

The following Scripture passages are offered to aid beginning fellowships. The readings and commentary for this week are more in line with what has become usual; for the following will most likely be familiar observations. The concept behind this Sabbath's selection is "the leaven of Pharisees."

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Weekly Readings

For the Sabbath of January 2, 2016

[A Followup to the December 26th Reading]

The person conducting the Sabbath service should open services with two or three [hymns](#), or psalms, followed by an opening prayer acknowledging that two or three (or more) are gathered together in Christ Jesus' name, and inviting the Lord to be with them.

When the disciples reached the other side, they had forgotten to bring any bread. Jesus said to them, "Watch and beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees." And they began discussing it among themselves, saying, "We brought no bread." But Jesus, aware of this, said, "O you of little faith, why are you discussing among yourselves the fact that you have no bread? Do you not yet perceive? Do you not remember the five loaves for the five thousand, and how many baskets you gathered? Or the seven loaves for the four thousand, and how many baskets you gathered? How is it that you fail to understand that I did not speak about bread? Beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees." Then they understood that He did not tell them to beware of the leaven of bread, but of the teaching of the Pharisees and Sadducees. (Matt 16:5–12)

2.

Pharisees sought theological purity; sought *perfection* in their worship of the God of Abraham. And modern rabbinical Judaism contends that Pharisees of the second temple were excellent readers of Scripture. So why would Matthew's Jesus warn His disciples about the teachings of Pharisees and Sadducees, especially in juxtaposition to Jesus telling the Pharisees and Sadducees that had just come to Him asking for a sign from heaven that these religious leaders couldn't interpret "signs of the times" (Matt 16:3)?

Elsewhere, John's Jesus told Jews gathered in the temple to keep Sukkoth that none of them kept the Law (John 7:19). And how could that be if "keeping the Law" involved seeking and applying theological purity in the person's relationship with God ...

If you, as a Christian, seek perfection in your worship of God, who is the center of your attention? You are. And if you are the center of your attention, who is your God? You are. And

is this not a transgression of the First Commandment? It is, isn't it? Therefore, those Pharisees and Sadducees that sought individual perfection under the Law would not have been keeping the Law: they would have all been Law-breakers, what Jesus told the assemblage of righteous persons in the temple on Sukkoth. Not that any of them were openly breaking a Commandment, but in focusing on their own worship of God, they missed the larger point that keeping the Law requires the person to manifest love for neighbor and brother; requires the person to take his or her mind off him or herself and to put others before self in the person's thoughts.

In the above case, "perfection" is the enemy of "good works."

When a person realizes that he or she has a point of Scripture wrong—a prophetic understanding or the Christian's relationship with the Law—and the person does nothing about correcting the error, the person becomes an unbeliever, a sinner; for the person's worship of God is no longer based on faith, but usually on tradition. Thus, if it has been the Christian's tradition to worship God, Father and Son, on the day after the Sabbath, and if the Christian finally reads Moses for him or herself and sees that manna was given for six days but not given on the Sabbath (Ex chap 16), then reads John's Gospel and hears Jesus tell the crowd that followed Him that He was the true bread that came from heaven (chap 6), the spiritual manna, then if this Christian again opens his or her Bible to Hebrews and reads the citation from Jeremiah 31:31–34 inscribed in Hebrews 8:8–12 that says under the New Covenant, the Law [Torah] will be written on hearts and placed in minds so that all are taught by the Lord (from Isa 54:13); so that all will *know the Lord*, what is this Christian to do with the Sabbath? Continue to worship on the day after the Sabbath because that has been the Christian's tradition? Or begin to keep the Sabbath that as a Commandment moves from being written on two tablets of stone that Moses lugged down from Sinai to being written on two tablets of flesh that regulate the thoughts of the mind and the desires of the heart? For if the Christian doesn't begin to keep the Sabbath, the Christian transgresses the Law and is therefore a sinner of the sort Paul mentions when he wrote, "All who have sinned without the law will also perish without the law" (Rom 2:12).

Throughout the Depression of the 1930s and into the middle of the 20th-Century, one man more than any other powerfully preached over the radio that Christians are to blow the dust off their Bibles and read for themselves the words of Christ Jesus. He became the loudest voice advocating for Christians to keep the Sabbaths of God. Many Christians believed him: this "many" though was nevertheless a statistically insignificant number when compared to greater Christendom. But enough believed that the incorporated Worldwide Church of God had gross revenues that placed it among America's top 500 corporations. Yet this man, Herbert W. Armstrong, when he knew he had prophecy wrong in fall 1961 and had scheduled an advanced prophecy seminar for spring semester 1962 that he required all of his senior evangelists at Pasadena, California, to attend so that his ministry could get prophecy "right," tacitly rejected additional revelation and continued to teach what had become his odd but traditional understanding of biblical prophecy.

If a Sunday-keeping Christian realizes that the Sabbath is the seventh day, that Sunday is the day after the Sabbath as Scripture says nine times, but continues attempting to come into God's presence on the day after the Sabbath because the Christian is not under the Law—and Christians are not under the Law—is this Christian not a sinner that will perish without the Law according to Paul's Gospel; for Paul adds to the previous cite the following, "It is not the hearers of the law who are righteous before God, but the doers of the law who will be justified" (Rom 2:13).

Under Paul's gospel, Christians are to follow Paul as he followed Christ Jesus (1 Cor 11:1 *et al*), meaning that Christians are to voluntarily keep the Law as the right thing to do.

Under Paul's gospel, if a Gentile [a person who has no relationship to Scripture] does by nature what the Law requires, the person shows that the work of the Law is written on the person's heart, and this Gentile in having done what the Law requires in manifesting love toward neighbor and brother will be all right when judgments are revealed (Rom 2:14–16) ... a Gentile wouldn't know to keep the Sabbaths of God because the Gentile by defining category has no relationship with God; therefore, the Sabbath Commandment as the least of the Commandments would not apply to a Gentile.

But Christians by the very definition of the identifying noun <*Christian*> are not Gentiles even though many continue to live as Gentiles live: Christians and greater Christendom constitute a second nation of Israel, a spiritual nation, enslaved by Sin and Death as ancient Israel was physically enslaved by Pharaoh in the physical land of Egypt. Therefore, Christians have the added requirement of loving God as well as loving neighbor and brother when coming under Paul's gospel. And how does a Christian show that he or she loves God? By keeping the first four Commandments [for Roman Catholics, the first three Commandments].

Keeping the Commandments is the reasonable expectation of everyone in the household of God, and not something that earns the Christian anything. Thus, there are no wages, no rewards for keeping the Commandments. But not keeping the Commandments reveals imbedded unbelief of God in the Christian.

In his fifty year ministry, Herbert Armstrong never really grasped that writing the Law on hearts and minds required movement of the Law away from physically regulating what hands and body do as in murder and adultery (Matt 5:21–22; 27–28) to spiritually regulating inner thoughts and desires; required movement of the Sabbath Commandment away from dictating that hands and body do no mundane work on the Sabbath to the Christian bringing his or her thoughts and desires into subjection to God on the Sabbath as a prelude to Christ Jesus entering into the person to glorify the person's inner self.

In the decades of Armstrong's ministry, too many Sabbatarian believers placed their own personal relationship with Christ Jesus ahead of manifesting love for neighbor and brother, and in doing so, these Sabbatarian believers became unbelievers, sinners without committing any discernable transgression of the Law. For the Law exists to bring sin to life so that it can devour the unbeliever, about which Paul wrote:

For while we were living in the flesh, our sinful passions, aroused by the law, were at work in our members to bear fruit for death. But now we are released from the law, having died to that which held us captive, so that we serve in the new way of the spirit and not in the old way of the written code. What then shall we say? That the law is sin? By no means! Yet if it had not been for the law, I would not have known sin. For I would not have known what it is to covet if the law had not said, "You shall not covet." But sin, seizing an opportunity through the commandment, produced in me all kinds of covetousness. For apart from the law, sin lies dead. I was once alive apart from the law, but when the commandment came, sin came alive and I died. The very commandment that promised life proved to be death to me. (Rom 7:5–10)

For most of the disciples Armstrong made in his five decades of ministry, the Commandments that promised life proved to be their spiritual death sentences; for Armstrong was scarcely in the grave for a year when concealed unbelief in senior ministers manifested itself and Armstrong's ministry was "rehabilitated," emerging from this

rehabilitation as just another minor sect of Evangelical Christendom although leaving behind fossilized splinters of its former self.

As if having hooks akin to cholla cactus spines, the fossilized splinters left over from the rehabilitation of Armstrong's ministry snared the few believing Sabbatarianists that hadn't committed spiritual suicide and began to milk them for support so that these splinters could continue saying, unchanged, what Armstrong said when Armstrong knew he was a hypocrite, preaching an understanding of prophecy that wasn't true but was what his supporters expected him to continue declaring ... if the money was to continue, he had to continue saying what brought believers to him. This Garner Ted understood; hence, Garner Ted Armstrong's "killing" of the Advance Prophecy Seminar of Spring Semester 1962.

The concept of financial supporters dictating what a ministry can or cannot declare has proved to be the spiritual death knell for Christian ministries collectively ... *for whom does the bells toll; for you, Christian, who embrace tradition—*

On *Yom Kipporim*, 2002, the pastor of a fossilized splinter realized that both goats [the one sacrificed on the altar, and the *Azazel*] were the sin offering for Israel and as such neither goat could represent the Adversary, that both goats had to represent Christ Jesus, said from where he was seated for the Bible study, "Yes, that is what it says, but that is not our tradition. Our tradition has been that the *Azazel* represents Satan." And this pastor committed spiritual suicide with his mouth; for he knew inside himself that he had just placed belief of Armstrong's traditional understanding of the *Azazel* ahead of what he knew Scripture said. (The pastor can be named, but out of love for him, he hasn't been named here.)

Again, Christians are not under the Law even though it is the reasonable expectation of every Christian that he or she keeps the Law as if the Christian were an outwardly uncircumcised Judean (see Gal 2:14 in Greek).

When a person such as Abraham has life apart from the Law—and Abraham had life apart from the Law ...

Paul wrote,

Now the promises were made to Abraham and to his offspring. It does not say, "And to offsprings," referring to many, but referring to one, "And to your offspring," who is Christ. This is what I mean: *the law, which came 430 years afterward, does not annul a covenant previously ratified by God, so as to make the promise void*" (Gal 3:16–17 emphasis added)

For Abraham, sin existed, but existed in its "dead" state in which it could harm no one who believes God.

Hold the words of Paul that he wrote to the holy ones in Galatia in your mind, Christian, while a textual difficulty is addressed ... there will be Sabbatarian Christians that drag out Gen 26:5 to show that Abraham kept the Law, that Abraham had the Law. For to Isaac, the Lord said,

I will multiply your offspring as the stars of heaven and will give to your offspring all these lands. And in your offspring all the nations of the earth shall be blessed, *because Abraham obeyed my voice and kept my charge, my commandments, my statutes, and my laws.*" (Gen 26:4–5, v. 5 emphasized).

There does seem to be a conflict, one of many in the Bible—

The English translation of Genesis 26:5 that is cited above comes from the Masoretic Text, which didn't come into existence until between the 7th and 10th Centuries CE. Paul's citation is from the Septuagint, translated into Greek from an earlier version of the Tanakh than the Masoretic Text ... the modern recovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls have shown that the Masoretic

Text is similar to some texts of the Tanakh from 200 BCE (particularly the text of Isaiah), but different from others, meaning that although the Masoretic Text is today considered the authoritative Hebrew text, it is a redaction from earlier texts that were themselves redactions. No one has original autographs. Thus, strong evidence doesn't exist to clearly show that Abraham had the Law, which, again, according to Paul, didn't come into existence until four centuries after Abraham. Therefore, the Sabbatarian Christian who uses Genesis 26:5 as a proof text that the Law existed before Moses has serious problems with the Apostle Paul.

Because Israel in Egypt rebelled against the Lord and would not listen to Him (Ezek 20:8); would not believe Him, the Lord gave to Israel the Law to bring sin to life so that it, Sin, would devour those people who when in Egypt would not listen to Him ... if Israel had listened to the Lord at Sinai, and if in hearing the Lord's words Israel would have believed Him, there would not have been a golden calf rebellion against the Lord, with the Lord telling Moses,

Whoever has sinned against me, I will blot out of my book. But now go, lead the people to the place about which I have spoken to you; behold, my angel shall go before you. Nevertheless, *in the day when I visit, I will visit their sin upon them.* (Ex 32:33–34 emphasis added)

The Lord brought Israel's rebellion in Egypt against Him upon the people at Sinai by bringing sin to life so that the unbelief of the people might devour them ... He gave Israel a chance just as He gives every Christian a chance to show that the Christian believes Him. In fact, the Lord gave Israel many chances to show that this people believed Him; ten chances, and then the door to this nation of Israel entering the Promised Land closed forever. Of the generation of Israel numbered in the census of the second year, except for Caleb and Joshua, none entered into the Promised Land. All died in the wilderness, consumed by their unbelief (Heb 3:19).

Sin is, where the people are under the Law, transgression of the Law (1 John 3:4); but for those who are not under the Law, sin is simple unbelief of God (Rom 14:23). And yes, sin is just that simple.

The Law is a sign, a symbol representing belief of God. And like every symbol, it takes its meaning from its context, something that Herbert Armstrong never realized or understood. Therefore, the Sabbath as one link in a ten link chain remains the least of the Commandments, the weakest link, the most easily broken link that leaves the person who breaks the Sabbath a law-breaker, a sinner, an unbeliever unable to enter the Promised Land of heaven. But for the Sabbath to have meaning, the person must know that Christ Jesus is the Lord of the Sabbath, the spiritual Bread that came down from heaven on the seventh day, the bread ancient Israel never gathered, never ate, never knew about.

The context for the Law as a symbol to have meaning within greater Christendom is the indwelling of Christ Jesus in the Christian. Without the indwelling of Christ, the Christian remains a son of disobedience, not under the Law and not subject to the Law. Hence, again, Christians are not under the Law but are to keep the Law as their reasonable responsibility within the household of God.

But as Paul wrote concerning Israel—"not all who are descended from Israel belong to Israel, and not all are children of Abraham because they are his offspring" (Rom 9:6–7)—not all Christians are of Christ Jesus, and not all who claim to be born of spirit are sons of God. In this present era that will extend to the Second Passover liberation of a second Israel, only those persons foreknown by God the Father and predestined to be resurrected from death while still physically alive have been drawn from this world by God and delivered to Christ

Jesus to call, justify, and glorify while remaining physically alive. Therefore, the Law as a sign or symbol is as a red sky ...

The physical sign Jesus used that He said Pharisees and Sadducees could understand was that of a red sky at either dusk or dawn: “When it is evening, you say, “It will be fair weather, for the sky is red.” And in the morning, “It will be stormy today, for the sky is red and threatening”” (Matt 16:2) ... the “sign” of a red sky takes its meaning from its context; i.e., whether the sign occurs going into darkness, or going into light [day]. And the context in which the sign appears gives to the sign opposing meanings.

The Law is such a sign.

Jesus had previously told scribes and Pharisees that He would give them only one sign, the sign of Jonah—and He gave to them a physical meaning for the sign of Jonah in the physical portion of Matthew’s Gospel: “Just as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the great fish, so will the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth” (Matt 12:40).

Matthew’s Gospel, like Hebraic thought-couplet verse, has a physical portion and a spiritual portion, with the physical forming a shadow and copy of the spiritual ... Matthew’s Gospel breaks in chapter fifteen, with the story of the faith of the Canaanite woman (verse 22) beginning the spiritual portion of the Gospel. Thus, everything found in first fourteen and a half chapters should be repeated in the form of its mirror image in the remaining chapters.

The sign of Jonah in chapter twelve equates to a red sky going into darkness; the sign of Jonah in chapter sixteen equates to a red sky going into the daylight portion of a day. The signs of the times that Pharisees and Sadducees couldn’t interpret was the movement of meaning coming from changed context, which in the case of the sign of Jonah was movement from resurrection of the dead as people (as will be seen when the men of Nineveh are raised to life with the generation of Israel that was demanding a sign from Jesus) to resurrection of the dead inner self that results in spiritual birth coming from receiving a second breath of life in a still-living fleshly body.

So as not to get too far away from the Law as a sign that takes its meaning from its context, the Law when inscribed on two tablets of stone [its context] pertains to what hands and bodies do within the nation of Israel, but when the Law’s context changes to the Law being written on fleshly tablets, the heart and mind of the person, the Law goes from being Ten Living Words to being the manifestation of love for God, neighbor, and brother regardless of what human words are used to express this love.

The Christian who would have Abraham under the Law is shallow-minded, unable to think deeply about what the Law represents or about why the Law was given at Sinai, given to bring sin to life in a manner Paul experienced in his own life. Yes, the Law represents the character of God, but the character of God cannot be expressed in human words, and neither can the Law be expressed in human words when it is taken from the physical and moved into the spiritual.

In the physical (what carnal men can understand), the sign of Jonah pertains to the resurrection of a dead Christ Jesus from the grave after the body was three days and three nights in the heart of the earth. In the spiritual (what carnal men cannot understand), the sign of Jonah pertains to the resurrection of the inner self, causing the now-living inner self to be inside the fleshly body of the person like Jonah was inside the whale.

The leavening of Pharisees and Sadducees has several attributes, all of which orient around theological purity having priority over love for neighbor and brother. But theological purity—perfectly keeping the Law outwardly—gets the Law-keeper nowhere if the one keeping

the Law neglects to manifest love for neighbor and brother. And again, Paul's gospel is at the center of the intersection of Love and Law:

[God] will render to each one according to his works: to those who by patience in well-doing seek for glory and honor and immortality, He will give eternal life; but for those who are self-seeking and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness, there will be wrath and fury. There will be tribulation and distress for every human being who does evil, the Jew first and also the Greek, but glory and honor and peace for everyone who does good, the Jew first and also the Greek. For God shows no partiality. For all who have sinned without the law will also perish without the law, and all who have sinned under the law will be judged by the law. For it is not the hearers of the law who are righteous before God, but the doers of the law who will be justified. For *when Gentiles, who do not have the law, by nature do what the law requires, they are a law to themselves, even though they do not have the law. They show that the work of the law is written on their hearts, while their conscience also bears witness, and their conflicting thoughts accuse or even excuse them on that day when, according to my gospel, God judges the secrets of men by Christ Jesus.* (Rom 2:6–16 emphasis added)

The frame of Paul's gospel is doing what the Law requires regardless of whether the person has or doesn't have the Law, meaning that "not being under the Law" is not an excuse for lawlessness. The person who will be saved, according to Paul's gospel, is the one who does what the Law requires because doing so is the right thing to do. Thus, being careful to fulfill the busywork added to the Law to keep Israel's attention focused on God has, of itself, no value. Again, doing what is "right" by way of God, neighbor, and brother is what's required of the person who would be saved.

The preceding paragraphs would seem to be enough for the first Sabbath Reading of a new civil year. So while ending the Reading abruptly leaves much unsaid, there will be time to resume what has been begun.

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