are *rejecting critical parts* of that divine revelation from Jesus Christ.

Michael Bacon (the author cited above), ironically admits from real-life analysis in our day, that *at least fifty percent* of those who start down the path of Hebrew Roots/Messianic Judaism, ultimately *go all the way* to the practice of *traditional Judaism*

(rejecting Jesus Christ as Savior). Amazing! This means that for many, the whole movement has become a halfway house for those who are in the process of rejecting their former beliefs. Either Jews are escaping Judaism to become nominal, Trinitarian Christians, or else Christians are escaping their roots to embrace Judaism. Many never actually remain "in the middle" for long. We need to understand why that may be, and why this whole movement is a danger to those who are truly called by God to hold firm to a *divinely-revealed* Way of Life.

There are two major doctrinal issues that divide those involved in the Jewish/Messianic movement. First is the issue of *One Law vs. Two Laws*, and the second is the issue of *One House vs. Two Houses*. What are these controversies, and why do we care?

### **One Law vs. Two Laws**

Messianic Judaism follows traditional Judaism in teaching that not all people are required by God to obey the same set of laws. They believe that there is one set of Commandments for physical Jews (the Torah), and another set of laws for physical Gentiles who want to be "good people." This is also called *Dual Covenant* or *Two Law Theology*. In brief, they believe the covenant that God made with Israel at Mt. Sinai has not been done away (even if Messianic Jews accept Jesus Christ as Savior), and that physical Israelites are still required to keep the Law, no matter what. They not only believe that the Old Covenant was not "done away," but also believe that *only Jews* are allowed—and required—to keep it (all 613 dos and don'ts of the Talmud)! This means that they do not want "non-Jews" to keep the Sabbath and Holy Days, because that is the *protected property* of Jews alone.

But what about non-Jews (Gentiles) who want to join the Messianic Jewish movement? Is there no place for them? Yes, there is! They believe there is a *second Law* for Gentiles, expressed in the *New Covenant* for Christians, and based upon the special laws given by God to Noah after the flood (Genesis 9). These laws are expounded in the Jewish Talmud to include seven basic requirements: 1) Do not deny God (no idolatry). 2) Do not murder. 3) Do not steal. 4) Do not engage in sexual immorality. 5) Do not blaspheme. 6) Do not eat of a live animal (no eating flesh taken from an animal while it is still alive). 7) Establish courts and legal systems to ensure obedience to these laws. These seven principles are called the *Noachide Laws*. Judaism (as well as Messianic Judaism) believes that every non-Jew is considered a "son of the covenant of Noah" and he who accepts these obligations is considered a righteous person who is guaranteed a place in the "world to come." Notice that there is no Noachide commandment to keep the seventh-day Sabbath, let alone the annual Holy Days. These Jews believe that Gentile converts can *respect* the Sabbath, but they do not want them to think they are "keeping" it like "real Jews" are doing. To them, any Gentile who does this is pretending to be a Jew, which to them is blasphemy.

Recall that Messianic Judaism began with Protestant Christians trying to convert the Jews to their brand of false Christianity. In order to convince the Jews to become Christian (saying the magic words), they became agreeable to the concept that physical Jews still have a special duty to keep the Old Covenant. So that is how these Protestants have melded "Christ" with the "613 laws" of the Talmud. They *allow* that real Jews are still "under the Law." But they *do not* want any *non-Jewish Christians* to adopt Jewish "law-keeping," since that would threaten their *done-away-New-Covenant theology*. Messianic Jewish groups have members who are both "Jew" and "Gentile." So within those congregations, there are some keeping the Old Testament Laws, and others not doing so, according to their physical birth. That is how Two Laws exist side-by-side in one church. Those churches meet on the Sabbath, but the Gentile attendees are not supposed to think they are really "Jewish."

That is what traditional Judaism and Messianic Jewish groups teach—a *Two Law Theology*. By contrast, what do many Jewish Roots groups teach instead? They teach that there is only *One Law* for all, regardless of physical birth.

Remember that most of the Jewish Roots groups started out with Christians (not Jews) who simply recognized that the New Covenant did not "do away" with the Ten Commandments and certain other teachings of the Old Testament. But likewise, being rooted in Christianity, they teach that the death of Jesus Christ *did indeed* end the Old Covenant and broke down the "middle wall of partition" separating Jew and Gentile (Ephesians 2:14), allowing all true Christians now to be one, regardless of physical pedigree. And that oneness includes being subject to *One Law* for all. Whatever is required of a Jewish convert is equally required for a non-Jewish member, and vice versa. Therefore, *Jewish Roots* congregations typically celebrate the Sabbath and Holy Days as a requirement for *all members*, unlike what the Messianic Jewish groups are doing. And as you already understand, these are the ones who are actually correct on this point, in that there is only *one spiritual Law* that has ever been required by God of *all peoples*, regardless of birth.

There is also a particular group headquartered in the Midwest of the USA, the *First Fruits of Zion*, that is an excellent example of "trying to have it both ways," changing their doctrines over the years to seek middle ground. While once they taught that all peoples were subject to One Law, now, to appease the more conservative Jews, they have embraced Two Law Theology, howbeit teaching that there is a "Divine Invitation" by God which allows Gentiles to keep the Torah without being blasphemous. This group has "flip-flopped" on doctrine to try to meld together people on opposite ends of this doctrinal spectrum. But it is still like trying to mix water and oil. We all know how well that worked within the Worldwide Church of God, do we not—trying to water down doctrine to solve issues of membership unrest?

## One House vs. Two Houses

The second major doctrinal dispute among the Messianic groups involves the question of whether there is only "one house" of Israelites today, or instead "two houses." What does that really mean? Basically, it hinges upon ones who believe that all twelve tribes of Israel are represented today in those recognized as "Jews" vs. those who believe there are many other *modern-day Israelites* around the globe who are not identified as Jews. In other words, you might say that this is a fight between those who accept British Israelism as a reality vs. those who do not. The belief popularized in the twentieth century—mostly by Herbert Armstrong (even though he was not the originator)—contends that the lost Ten Tribes (the *House of Israel*) truly lost their recognized identity through captivity, but survived separately from those of the *House of Judah* (those who returned to Jerusalem and are recognized today as the Jews). It contends that the descendants of the Lost Tribes are the ones who were promised great wealth in the last days, as Abraham's physical "seed," and that it is the British and the Americans who represent Ephraim and Manasseh on the world scene today.

Why is the question of British Israelism important? First of all, the Jews today absolutely loathe the idea of anyone other than themselves claiming to be physical Israelites. They insist that they are the only descendants of Israel left on the earth, and therefore the Covenant of God is with them alone. Likewise, since they believe that *true Israelites* are still required to keep the Old Covenant, what would it mean if there are actually *a whole lot more* legitimate Israelites out there than what they acknowledge? There would be many others with the "right" to keep the Sabbath and Holy Days and share in God's promises of favor.

Many who are part of Messianic Judaism likewise believe that British Israelism is racist and demonic, since they are still aligned very much with traditional Judaism. By contrast, many (but not all) in the Jewish Roots camp believe in major aspects of the *Two House Theology*.

## A Smorgasbord of Combinations

With only these two major doctrinal variables to consider for the moment, just think about the number of combinations of ideologies that are produced (not to mention others that we will discuss later). On one hand, you have those who believe in *Two Laws* and *One House*. This includes traditional Judaism and many within Messianic Judaism. On the other hand, there are those who believe in *One Law* and *Two Houses*, common with many of the Jewish Roots groups. But what if you believe in *Two Laws* but also accept British Israelism? Then you would believe in *Two Laws* and *Two Houses*. In that case, you would agree with the Jews that there is a separate set of laws for Gentiles apart from the Jews, but believing

that many Americans and British are actually Israelites, you would be claiming the "right" to keep the Torah just as much as the recognized Jews. And then there are those who believe there is only *One Law* for all, but at the same time discount British Israelism, which is much akin to mainline Protestants. These are ones who believe in *One Law* and *One House*.

Now then, just think about people in these *four different camps* choosing fellowship. Many of them seek to fellowship with a "Sabbath-keeping group" of some kind, and there are few enough congregations that many go to the nearest one available in their local area. But be careful! If you seek to attend a Messianic Jewish group, even though you are of Jewish Roots orientation, if you are not actually "Jewish," do not let on that you think you are keeping the Sabbath as an obligation to God. Leave it unspoken so that they might assume you are a "practicing Gentile" so as not to offend many in the host group. Or conversely, if you are a Messianic Jew, but fellowshipping with a Hebraic Roots group, it might be best not to let on that you believe that you, *and not they*, are actually authorized to "keep" the Sabbaths.

What is fascinating is that because of all of these incompatible doctrines, many participants are trying to solve the "unity problem" by advising "love," seeking common ground, and advocating a policy to downplay doctrinal differences in the name of "fellowship." Does that sound familiar? It is exactly what has been going on in the Church of God family of groups, as certain uniting voices are seeking to "get everyone together" in spite of very strong differences in doctrine. The truth is, simply believing in worship on Saturday vs. Sunday is *not enough glue* to hold these factions together. It really takes much more!

### **Attraction for Church of God Members**

Why would anyone who learned "the Truth" through Herbert Armstrong ever become enamored with any aspect of the Jewish Roots movement? That is easy to explain.

Many Jewish Roots adherents claim that they are not a denomination, but they hold to seven basic tenets that set them apart from other sects. They believe: 1) the entire Bible should be obeyed, 2) that Christ did not do away with the Law, 3) that the Talmud (the Jew's oral law that Jesus condemned as man-made) does not have God's authority, 4) that the Law (Torah) is for everyone (One Law), 5) that the Hebrew language should be studied, 6) that history should be studied to understand past corruption of God's Way, and 7) that the Sabbath and Holy Days must be observed.

Given that summary, what is your first impression? *We agree with all of those principles too!* It sounds very much like what Herbert Armstrong taught the whole church to do in the twentieth century! Is it any wonder then that the Jewish Roots movement began to take off in the 1970s, and then really exploded in the 1990s? Why might that be? Is it just possible that the weakening and ultimate dissolution of the Worldwide Church of God from the 1970s through the 1990s actually set adrift many sheep who then sought refuge in the Messianic movement? That is exactly what happened! Being cast off amidst doctrinal and administrative turmoil, many of these lost sheep were looking for a new safe haven. In fact, some of the leaders of the largest Jewish Roots groups today originally learned their "Bible truths" through membership in the Worldwide Church of God years ago, and then carried that foundation into their new Messianic practices.

So what is the problem? If they "agree" with foundational principles that Herbert Armstrong taught—which we believe were part of the *faith once delivered*—why are they not a reasonable "alternative" for fellowship today?

### **Never Forget the Basics!**

What is missing from this analysis of Jewish Roots theology? Well, what do they teach about the most foundational doctrines, like *the nature of God*? Here is where their fascination with "things Jewish" gets them into trouble.

Judaism teaches that there is only one Being who can be called God, the One we call the Father. They cite Deuteronomy 6:4 as proof: "Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God is one LORD." Most Jews, therefore, are *monotheistic*. What then do you think is true about many in the Jewish Roots movement? Well, many of them do not advertise their teaching on the nature of God. You have to dig for it. But when you do, you will find that many have embraced *Jewish monotheism*, an absolute denial of the Truth about who and what God is!

Those who are Messianic Jews most certainly teach monotheism. This means that, even though they accept that Jesus Christ is the prophesied Messiah, they think of Him only as a human being (like Moses) whom God raised up to save the world. They do not believe at all that He was *a pre-existent member of the God Family*, as we were all taught through Mr. Herbert Armstrong. And the same is true for many who are associated with Jewish Roots as well. A number of "big names" within the Worldwide Church of God ministry who later departed to start their own groups ultimately *changed their belief* concerning the nature of Jesus Christ, and many deceived sheep did not even realize it because they were focused more on just finding any "Sabbath-keeping group" nearby.

Does this matter to you? Would you settle for meeting with a group just because they are having a service on Saturday? How much basic truth must a fellowship possess and defend in order for you to believe that God is present and working there? Just the Sabbath? Be careful! God prophesied that many in the last days would be using the name of Jesus and yet denying Him by their actual teachings:

Little children, it is the last time: and as ye have heard that antichrist shall come, even now are there *many antichrists*; whereby we know that it is the last time (1 John 2:18) [emphasis mine throughout].

For there shall arise *false Christs*, and false prophets, and shall show great signs and wonders; insomuch that, if it were possible, they shall deceive the very elect (Matthew 24:24).

A good man out of the good treasure of his heart bringeth forth that which is good; and an evil man out of the evil treasure of his heart bringeth forth that which is evil: for of the abundance of the heart his mouth speaketh. And *why call ye me, Lord, Lord, and do not the things which I say?* (Luke 6:45–46)

Yes, there are many prophesied to be calling Jesus Christ, "Lord," but at the same time denying everything critical about who and what He is. Do you really think there is some "spiritual wisdom" found among ministers who deny the Truth about the God Family Plan, given that they believe there can never be more than one "member" of that Family? This is the first and most basic of doctrines!

What about many other doctrines? Is the Hebrew calendar God's calendar? We say yes, and so do most of them (since they often default to whatever the Jews teach). But what about *how to use that calendar?* When are God's Passover and Holy Days to be kept? Many of these groups conclude that God gave the Jews (those practicing Judaism) authority to tell us which night on that calendar is Passover night, and what day is Pentecost (just for examples). Yet Church of God, The Eternal is a remnant group that formed for the very purpose of defending basic doctrines originally taught by Herbert Armstrong, like a Monday Pentecost. Many of these Jewish Roots fellowships follow the Jew's perversion to merge Passover into the Night to Be Much Observed, or to keep either a Sivan 6 or a Sunday Pentecost! If you are one who believes these are "small issues" that do not preclude your thinking that these Messianic groups have "something to offer," then you most definitely are not on the same page with what we stand for. The only reason we became a remnant group in 1975 is because *it did matter* to us. And it still matters to us.

What about the teaching on the nature of man? Does it matter? Does God want us to understand who and what we are, as well as who and what God is? Herbert Armstrong

was led by God to impart that divine understanding to us, and that is why we know that mankind was *created intentionally by God with a rebellious nature* for us to overcome through self-crucifixion and the putting on of Jesus Christ through the Holy Spirit. What do Messianic groups teach by comparison? Let us pick on the *First Fruits of Zion* once again, since they have made their teaching very plain for all to see:

### "Gods" at Mount Sinai

According to a popular Jewish teaching about Psalm 82, the Psalm originally addressed the entire nation of Israel after they received the Torah at Mount Sinai. In that explanation, the gift of receiving God's holy Torah at Mount Sinai *elevated the spiritual state of Israel to an angelic, divine level. They became like divine beings—like gods, so to speak—immortal and pure.* If the people at Mount Sinai had kept the Torah and not sinned, *they would have retained their divine, godlike status* and been ever after "sons of the Most High." When they sinned by making the golden calf, however, *they lost their divine status . . . .* The same traditional interpretation of Psalm 82 appears in several other sources. For example, the following teaching appears in the Talmud: We should be grateful to our forebears, for had they not sinned by making the golden calf, we would not have been born into the world, as it says in Psalm 82, "I said, 'You are "gods"; you are all sons of the Most High.'" After they sinned, however, the LORD told them, "Now that you have done evil, though, 'You will die like mere men.'" (*First Fruits of Zion*: <https://ffoz.org/discover/hanukkah/are-we-gods.html>) [emphasis mine]

What does this tell us? This is nothing more than Jewish perversion. They believe that physical Israelites actually *became divine beings* at Mt. Sinai, and then later "fell" from their divinity because of sin. It sounds very much like false Christianity and their heresy concerning the "fall of man" in the Garden of Eden. Of course, both doctrines came from the very same enemy of man—Satan, the Devil—who very much wants to hide from man the knowledge of what he truly is, and why he was created. Does this teaching matter to you? Enough to make it a test for fellowship?

Even if many other Jewish Roots groups do not share this precise doctrine about the nature of man, do they teach the Truth that Jesus Christ actually revealed in our age? Not even the Worldwide Church of God held on to that truth after the mid-1970s. They all departed from it, beginning to say that man was created "neutral," neither good nor evil! Do you really think you will be able to find any spiritual wisdom within any group like that, when they are ignorant concerning the most fundamental doctrines that affect God's called children? That has *never been* how God works in teaching His true Church!

Either make the tree good, and his fruit good; or else make the tree corrupt, and his fruit corrupt: for the tree is known by his fruit (Matthew 12:33).

### **The Real Point of It All**

When Messianic groups teach that certain customs commanded to ancient Israel were on the list of things "not done away" by Jesus Christ, from where do they derive their authority? In other words, *who said so*? If they teach that physical circumcision is still required for one who is a physical Jew, where did they get that inspiration? Was it from the same "source" as the Jewish converts in the first century who were stirring up controversy in the church in Jerusalem (Acts 15:24)? By what authority were they dictating what portions of the Old Covenant were still applicable vs. which ones were not? The truly inspired apostles of Jesus Christ had to set the record straight. The question is, who has the authority *in our day* to clarify these confusing issues? Would it be ones who are teaching falsehoods about who God is, who man is, and what the purpose for human salvation entails? Hardly!

What did Herbert Armstrong teach to us to clarify the difference in the eternal Laws of God that remain in force at all times vs. those laws that were temporary in nature? What was *the faith once delivered* through God's chosen servant that explained which Old Covenant teachings were transformed by the sacrifice of Jesus Christ *away from a physical edict*? Let us take one particular Old Covenant command as an example for our case study.

### **Must God's People Wear Fringes Today?**

Numbers 15:38–40 states:

Speak unto the children of Israel, and bid them that they make them fringes in the borders of their garments throughout their generations, and that they put upon the fringe of the borders a ribband of blue: And it shall be unto you for a fringe, that ye may look upon it, and remember all the commandments of the LORD, and do them; and that ye seek not after your own heart and your own eyes, after which ye use to go a whoring: That ye may remember, and do all my commandments, and be holy unto your God.

Notice also: "Thou shalt make thee fringes upon the four quarters of thy vesture, wherewith thou coverest thyself" (Deuteronomy 22:12).

Is this still required of all spiritual Israelites today, like keeping Sabbaths and Holy Days? What do we believe is the truth of the matter? There are many sources for confirming the original church teaching, like the October-November 1983 issue of *The Good News* magazine, entitled, *Which Laws in the Old Testament Have Authority Today?* Even though this article was published after the WCG began perverting much of the original Truth, it still confirms the *formula* used by Herbert Armstrong to clarify which laws are lasting. In summary:

- The Ten Commandments existed prior to the codification of the Law on Mt. Sinai, and *they define what is sin*.
- Statutes and Judgments, which came afterward, still expound the Commandments and *show how they are to be applied more specifically* (like Leviticus 18, defining what is incest—a violation of the Seventh Commandment).
- Ritual sacrifices, washings, lighting of candles, etc., added later, *do not define sin*, and therefore they *are not* still binding today. They were merely *reminders of sin*.
- Passover was *the singular sacrifice* commanded prior to Mt. Sinai, and which God included as *required worship* of the One True God (the First and Second Commandments).

With these principles as our blueprint, you can plug in virtually every command from the Old Covenant and figure out which provisions are still binding today in exactly the same way as before, and which ones have changed or been replaced in the New Covenant.

Therefore, what about our test question for this case study on Numbers 15:38–40? Should true Christians today wear fringes like ancient Israel was commanded to do? Well, what does our formula tell us?

Was the command for fringes one of the original Commandments, or even one of the Statutes or Judgments? No, it was not. Does the command to wear a fringe actually define sin, or does it simply *remind us of sin*? God made the Israelites wear fringes so that when they looked down and saw them throughout the day, they would be reminded of God's Law and *what constitutes the transgression of that Law*. Therefore, the wearing of fringes was part of *the temporary law* that was replaced in the New Covenant!

Does that mean that we believe fringes were totally *done away*? No! They were no more done away than was the command for circumcision. But even as circumcision was *changed* from a physical sign in the flesh to a *spiritual state of the converted heart* (Romans 2:28–29), so was the fringe (or tassel) replaced in the New Covenant by *the power of God's Spirit*, dwelling within each of us after baptism. It is *that Spirit in you* which is your *perpetual and powerful reminder* to keep God's Law uppermost in your thinking *always*!

Ancient Israel had no access to spiritual baptism and the true begetting of the Holy Spirit. So the fringe was *a reminder of sin and law*, and it foreshadowed the time to come when true conversion would finally be opened to the called, and the Church would have the indwelling power to actually remember God's Commandments moment by moment.

Now then, between the two options, a piece of blue fringe hanging from your waist, or the indwelling presence of God's Holy Spirit, which one do you value for helping you *actually practice obedience* to God's Commandments?

Those of Messianic Judaism and Jewish Roots will argue that Jesus Christ wore fringes (since He was an obedient Jew) and therefore we are to do what He did. Well, if so, then we should also be offering animal sacrifices, because Jesus certainly did that too, since He lived while the Old Covenant was still in force. Jesus would have obeyed everything in the Old Covenant! But how long did that Covenant last? Until His death and resurrection. Once Jesus Christ ascended to His Father's throne to be sanctified as our High Priest (on Wavesheaf Sunday), that Old Covenant was nullified, including every provision of the law that only gave "reminders of sin," including animal sacrifices, washings, lighting of candles, and wearing fringes.

How simple! It truly is the simplicity of Christ (2 Corinthians 11:3). But do not tell that to the Jewish Roots advocates. Oh no, they have a very different "formula" for determining which Old Covenant instructions are still binding today. So what? Remember, these are the same groups that have swallowed *major doctrinal error* on every principle that matters most (who is God, who is man, and what is real salvation)! Why would anyone called to a knowledge of the real Truth through a legitimate last-day servant, look to these groups for wisdom?

### **What Do Your Personal Choices Testify?**

But is there anything wrong with wearing a fringe, speaking Hebrew phrases instead of English, wearing Jewish attire, etc.? No, doing those things are not sin. But recall also that we have an obligation before God that goes further:

Abstain from all appearance of evil (1 Thessalonians 5:22).

But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts: and be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you with meekness and fear (1 Peter 3:15).

What we speak, how we dress, and how we appear to others is *sending messages* about what we each stand for. What *immediate signals* are you sending out, based upon what you show outwardly? If you are mimicking the outward behaviors of the Messianic movement, will not people presume that you agree with their ideologies? That is what "an appearance" is all about. Do not claim that appearances do not matter. God says that they do! You are called *lights* for His revealed Way of Life (Matthew 5:14–15).

Herbert Armstrong, the man we believe was sent by Jesus Christ to deliver real Truth, did not use Hebrew words in casual language, wear fringes, or sport an unkempt beard. Neither do we.

As always, the real question is, what source will each of us pick to teach us spiritual wisdom? In this little fellowship, the teachings that we are defending as *the faith once delivered* are not found in monotheistic (or Trinitarian) sects that deny who Jesus Christ is, or deny what is man's true hope for salvation. These sects are filled with doctrinal error, and we refuse to do things that might make others believe that we are part of them. We choose to be witnesses by showing *a truly bright light* in this very dark world.

Always your servant and brother in the Faith,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "Jon W. Brisby". The signature is written in black ink and is centered on the page.

Jon W. Brisby