

**Text:** Various

**Title:** Hebrew Roots Movement or Jewish Roots Movement or Awakening

**Truth:** HRM is a doctrinal deviation from orthodox Christianity.

**Date/Location:** December 2 and 6, 2020 at FBC

## Introduction

I had heard about the Hebrew Roots movement before, but I was not familiar with it. Then it came up recently in conversation. After that, I asked a pastor friend if he had anything written on the subject, and he did not. So, I figured I better dig in. After all, there are 200,000 to 300,000 adherents to the movement.

The basic idea of HRM is that the church has lost its way, and must return to the Jewish or Hebrew roots of its faith as in the first century. The lifestyle of the first century Jew is to be practiced by all believers, even imposed upon them. Adherents emphasize that Christians must “believe in a Hebrew way.”

Based on the above, and before really digging in to a study of the movement, I wondered if it is basically a variant of replacement theology. Is it the modern version of the circumcision faction that plagued the early church (Acts 15) and which Paul wrote against?<sup>1</sup>

But I also cautioned myself that Christians must understand that salvation *is* of the Jews (John 4:22). Christianity is an outgrowth of the Jewish faith. It is the fulfillment of that faith.<sup>2</sup> It has a definite Jewish flavor to it.

## I. Key Ideas and Practices

- Law of Moses (Torah) elevated. They are “Torah observant.”

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<sup>1</sup> “The circumcision” is used to refer to the Jewish people in a good or neutral way in Romans 4:12, 15:8, and Col. 4:11. It refers to regeneration in Col. 2:11. It refers to the Judaizing party in Gal. 2:12 and Titus 1:10. Note particularly Acts 15:1, 5.

<sup>2</sup> To my Jewish readers, this is not intended to offend. Your own Scriptures in the Hebrew Bible demand that *something* more must come—a Servant who gives Himself as an offering for sin (Isaiah 43); a priest after the order of Melchizedek (Psalm 110); a kingdom (Amos 9:11, Isaiah 9, Isaiah 11, Ezekiel 37:24), a new covenant (Jeremiah 31), etc. Jesus Christ answers to all of those and many more, as a fulfillment of the Hebrew Scriptures.

- Kosher diet is required, as is keeping Sabbath and Jewish feasts.
- Most elevate other Hebrew traditions. Focused attention is given to Hebrew culture and lifestyle of the first century. The idea is that “Jesus was Jewish, so we should be too.”
- Some elevate extra-Biblical writings or prioritize OT over NT.
- Some change their own name to a Hebrew name.
- Christ came to clarify the Jewish oral law was not of divine origin—not to establish a new religion.
- Use Yahweh often in reading Scripture because that is “God’s Name,” or write the word God as G-d with the (superstitious?) reverence that a Jew would use today.
- Use Hebrew Yeshua to refer to Jesus.
- Teach that the New Testament was originally written in Hebrew.
- Critical of Christian traditions (like Christmas and Easter). Belief in these is considered “harmful” [7].
- Some deny the Trinity and deity of Christ. The idea of God in the flesh is an offense to some HRM advocates.
- Sin is defined as breaking the Torah (1 John 3:4, misapplied from the Law of Christ to the Law of Moses).
- One-law theology based on Numbers 15:16.

As a Christian pastor, this is a very concerning list. It indicates misunderstandings of Scripture in many areas.

## II. Connections

- A. The Sabbath emphasis seems to be influenced by Seventh Day Adventism.
- B. The Worldwide Church of God is the major influence on HRM through the teachings of its founder, Herbert W. Armstrong. He had such beliefs as forbidding medical intervention and requiring three tithes [5]. He believed the lost tribes of Israel ended up in Britain, the U.S., and several other European countries. He denied the Trinity. The movement was charged with works-salvation and Walter Martin in *The Kingdom of the Cults* said that Armstrong borrowed from SDA, JW, and Mormon doctrine.

After the death of the founder, the church changed its doctrine to match more the evangelical mainstream doctrine. Churches split

away from the denomination starting in the 1970s, retaining variations on the beliefs above. Today the HRM is claimed to be a grassroots movement without a church superstructure [2:History:Para 2].

- C. Another related movement was the Sacred Name Movement.
- D. Messianic Jewish influence, but the movement is distinct from the Messianic Jewish movement.
  - 1. Messianic Jews are primarily of Jewish ethnicity and are concerned about cultural practice. Gentiles can participate. The movement is dispensational, generally.
  - 2. HRM is largely made up of Gentiles. It is not exclusive, however.
  - 3. Both groups (MJ and HRM) suggest that the Law of Moses must be followed for sanctification. Some practically consider the Law as necessary for *salvation*.
  - 4. HRM is not dispensational and variations may be anti-dispensational instead of neutral on the issue. It is similar to covenant theology in that believers in Jesus are the true Israel.
- E. A present day influential teacher of the movement is Yisrael Izzy Avraham. He emphasizes the language and culture of the Jews, but centered on the Messiah. He directs the “Holy Language Institute” [8]. He has a show on the Hebraic Roots Network. He is a Messianic Jew and belongs to a synagogue. He says he is “in, but not of” the HRM. Some believers explain that they have wonderfully discovered and belong to the “holy language tribe.”

### **III. Theological Issues [December 6, 2020]**

- A. The Law is not actually binding on all people of all time. HRM confuses the Law of Christ with the Law of Moses. Gentiles were not the recipients of the Mosaic Law. That Law has been fulfilled by Christ (Matt. 5:17) and is *explicitly* set aside for the church-age believer, whether Jew or Gentile (1 Cor. 9:20). In fact, a *Jew* today cannot fulfill the Law of Moses, because the sacrificial system is not operational.

Acts 15 clearly means that Gentiles are freed from law-keeping as a way to please God or express true faith. To claim that this only has to do with the evangel (good news/gospel) is not convincing. The passage is also clear that the Law was not required before or *after* salvation!

The books of Romans and Galatians make it clear that the Acts 15 decree was considered final, especially by the apostle Paul as indicated in the epistles. Nowhere does Paul teach his Gentile target audience that they must keep the Law for salvation. [1] contains several paragraphs of good text on this issue.

Keeping the Law for salvation is clearly wrong. In fact, the Law was *never* a means of salvation, neither for church saints or Jews before Christ came.

To put it starkly, some HRM people say “You cannot have eternal life without the Law/Torah” [9]. This is heresy.

- B. Keeping the Mosaic Law for sanctification is also wrong, according to Galatians 3:1-3. The Spirit-filled walk is how a believer expresses his new life in Christ, and how he therefore pleases God.

For instance, Col. 2:16 says that no one (including HRM proponents) are allowed to judge me regarding Sabbath-keeping. They may consider one day above another, but I consider the days differently (Rom. 14:5). Flipping this around, I am not permitted to judge an HRM advocate for observing a Jewish day or festival if they so desire.

However, I am authorized by God’s word to condemn a doctrine that raises these issues as *requirements* for salvation or sanctification. If those practices are considered in a doctrinal system to have the legalistic effect of earning merit with God or advancing likeness to Christ, then *that* teaching—not the voluntary participation in certain cultural forms—is what must be condemned. The New Testament is clear on this issue.

- C. The Sabbath was a sign of the Mosaic covenant for the Jewish people—not for Gentiles. See Exodus 31:13 and Ezekiel 20:12, 20. The Sabbath is not a sign for the church. In fact, if there is a “sign”

for the church, it would be the Lord's Table or baptism, but not Sabbath-keeping.

D. Christianity has no dietary regulations except for those listed in Acts 15:20. These "regulations" are not for salvation or even sanctification. To avoid offense toward our Jewish friends, we should not eat idol-meat, except in the manner permitted by Paul in 1 Cor. 10. We should also not eat animals that have been strangled or eat blood.

As far as the rest of food concerned, Jesus made it clear in Mark 7:18-19 and Acts 10:11-16.

E. The above theological error about Sabbath and dietary laws play into the next error, namely, "if you are not moved to keep the sabbath or to keep dietary restrictions, you must not truly be born of God." Adherents of the movement would likely say that these works are evidentiary of one's salvation, and not the way to earn salvation. The problem is that with explicit Scriptural teachings against these particular works being required at all of NT Christians—and even NT Jews!—it appears that they are raising these to a level that is akin to works salvation. Your faith *must* be expressed in these ways to be satisfactory to the HRM. But that is *not* the case at all.

F. We must be very clear that the Bible alone is the word of God. Only it is God-breathed. It is our only and sufficient rule of faith and practice. If a teaching agrees with it, fine. If not, it is out. Raising extra-biblical sources to a place of prominence on par with or even above Scripture is not permissible for a Christian.

G. Limiting celebration of days to only those days in the Law is invalid. Jesus recognized Hanukkah at some level (John 10:22). That is not listed in the Law of Moses. There should be no issue with marking certain days with special thanksgiving for things like the birth of our Lord, or the resurrection, or even a personal birthday or anniversary. These are fine times to honor God and enjoy the blessings He has bestowed.

H. Testament priority. One convert to the movement wrote, "decided that the Hebrew text was right" [3]. This is concerning because it

pits the NT against the OT. The truth is that both testaments are equally inspired, such that there really are not two testaments as much as there is a single Bible. A method of interpreting Scripture that elevates one section over the other is immediately suspect because *all of Scripture is God-breathed*.

- I. The doctrine of Christ. This is a big issue. Note what is written in the (favorable) Wikipedia article [2], emphasis in bold mine:

There is no unified Christology in the Hebrew Roots movement. It is **not rare** to find **among Hebrew Roots believers** people who **reject the notion of Yeshua as God in the flesh**. The "notion of a "Trinity" or any other "God in the flesh" Messiah teaching is a fundamental violation of that clear understanding of the ONE and ONLY true God," according to some in the movement. To make Yeshua as God is "the equivalent of breaking the first of the Ten Words" (Ten Commandments) according to others.

This is basically the Jewish error propagated into the modern HRM. We have taught from the Bible that Jesus shares exactly the very divine nature of God, so that there are three persons with one essence in the one and only God who is triune. Here are some summary points to help you review the doctrine of the deity of Christ:

1. The Son of God who came in the flesh as Jesus is *not* a created being because He did not have a beginning. John 1:1, 17:5. He was before all things. Col. 1:17. He pre-existed. John 1:15
2. The Son was not created because anything that was created was created by Him. John 1:3, Hebrews 1:2, Colossians 1:16. He is in the "uncreated things" category, whereas everything else that exists is part of the "created things" category. Those are the only two categories of things that exist.
3. The Son of God is the very image and likeness of God. Hebrews 1:3.
4. Jesus is called God *by God*. Hebrews 1:8.
5. Jesus is called God by the apostles. Titus 2:13, 2 Peter 1:1, Romans 9:5 (the first two are "Granville Sharp constructions").

6. Jesus did the works of God. For example, He raised the dead and made food out of essentially nothing. Luke 7:14-15, Matt. 14:17-21.
  7. In Jesus all the fullness of the Godhead dwells in bodily form. Col. 1:19, 2:9.
  8. Jesus is one with the Father. John 10:30.
  9. We are called to honor the Son as we honor the Father. For the Son to have the same honor as the Father, He must be of the same essence as the Father. John 5:23. If we do not honor the Son this way, we do not actually honor the Father either.
- I. Dispensationalism. The HRM believes in a light version of replacement theology. The nation Israel is basically now the people of God who believe in Yeshua the right way.
1. “The entire reason the church created dispensationalism with its eschatological view of Futurism was to get rid of the law so they could explain away their corruptions.” [7] That is a very foolish and anti-historical position. To suggest that dispensationalists are *all* antinomian is extraordinarily a reckless charge.
  2. “Dispensationalism was created by those who did not want the Reformation to take hold.” [7] This is another completely incorrect statement.
  3. This is a woefully uninformed approach to dispensationalism that is historically inaccurate and out of date. At least source [7] is demonstrating that he wants a reformed approach to Scripture, he rejects the Rapture, Tribulation, personal Antichrist, etc. He also seems to go the extreme of being anti-local church. No church is perfect, dear friends, but that does not give you warrant to leave all local churches. Cultish forms of doctrine very frequently do this—they reject what God has clearly revealed (Heb. 10:24-25, local churches throughout the New Testament) and instead gravitate toward some esoteric interpretation that is “enlightened” and which not many people “see” in the Scriptures.

J. Soul sleep. I had heard that some HRM adherents hold to the doctrine of soul sleep, which is that a person who dies sleeps through the “intermediate state” until the resurrection of the body. In other words, there is no conscious existence after death and before the resurrection. I found one source that verified this is a “thing” with some HRM advocates [9]. Some go so far as to say that the soul does not go *anywhere* upon death. It just stays with the body, they teach, and is resurrected with the body, so that it is like a time-warp after death and no matter how much time passes, it will seem like no time has passed at all. This doctrine is also held by Seventh Day Adventists and Jehovah’s Witnesses.

It is based on a wrong understanding of the word “sleep” in passages such as Daniel 12:2 and 1 Cor. 11:30 and 1 Thess. 4:13. Sleep is a euphemism for *death*, but not for unconsciousness of the soul after death. After one dies, the soul goes immediately to be with either the Lord (2 Cor. 5:8) or to Hades. Other texts of Scripture prove that soul sleep is a false teaching:

Rev. 6:9-11 where souls of dead people are conscious in heaven and speaking.

Luke 16:19-31 in which the rich man in particular is presented as awake, conscious, and in torment. He represents any person who dies and goes to Hades.

Philippians 1:23-24 speaks of the two states life and death, with no inkling that there is a third state in between.

The Bible is clear that death is defined as the soul leaving the body. Consider Philippians 1:23, Genesis 35:18, Eccl. 12:7, 2 Cor. 5:8, and James 2:26.

K. Annihilationism. I have not been able to confirm that HRM advocates believe in annihilationism, in which the souls of those who are wicked are not punished but rather are destroyed and pass into a state of non-existence. Whether or not HRM believes this doctrine does not change the fact that it is out of step with Scripture. The Bible is clear that people who die in unbelief are punished for their sin forever. As hard as that teaching is, the Bible cannot be mistaken: Luke 16:19-31 (again); Revelation 20:10, 15;



and Matthew 25:41. The fire is everlasting because the people will be there forever. The fact that a person exists forever in a state of eternal (second) death does not confuse us as to believe that they actually have “eternal life.” That phrase refers to the eternal blessedness of the saved, who have the life of Christ. Those who do not share in the life of Christ have an eternity of separation from the life of blessedness with God and instead are condemned for their sin. This is called the second death (Rev. 20:6, 14; 21:8).

What other *authority* can you bring to the table to contradict that understanding?

#### **IV. Practical Issues**

- A. HRM cannot and does not fulfill all the Law. They engage it a bit of bait-and-switch in talking about the Law, only keeping select portions of it. They speak about all 613 laws, but it is impossible to keep many of those today—with no sacrificial system for example. Not even Jews keep the whole law today, or even substantial portions of it. There are no annual pilgrimages, sacrifices, and the like. They have no atoning sacrifice. God has seen to that, in order to make clear that the once-for-all sacrifice of Christ would be the only one that anyone can look to for rightness in one’s relationship to God.
- B. Teaching doctrines that confuse honest believers and/or sow division among them or in churches is a matter that is not tolerable to the conservative = Bible believing Christian. Those who create such divisions are to be rejected (Romans 16:17-18).
- C. Some make an attempt to distinguish the Hebrew Roots Movement from the Christian Hebrew Roots Movement. I have not seen enough evidence to find this a credible or practical distinction.
- D. Theological error invariably leads to further error in doctrine and practice. The current generation of HRM advocates must consider the effects of their beliefs and practices on the next generation. HRM confuses and clouds issues so that the next generation will likely run amok into works-based salvation or denials of crucial doctrines *even if* their parents (physical or spiritual) do not hold those particular errors.

E. As a pastor, I am required to inform the church of matters such as these to faithfully fulfill my ministry. Pastors are not only called to teach (feed) and guide (lead) but also to guard and protect the flock from error. This is not an optional part of the calling of the pastor—as if he can avoid the most difficult or sensitive issues. Warnings are an important part of ministry: 1 Thess. 4:6, 5:14; Titus 3:10; Acts 20:31.

## Conclusion

The HRM is not a form of sound doctrine. It has errant theology in a number of ways and must be avoided. Calling upon people to “believe in Messiah in a Hebrew way” is never what the Bible calls Christians to do. That is an added requirement to genuine faith in Jesus Christ. No one is called to change their culture to the Hebrew culture in order to be a faithful Christian, or keep select parts of the Law of Moses, or believe in the holy language. These things are additions to the Bible that are attractive because they have a historical attraction to them.

MAP

## References

[1] <https://answersingenesis.org/presuppositions/dangers-hebrew-roots-movement/>

In this article, AiG explicitly says that it does not take a position on dispensationalism or covenant theology. That doesn't bode well for its long-term theological future.

[2] [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hebrew\\_Roots](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hebrew_Roots)

[3] <https://jewsforjudaism.org/knowledge/articles/hebrew-roots-movement-often-lays-roots-for-jewish-life-conversion-or-not>

Jews for Judaism is “an education and counseling organization that seeks to counteract ‘deceptive proselytizing targeting Jews for conversion.’” They see HRM as a fringe of the fringe, farther out than Jews for Jesus, and rejected by both Hebrew Christians and Jews (and, I would add, Biblical Gentile Christians as well).

They find that HRM people tend to reject Christianity, and in learning the Torah move instead toward a stream of more pure Judaism. Or worse, they convert to **Noahidism**, a movement of non-Jews who observe the seven Noahide laws as the basis of morality. Those laws are:

1. Do not deny God
2. Do not blaspheme God
3. Do not murder
4. Do not engage in incest, adultery, pederasty, bestiality.
5. Do not steal
6. Do not eat a live animal
7. Establish a legal system to maintain some semblance of law and order.

[4] Jews for Jesus article that is now not available. Stephen Katz, “The Jewish Roots Movement: Pros and Cons,”

<https://jewsforjesus.org/publications/havurah/havurah-v04-n01/the-jewish-roots-movement-pros-and-cons/>

[5] [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Grace\\_Communion\\_International](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Grace_Communion_International)

[6] <https://www.hebrewroots.net/> This is claimed to be a “mom and pop” shop written by Dean and Susan Wheelock. It is not an official organizational or “denominational” page. However, They received a Federal Trademark for the term “Hebrew Roots” and began publishing the Hebrew Roots magazine in 1998.

[7] [messianicandhebrewroots.wordpress.com/dispensationalism/](http://messianicandhebrewroots.wordpress.com/dispensationalism/)

[8] Yisrael Izzy Avraham, <https://madmimi.com/s/242586> in which he disavows the title “leader of the Hebrew Roots Movement.”

[9] <https://twinternational.org/what-happens-when-you-die-in-the-hebrew-roots/>