

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 *spiritual circumcision*.

## Weekly Readings For the Sabbath of January 26, 2008

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.

The person conducting the services should read or assign to be read Romans chapter 3.

**Commentary:** In chapter two, the Apostle Paul says that the circumcision that matters is of the heart by Spirit, not of the flesh by hands (2:28-29). This was central to the message he taught everywhere, for the prophet Jeremiah writes, "Behold the days are coming, declares the Lord [YHWH], when I will punish all those who are circumcised merely in the flesh—Egypt, Judah, Edom, the sons of Ammon, Moab, and all who dwell in the desert who cut the corners of their hair, for all these nations are uncircumcised, and all the house of Israel is uncircumcised in heart" (9:25-26).

Judah and Edom (the sons of Esau)—and perhaps Ammon and Moab (the sons of Lot) and those who dwelt in the desert (the sons of Ishmael)—should have been physically circumcised if these nations had continued in the practices of Abraham. But apparently, even the house of Judah had abandoned the practice of circumcision, leaving only the house of Israel to continue physical circumcision as received from the patriarch Abraham until God sent what remained of Israel into captivity at Babylon. And, yes, God identifies the remains of the southern kingdom as the house of Israel at the time He sends this nation to Babylon (see Ezek 12:9, 21-25). From God's perspective, once He sent the northern tribes into Assyrian captivity, these tribes were dead (Assyria represents death as Egypt represents sin typologically). Israel still remained, for the name Israel stayed not with certain tribes, specifically the descendants of Ephraim and Manasseh as was taught by the former Worldwide Church of God and now taught by some of its splinters, but with the polis of Jerusalem. So Israel doesn't go into captivity until Nebuchadnezzar razes Jerusalem and takes the last inhabitants of the city to Babylon.

When a scriptural matter is unfamiliar, such as Judah having abandoned circumcision, and when scant evidence exists to prove or disprove the matter, understanding that natural Israel forms the lifeless shadow and copy of spiritual Israel allows the juxtaposition of the physical and spiritual to establish whether the scriptural matter has merit: if Jeremiah is correct, Judah was apparently uncircumcised when this nation went to Babylon. Judah was also all that was left in Judea of Israel when this nation was taken captive by