

Source: <https://answersingenesis.org/presuppositions/dangers-hebrew-roots-movement/>  
Accessed: Nov 9, 2020

# Dangers of the Hebrew Roots Movement

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## Abstract

The Hebrew Roots Movement has influenced hundreds of thousands of Christians in recent decades, and many more have encountered arguments from those in that group. The movement places a strong emphasis on Hebrew traditions and the Law of Moses. This article will describe the nature of the Hebrew Roots Movement, examine some of its major beliefs in light of relevant biblical passages, and challenge those who have been influenced by its teachings.

## At-a-Glance

- Certain Jewish teachings are elevated to the level of Scripture.
- The Hebrew Roots Movement (HRM) misunderstands the extent and scope of the Mosaic law.
- The “Jerusalem Council” rejected the notion that Gentile believers must follow the Law of Moses.
- The Apostle Paul refuted many of the most popular teachings of the HRM.

## The Growing Dangers of the Hebrew Roots Movement

In recent years, an increasing number of Christians have adopted teachings associated with the Hebrew Roots Movement (HRM). Properly defining this movement is difficult because it has no central hierarchy or leader and no official statement of faith for members to endorse. While this article will explain and critique some of the major teachings connected to this movement, *we recognize that some adherents to the HRM may not agree with all of the positions outlined here.*

**[Editors Note 07/06/2018:** While the previous sentence appeared in the original article, some of the wording in the remainder of the article gave the impression to some readers that every adherent to the HRM was being painted with a broad brush. Since this was not the intent of the article, certain revisions have been made to clarify this point. Also, several people responded to the original article claiming that it misrepresented their beliefs. However we received many responses from HRM proponents seeking to defend the beliefs and practices described in the article. Obviously, these individuals did not believe we mischaracterized their views; they simply disagreed with our understanding of the relevant biblical passages.]

# What Is the Hebrew Roots Movement?

Broadly speaking, followers of the HRM believe that all believers in Christ are obligated to follow Jewish laws and practices from the books of Moses. In some groups, extrabiblical rabbinic teachings and traditions are elevated (if not in official doctrinal beliefs then in practice) to the same level as Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy.

Although they often speak of keeping the “law,” they are usually inconsistent in how this is understood and defined. For example, certain laws are either broken or neglected while a great deal of attention is placed on keeping the Sabbath (Friday sunset through Saturday sunset) and celebrating the feasts mentioned in Leviticus 23. These issues will be discussed in more detail below.

It is difficult to document the movement’s history because of its lack of organizational structure, but the modern HRM has been influenced in some ways by Seventh-Day Adventism and the Worldwide Church of God during the lifetime of its founder, Herbert W. Armstrong. Additionally, the HRM has been influenced by the practices of Messianic Jews, but the similarities between the groups are superficial and should not be conflated. In fact, some Messianic Jewish organizations have denounced the beliefs of the HRM.[1](#)

The past few decades have witnessed a growing influence of this movement among conservative Christians. It is not unusual to see some HRM proponents give themselves Hebrew names, identify as Torah observant, write “[God](#)” as “G-d,” eat only kosher foods, claim that the New Testament was originally written in Hebrew (or at least several books were), condemn numerous [Christian](#) traditions as pagan, and dismiss teachings from Paul’s epistles. Some have gone so far as to challenge orthodox Christian beliefs such as the Trinity and even the deity of [Jesus](#) Christ. Fundamentally, the HRM teaches that many modern Christian beliefs and practices were introduced to the [church](#) by pagan Greeks. This is why they generally do not like to be identified as Christians. Instead, they believe that they need to recover the first century Hebrew roots of Christianity.

One writer summarized the HRM in the following way:

It is a very modern movement that insists that we must resurrect first-century Judaism (our Jewish Roots) and the milieu and lifestyle of first-century Jews and impose them on both Jewish and non-Jewish believers. This is not just an academic study to better understand Scripture and its setting but is rather a movement of restoration that claims that the church has moved off its Jewish foundation and must return to a more Jewish way of life to be authentic.[2](#)

So how should the claims of the HRM be discerned? Is it simply an up-and-coming movement destined to become another Christian denomination, albeit one with a strong emphasis on Jewish culture and practices? Or are some of its teachings dangerous and divisive, worthy of correction and rejection? The remainder of this article will call attention to some of the serious errors promoted by the HRM. Again, keep in mind that the HRM is not monolithic, that is, its followers often disagree on how much of Jewish culture and beliefs should be practiced. *So each point in the following critique may not apply to every person in the HRM.*

## Covenantal Confusion

Since the early years of the church, Christians have wrestled with issues related to Israel and the church. Many of these struggles can be seen throughout the New Testament epistles and they have continued into the twenty-first century. For example, two leading theological systems within Protestantism, *covenant theology* and *dispensationalism*, reach very different conclusions in how they understand the natures of Israel and the church. As a non-denominational ministry, Answers in Genesis does not take a position favoring one of these views over the other (please see “[Where Do We Draw the Line?](#)” for more details).

Many of the most serious errors of the HRM stem from its understanding of certain biblical covenants. Chief among these understandings is the notion that “the law” was intended to be binding on all people throughout history. Part of the rationale behind this notion stems from certain statements from Jesus.

Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them. ([Matthew 5:17](#))

If you love Me, you will keep my commandments. ([John 14:15](#))

The HRM makes much of the fact that Jesus said he did not come to abolish the Law and that he stressed the importance of keeping commandments. In their view, this means that the law must still be in force today—even on Gentiles, although they were not under the law in Old Testament times ([Ephesians 2:11–13](#)).<sup>3</sup> Somehow they seem to overlook or interpret the last part of [Matthew 5:17](#) in a much different way than Christians have typically done. Jesus said he came to fulfill the Law and the Prophets.<sup>4</sup> By living a sinless life ([2 Corinthians 5:21](#)), and then dying as the ultimate sacrifice, our Passover ([1 Corinthians 5:7](#)), Jesus Christ fulfilled the law ([Colossians 2:14](#)). This is why the Apostle Paul confidently wrote that those who have been saved by faith in Jesus Christ are “not under the law” ([Romans 6:14, 7:4; Galatians 5:18](#)).

Furthermore, it is highly questionable to assume that Jesus had the Mosaic<sup>5</sup> Law in mind when he told the disciples to keep his commandments. Earlier in the same evening, he commanded the disciples to love one another ([John 13:34](#)), and he gave them several commands during his ministry that are not spelled out in the Mosaic law. It is far more likely that Christ’s words in [John 14:15](#) referred to these instructions. Before he ascended, Jesus delivered what is popularly called the Great Commission, in which he instructed his disciples to make disciples of all nations, and part of that process was to teach them to obey everything he had commanded them ([Matthew 28:18–20](#)). Notice Jesus did not command them to bring their future disciples into the nation of Israel, as God told Moses ([Exodus 12:48](#)), but to make disciples of Jesus among the nations.

HRM followers often engage in some trinitarian misdirection here. They rightly claim that God gave the law to Moses and that Jesus is God. Then they conclude that since Jesus is God, his commandments would be the commandments given to Moses. There are multiple problems with this type of argument. First, God gave plenty of commandments in Scripture that do not fall under the Mosaic law. He commanded Noah to build an Ark and to bring food for all the animals that would come to him, and Noah obeyed God’s commands ([Genesis 6:22, 7:5](#)). Should we

assume that every believer must also follow these commands? If so, we should expect to see many more Arks being built around the world.

The HRM followers I have spoken to about this typically reply that those commands were given to a specific person for a specific time, and they are correct. But if that reason is strong enough to avoid following such commandments, why does it not hold true when it comes to the Mosaic law? After all, the Mosaic law was given by God to a specific group of people at a specific time. The [Bible](#) spells out this fact at the initiation of this covenant and again 40 years later when the Israelites prepared to enter the land God promised to them.

Shortly after the Lord delivered the Israelites from Egyptian bondage, they camped at the foot of Mt. Sinai, and Moses went up the mountain to hear from God.

The Lord called to him out of the mountain, saying, “Thus you shall say to the house of Jacob, and tell the people of Israel: ‘You yourselves have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagles’ wings and brought you to myself. Now therefore, if you will indeed obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my treasured possession among all peoples, for all the earth is mine; and you shall be to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.’ These are the words that you shall speak to the people of Israel.” ([Exodus 19:3–6](#), emphasis added)

The Bible is abundantly clear that God made this covenant with the people of Israel (the physical descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob), and Moses acted as their representative before the Lord.

Throughout Deuteronomy (the name of the book means “second law”), Moses repeatedly emphasized that God made this covenant with the Israelites at Mt. Sinai (Horeb), and he even states that the covenant was not made with their fathers ([Deuteronomy 5:2–3](#)). Following a lengthy restatement of hundreds of commandments in chapters 4–28, we read these words: “These are the words of the covenant that the Lord commanded Moses to make with the people of Israel in the land of Moab, besides the covenant that he had made with them at Horeb” ([Deuteronomy 29:1](#)). The entire book is replete with references to these laws being given to the Israelite people for them to obey as they live in the land they were about to possess.

Many HRM proponents respond to such claims by arguing that believers in Jesus are Jewish, even if they have no known Jewish heritage or ethnicity. Therefore, they argue that Christians are under the Mosaic law. Besides the issue of the law being fulfilled, this claim raises two additional problems. First, by inconsistently following the law, HRM followers are guilty of breaking the entire law. James stated, “For whoever keeps the whole law, but fails in one point, has become guilty of all of it” ([James 2:10](#)). But HRM adherents do not follow the 613 commands (by traditional count) in the Mosaic law—they focus only a small fraction of those. In fact, they could never keep all of those laws because they do not have access to the Levitical priesthood.

The second problem with the teaching that Gentiles must be placed under the Mosaic law is that the New Testament has much to say on this issue that directly contradicts the claims of the HRM, as will be explained in the remaining sections.

# The Jerusalem Council

Acts 15

## Did the Apostles Believe That Gentiles Should Follow the Mosaic Law?

The book of Acts records how the early Christian message started in Jerusalem and then spread to Judea, Samaria, and the ends of the earth. The first seven chapters focus primarily on the church's growth in Jerusalem. Beginning in chapter eight, the message spreads beyond the city. The well-known conversion of some Gentiles, Cornelius and those in his house, at Peter's preaching sparked a crucial debate in the early church. Not too long after that, following Paul's first missionary journey where countless Gentiles believed the [gospel](#) message, the apostles gathered together in Jerusalem to settle a divisive issue in the church that speaks directly to the claims of the HRM.

After Paul and Barnabas declared all that God had done during their journey, particularly the conversion of the Gentiles, some of the "believers who belonged to the party of the Pharisees rose up and said, 'It is necessary to circumcise them and to order them to keep the law of Moses'" ([Acts 15:1-5](#)). The apostles and elders debated the matter for a time, and then Peter stood and argued that such burdens mentioned in [verse 5](#) (circumcision and Mosaic law) should not be placed on the Gentile believers. "Now, therefore, why are you putting God to the test by placing a yoke on the neck of the disciples that neither our fathers nor we have been able to bear? But we believe that we will be saved through the grace of the Lord Jesus, just as they will" ([Acts 15:10-11](#)).

I have spoken with someone in the HRM who responded to this by saying that this referred only to the evangelistic message, and that once a Gentile became a believer, then he would be expected to be circumcised and keep the law. However, this is flatly contradicted by what happened next. James addressed the group and said, "Therefore my judgment is that we should not trouble those of the Gentiles who turn to God, but should write to them to abstain from the things polluted by idols, and from sexual immorality, and from what has been strangled, and from blood" ([Acts 15:19-20](#)).

So why did James think that four restrictions should be placed on Gentiles? Was it because Gentiles needed to obey these laws to be saved? Not at all! He answers that question in the next verse. "For from ancient generations Moses has had in every city those who proclaim him, for he is read every Sabbath in the synagogues" ([Acts 15:21](#)). One HRM follower told me that this verse meant that the Gentiles would go to the synagogues in those cities to learn about following the law. But that is not even close to what James said. The reason for the restrictions was so that the Gentile Christians who were not under the Mosaic law would not unnecessarily offend the Jews. Notice, James did not include circumcision or the entirety of the law in his response. In fact, the four "apostolic decrees," as they have been called, are quite similar to four of the regulations in the Mosaic law placed upon foreigners who wished to remain in the land of Israel. They were to abstain from pagan sacrifices ([Leviticus 17:8-9](#)), from blood ([17:10-14](#)), things strangled ([17:13-14](#)),<sup>6</sup> and sexual immorality ([18:6-23](#)).

Did the rest of the elders and apostles agree with Peter and James? Absolutely. In fact, they agreed at every point and drafted a letter to be sent out to Gentile believers that included the following words:

The brothers, both the apostles and the elders, to the brothers who are of the Gentiles in Antioch and Syria and Cilicia, greetings. Since we have heard that some persons have gone out from us and troubled you with words, unsettling your minds, although we gave them no instructions, it has seemed good to us, having come to one accord, to choose men and send them to you with our beloved Barnabas and Paul. . . . For it has seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us to lay on you no greater burden than these requirements: that you abstain from what has been sacrificed to idols, and from blood, and from what has been strangled, and from sexual immorality. If you keep yourselves from these, you will do well. Farewell. ([Acts 15:23–26](#), [28–29](#), emphasis added)

So the disciples specifically stated that they did not send people to teach Gentiles that the law must be kept, and then they sent people to deliver a letter that included just four regulations. If ever there was a time in early Christianity to teach that Gentiles should follow the law, this was it. The decision of the “Jerusalem Council” carried the combined weight of the apostles and confirmation of the Holy Spirit. They did not command the Gentile believers to keep the Sabbath, observe the festivals, or to be circumcised.

## Do the New Testament Epistles Teach That Gentiles Should Follow the Mosaic Law?

As mentioned earlier, the HRM often ignores relevant passages in the New Testament epistles. In some cases, the text is not technically ignored; rather its meaning is flipped on its head. Downplaying the teaching contained in these letters is unwise, particularly since most of these letters were specifically composed to instruct the various churches or individuals on matters of Christian doctrine and practice. The Gospels and Acts, on the other hand, are more akin to historical writings. That is, their emphasis is on what happened whereas the epistles’ focus is on how one should live.

### The Gospel: Jesus Plus Nothing Else

## Galatians

Written close to the same time as the convening of the Jerusalem Council, Paul’s letter to the Galatians was penned primarily to deal with the same type of issues. A group of people known as Judaizers had troubled the churches in Galatia with the idea that believers in Christ must submit to the Mosaic law, with circumcision being highlighted throughout the letter. In fact, it is probably not a stretch to say that the HRM would end today if each of its followers properly understood the main argument of Galatians.

Paul makes some extremely strong statements against such teaching. Following his introductory comments, he twice condemned those, whether man or angel, who would preach any other gospel than what Paul had preached to them ([Galatians 1:8–9](#)). Later, he stated, “We ourselves are Jews by birth and not Gentile sinners; yet we know that a person is not justified by works of the law but through faith in Jesus Christ, so we also have believed in Christ Jesus, in order to be

justified by faith in Christ and not by works of the law, because by works of the law no one will be justified” ([Galatians 2:15–16](#)).

The HRM follower might respond that they do not believe they are justified by the law, but through faith in Christ.<sup>7</sup> Instead, many of them view the works of the law as being required of believers for the purpose of obedience and sanctification. Paul bluntly addresses this idea as well:

O foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you? It was before your eyes that Jesus Christ was publicly portrayed as crucified. Let me ask you only this: Did you receive the Spirit by works of the law or by hearing with faith? Are you so foolish? Having begun by the Spirit, are you now being perfected by the flesh? ([Galatians 3:1–3](#))

Paul stated that those who think they can be sanctified by the works of the law are foolish and have been bewitched. If we have been saved by “hearing and faith,” having “begun by the Spirit,” then how should we live? Paul condemns the notion that one should now rely on the works of the law, attempting to be perfected by the flesh. Instead, he provides the answer near the end of his letter. “But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh. For the desires of the flesh are against the Spirit, and the desires of the Spirit are against the flesh, for these are opposed to each other, to keep you from doing the things you want to do. But if you are led by the Spirit, *you are not under the law*” ([Galatians 5:16–18](#), emphasis added). How much plainer does Paul need to say it? What can we unreservedly say about those who are led by the Spirit? They are “not under the law.”

Instead of being under the law, Paul stated that in Christ, we have liberty and do not need to rely on law-keeping.

For freedom Christ has set us free; stand firm therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery. Look: I, Paul say to you that if you accept circumcision, Christ will be of no advantage to you. I testify again to every man who accepts circumcision that he is obligated to keep the whole law. ([Galatians 5:1–3](#))

Notice the similarity of [verse 3](#) with [James 2:10](#). If someone believes he must keep the law, then he cannot pick and choose which parts of the law he wants to keep: it’s all or nothing.<sup>8</sup> There is much more from Galatians to address this issue, but we need to see what Paul taught about these matters in some of his other letters.

## The Gospel Does Not Depend on the Works of the Law

## Colossians 2

In [Colossians 2](#), Paul explained that the Colossian believers, who were of the uncircumcision (i.e., Gentiles) had been “circumcised with a circumcision made without hands” having been saved “through faith in the powerful working of God” ([Colossians 2:11–12](#)). This circumcision made without hands refers to a circumcision of the heart, which comes through the Spirit ([Romans 2:25–29](#)).

The previous paragraph laid the framework for what Paul told these Gentile believers next. “Therefore let no one pass judgment on you in questions of food and drink, or with regard to a festival or a new moon or a Sabbath. These are a shadow of the things to come, but the substance belongs to Christ” ([Colossians 2:16–17](#)). As we have already seen in Acts 15 and Galatians, the early churches often consisted of contingents of both Jews and Gentiles, and they struggled with the dynamic of Gentiles being “brought near by the blood of Christ” ([Ephesians 2:13](#)). Many of the Gentile believers had been told that they need to believe in Jesus and follow some or all of the Mosaic law. But, as he did in Galatians, Paul rejected such a view and told these Gentiles not to let anyone judge them if they did not follow Jewish customs, such as the dietary laws, festivals, new moons, or Sabbaths.

Amazingly enough, HRM teachers flip the meaning of *this verse* on its head, claiming that Paul is telling them not to let anyone judge them for now keeping these practices.<sup>9</sup> Such an interpretation is exactly the opposite of what Paul stated. The whole thrust of the passage is that a person is saved by faith alone and not by human effort, such as legalism. Paul urges these Gentile converts to understand that they are in danger of losing their reward if they seek to be sanctified in any way outside of faith in Christ, whether it be legalism ([verse 16](#)) or other fleshly practices, such as asceticism and mysticism ([verses 18–23](#)).

## The Law of Liberty and the Weaker Brother

## Romans 14

Paul discussed dietary regulations and Sabbaths in [Colossians 2](#), and these two aspects of the Mosaic law show up again in [Romans 14](#).

As for the one who is weak in faith, welcome him, but not to quarrel over opinions. One person believes he may eat anything, while the weak person eats only vegetables. Let not the one who eats despise the one who abstains, and let not the one who abstains pass judgment on the one who eats, for God has welcomed him. Who are you to pass judgment on the servant of another? It is before his own master that he stands or falls. And he will be upheld, for the Lord is able to make him stand.

One person esteems one day as better than another, while another esteems all days alike. Each one should be fully convinced in his own mind. ([Romans 14:1–5](#))

Once again, it is difficult to be much clearer than what Paul wrote here. Believers should not pass judgment on each other over the foods they choose to eat. One person believes he can eat any type of food, but the one who is weak in faith believes he can only eat certain foods. Yet, even though Paul identifies this person as weak, he still urges one side not to pass judgment on the other side. The same is true when it comes to recognizing certain special days. One person highly esteems a given day while another esteems all days the same. Both positions are fine as long as each person is fully convinced in his own mind. These issues are matters of the conscience.

How could Paul, a Jewish believer in the Messiah, tell people that they do not need to observe special days or dietary restrictions? He explains in [verse 17](#) that the kingdom of God is not eating and drinking, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit. Keeping the Mosaic law



does not sanctify a person (nor does it save him) and neither does following any manmade set of rules. We are to walk in the Spirit each and every day, seeking to honor God in every situation.

Paul taught the same thing in 1 Corinthians 8. The person with a weak conscience is one who would not eat certain food, namely that which had been offered to idols. Others understood that the food itself was not defiled by an idol and that God is the Creator of all things, so they had no qualms about eating it. They recognized they were free to eat it because “food will not commend us to God. We are no worse off if we do not eat, and no better off if we do” ([1 Corinthians 8:8](#)). However, Paul did place a stipulation on them—they were not to eat such meat if it would cause their brother to stumble. Living the Christian life is not about what food you eat or which days you might acknowledge as holy. The issues of food and holy days require more space since the HRM focuses so much attention on them.

## Special Foods

It can easily be demonstrated from the pages of Scripture that the dietary regulations of the Mosaic law were not binding on all people throughout history. We have already seen that Paul permitted his readers to eat whatever they chose, as long as their decision did not injure the conscience of the weaker brother. Does the Old Testament have any teachings similar to this?

When God created [Adam and Eve](#), he instructed them to eat vegetation (Genesis 1:29). There is no mention of any change in this regulation until Genesis 9:3, which records the Lord telling Noah after the Flood, “Every moving thing that lives shall be food for you. And as I gave you the green plants, I give you everything.” Of particular interest here is that God specifically proclaims that he is changing what man is permitted to eat. At first, man could only eat plants, but after the Flood, God permitted man to eat meat from “every moving thing that lives.”

HRM proponents have argued that since the Flood account distinguishes between clean and unclean animals (Genesis 7:8), then it follows that God was simply telling Noah that he could now eat clean animals; thus it is just like the Levitical restrictions. A problem with this claim is that Genesis 9:3 makes no mention of the distinction between clean and unclean animals, so they are reading such an idea into the text rather than getting it from the text. In fact, the text specifically states twice that man was now permitted to eat “every” moving thing, and it mentions no restrictions. Another problem is that this verse still shows that prior to this moment, man was only permitted to eat vegetation. So the dietary restrictions found in Leviticus were clearly not in operation prior to the time of Moses. And if God changed the dietary restrictions at the time of Noah and the time of Moses, then there is no reason he could not have done so at the time of Jesus ([Mark 7:18–19](#)).

This simple fact undermines the central tenet of the HRM—the Mosaic law was not binding on all people throughout history. Of course, this does not mean it was fine to murder someone before God told Moses, “You shall not murder” ([Exodus 20:13](#)). Long before that, he confronted Cain over his evil act of murder (Genesis 4:10–15). He also told Noah that murderers deserve to be put to death, because man was made in God’s image (Genesis 9:6). Just because certain laws or principles can be found across biblical history, it does not follow that all 613 laws of Moses are binding across history.

## Special Days

A very common teaching in the HRM is that faithful believers must only celebrate the holidays that were part of the Mosaic Covenant. Those who demand that others participate in these festivals and abstain from any other celebration or face God's condemnation are teaching contrary to Scripture. Leviticus 23 describes the proper protocol for celebrating the following feasts: Passover, Unleavened Bread, Firstfruits, Weeks (Pentecost), Trumpets, Tabernacles, and Day of Atonement.

Every year around Christmas, Answers in Genesis receives hundreds of messages (via email and Facebook) from people within the HRM who castigate the ministry for talking about Christmas and using it as a time to point people toward the Savior. There is no question that many of our culture's Christmas traditions have no biblical basis, and HRM followers use this truth to label any and all celebrations of Christmas akin to worshipping pagan gods. The same thing happens every year at Easter time. Many of the claims about these holidays by the HRM are flawed, being based on revisionist history, shoddy scholarship, and the misinterpretation of Scripture. We have written much on these topics, so there is no reason to rehash the issues here (see footnote for links to various relevant articles).<sup>10</sup> We will consider a few of the major errors of the HRM on these points.

First, as discussed above, Christians have the freedom to esteem any day higher than any other or to not hold one day in honor above another ([Romans 14:5](#)). While this particular verse might have been written to specifically address the issue of the Sabbath, it can still be applied to any holiday, and Paul taught the same type of freedom applied to the festivals ([Colossians 2:16](#)). Neither did the apostles at the Jerusalem Council instruct the Gentile believers to celebrate the Levitical feasts.

Second, it is quite hypocritical to accuse Christians of celebrating pagan holidays (because extrabiblical ideas have become associated with the celebrations for some people) when their own celebrations are loaded with extrabiblical ideas. For example, HRM proponents criticize Christians who celebrate Christmas for a variety of reasons. One popular reason is that the Bible never says anything about things like Santa, reindeer, and mistletoe being connected to the birth of Jesus Christ. While it's true that the Bible does not mention these things, it does not follow that every Christian who celebrates the Lord's birth in December does so using things like Santa, reindeer, and mistletoe. Furthermore, this criticism is a wee bit like the clover calling the grass green. When some HRM followers celebrate the Passover, they include several items and practices that are not mentioned in Scripture, such as a roasted egg, the hidden piece of matzah bread called the afikomen, a bowl of salt water representing tears of Hebrew slaves and the Red Sea, and an extra seat for Elijah. These "traditions of men" were added over the centuries and are not found in the Bible. So why is it acceptable for traditions to be added to the Passover celebration but not to holidays deemed unacceptable by the HRM?

Third, if it is highly offensive to God to celebrate any holiday outside those mentioned in Leviticus 23, then why do so many HRM adherents often celebrate at least one holiday not found in that chapter and did not arise until more than 12 centuries after Moses? Hanukkah is an eight-day holiday to remember the rededication of the temple following the Maccabean Revolt (c.

167–160 BC). Why would the HRM celebrate such a festival when it is not mentioned in the Mosaic law?

The HRM certainly cannot condemn those who celebrate Hanukkah for a couple of reasons. Their followers highly esteem Jewish practices, and Hanukkah is a very important Jewish celebration. But the greatest argument against the “Leviticus 23 only” position is that Jesus almost certainly celebrated Hanukkah, “the Feast of Dedication” in the “winter” mentioned in [John 10:22](#). If he was not in Jerusalem to celebrate the holiday, then what was he there for? And if it were wrong to celebrate it, why did he not take the opportunity to set people straight during the “Feast of Dedication”? So if Jesus did not violate the law by celebrating a holiday not found in Leviticus 23, then why would it be wrong for Christians to celebrate a holiday not listed in that chapter? It should be mentioned that many HRM followers also celebrate Purim, another Jewish holiday that started long after Moses ([Esther 9:26–28](#)).

The point of the above discussion is not to criticize those who wish to learn more about the Hebrew culture, traditions, and practices during biblical times. In fact, learning about these things to some degree is necessary for properly understanding the Bible. Jesus and all of his apostles were Jews. With a few possible exceptions,<sup>11</sup> every book of the Bible was written by Hebrews. If we are to properly interpret the Bible, we need to be aware of the historical context of its writings.

There is nothing wrong with a Christian taking part in a Passover seder or celebrating Hanukkah, as long as he realizes that such practices are not required for salvation or sanctification and do not grant any special favor with God. Observing these festivals can help one acquire a better grasp of the Bible’s context. I recently had the privilege of visiting Israel during Hanukkah, and I believe it was quite helpful for me to see firsthand what the celebration is like today and what it means to the Jewish people. But I certainly do not believe it made me any holier than fellow believers who have not had such a wonderful opportunity.

## Final Considerations

The reason for this critique of the HRM is that some in the movement go far beyond the desire to gain a deeper understanding and appreciation of the historical and cultural background of Scripture and have fallen for false doctrine. These are not minor disagreements that can be swept under the rug, but are egregious errors that often have serious ramifications and must be addressed. When HRM proponents condemn Christians for not following the Mosaic law and/or extrabiblical Hebrew traditions, then they have crossed a line repeatedly rejected by the apostles. They need to hear the same rebukes that Paul delivered to the Galatians who had been bewitched by teachings very similar to demands made by some in the HRM.

There are real dangers in taking good intentions (learning more about the Hebrew backdrop of Christianity or “walking as Jesus walked”) too far. Some in the HRM have created divisions in the body of Christ by labeling non-HRM believers as pagans or accusing them of engaging in pagan practices. They have set up a Christianity consisting of haves and have-nots (i.e., the haves who keep the law and the have-nots who do not).

Some of the people involved in this movement have slipped into believing and teaching a false gospel by promoting “works salvation” when they argue that believers must keep the Mosaic law to maintain their salvation. If salvation is by God’s grace received through faith alone in Jesus Christ alone, as the Bible clearly states ([Romans 11:6](#); [Ephesians 2:8–9](#)), then it cannot be based on works of the law, or else it would no longer be by grace. Certainly, Christians should do the good works God has set before them ([Ephesians 2:10](#)), but we are not saved by such efforts, nor do those efforts keep us in a state of grace. We can only be saved on the basis of the complete and perfect atoning work of Jesus Christ.

If you have been influenced by the Hebrew Roots Movement, I urge you to carefully read through the book of Galatians. Seek the guidance of the Holy Spirit as you read. Do not rely on my interpretation of its passages mentioned above or on the interpretation of various HRM teachers. Just carefully and prayerfully read through the letter to see what Paul told his readers. Look closely at the other passages discussed in this article. Think about why none of the apostles ever instructed the Gentile believers to follow the Mosaic law when they had perfect opportunities to do so.

Remember that the kingdom of God is not about food and drink, but righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit ([Romans 14:17](#)). Recall the simplicity of the gospel, which is the power of God to salvation for everyone who *believes*, for the Jew first and also for the Gentile ([Romans 1:16](#)). It is not about the works we might do for God, but what God has already done for us. The gospel message Paul received and delivered is this: “that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures” ([1 Corinthians 15:3–4, NKJV](#)).

## Footnotes

1. Messianic Jews are people who are ethnically Jewish but believe that Jesus is the Messiah and that salvation can only be received through faith alone in Jesus Christ. They practice certain Jewish customs and traditions because these things are part of their cultural heritage. Generally speaking, Messianic Jews are dispensationalists who believe a strong distinction exists between Israel and the church. The HRM consists of people who usually are not ethnically Jewish; they are often Gentiles who believe that they must follow certain Jewish customs and traditions either as a means of sanctification or, worse, salvation. The HRM rejects the strong distinction between Israel and the church taught by dispensationalism. Instead, they often teach that believers in Jesus are the true Jews. For an example of a Messianic Jew pointing out the errors of the HRM from his perspective, see Stephen Katz, “The Jewish Roots Movement: Pros and Cons,” <https://jewsforjesus.org/publications/havurah/havurah-v04-n01/the-jewish-roots-movement-pros-and-cons/>.
2. G. Richard Fisher, “Bewitching Believers Through the Hebrew Roots Movement,” Berean Call, January 1, 2014, <https://www.thebereancall.org/content/january-2014-bewitching-believers-hebrew-roots>.
3. The Gentiles were not under the Mosaic law, but this does not mean they were under no moral obligation to God. Each person still possessed a God-given conscience to know right from wrong ([Romans 2:14–16](#)).

4. When Jesus spoke of “the Law” and “the Prophets,” he was likely referring to sections of the Hebrew Scriptures (Old Testament) instead of the Mosaic law. “The Law” would be a reference to the first five books of the Bible—the books of Moses. See [Luke 24:27](#) where Luke calls this section “Moses.” However, since the Mosaic law is included in “the Law” portion he mentioned, it is appropriate to say that he came to fulfill it too.
5. The term "Mosaic Law" is used throughout this article as a synonym for the biblical term "Law of Moses." It does not imply that the law originated with Moses, as some HRM proponents have alleged.
6. John B. Polhill, *The New American Commentary: Acts* (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1992), 332. [Leviticus 17:13–14](#) does not use the words “strangled animals;” however, the passage forbids the eating of any animal with its blood in it, which strangled animals would have. Typically, an animal would be cut or torn open and the blood would be drained, and [verse 13](#) specifies that the blood should be poured into the dust.
7. I think many HRM adherents sincerely believe this and do trust in Christ for salvation. However, their frequent harsh condemnations of those who do not practice the law give the impression that they are inconsistent on this matter. That is, how can one claim that the keeping of the law is not required for salvation and then state that those who do not follow the law are pagans and stand condemned?
8. This is not to say that believers do not have the freedom to follow certain laws if they choose to do so; they have that freedom in Christ. Leading Messianic Jew, Dr. Arnold Fruchtenbaum, described his belief that believers are free from the law, but they are also free to follow certain laws if they so desire. He gave two strong cautions for those who choose to follow individual commandments of the Mosaic law. “However, there are two dangers that must be avoided by any believer who volunteers to keep commandments of the Law of Moses. One danger is the idea that by doing so he is contributing to his own justification and sanctification. This is false and should be avoided. The second danger is in one’s expecting others to keep the same commandments he has decided to keep. This is equally wrong and borders on legalism. The one who exercises his freedom to keep the law must recognize and respect another’s freedom not to keep it.” Arnold G. Fruchtenbaum, *Israelology: The Missing Link in Systematic Theology*, Rev. ed. (Tustin, CA: Ariel Ministries, 1994), 652. Notice how different Fruchtenbaum’s view is from those in the Hebrew Roots Movement. Generally speaking, Messianic Jews understand they are free from the law while those in the HRM believe they are under it.
9. I have heard such a response numerous times from HRM supporters. In a video on the [New2Torah.com](#) web page, the presenter states, “And Paul is simply saying in [verse 16](#) not to let people judge you for now keeping these commandments that were once against us.”
10. See “[4 Misconceptions About Christmas](#)” by Tim Chaffey and Jeremy Ham for some of the false claims about Christmas. For an article addressing similar claims about Easter, please see Roger Patterson’s article, “[Is the Name ‘Easter’ of Pagan Origin?](#)”
11. Many Christians consider Luke to have been a Gentile, which would mean that Luke, Acts, and possibly Hebrews were written by a Gentile. However, persuasive arguments can be raised to support Luke being a Jew. For a compelling case of Luke’s ethnicity and possible connection to the book of Hebrews, see David L. Allen, *Lukan Authorship of Hebrews* (Nashville, TN: B&H Academic, 2010). Also, we are not entirely sure of the

authorship of a few Old Testament books, although [Romans 3:1–2](#) seems to indicate that they were written by Jews.