

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 Body of Christ*.

Weekly Readings For the Sabbath of February 10, 2007

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 service should read or assign to be read Matthew chapter 16.

Commentary: Pharisees and Sadducees were learned men of Israel who lacked the Spirit of God, or zeal for God based upon faith. They pursued a law that would have led to righteousness by the works of their hands (Rom 9:31-32); they were not men [and women] who are to be emulated. Rather, they are the touchstone for hypocrisy, having the law but not keeping it ... *not keeping the law*? How can that be? Rabbinical Judaism insists that the Pharisees were excellent readers of Scripture. Evangelical Christendom regards the Pharisees as the ultimate law-keepers. Yet Jesus told them that none of them kept the law (John 7:19). So knowing what the law says and closely following its dictates does not equate with keeping the law, a negative juxtaposition that will boggle the mind of a person not born of Spirit.

Keeping the law means doing those things that are described in the law, which is loving God with heart and mind, and loving neighbor as self. How to love God is described in the commandments, as is how to love neighbor—and here is where the problem enters: the commandments are not evenly divided between how to love God [commandments one through five] and how to love neighbor [commandments six through ten]. Rather, a person loves God by not being angry with his or her neighbor, by not lusting after his or her neighbor, by not bearing false witness about God, by not stealing tithes and offerings that belong to God, by not coveting acclaim or positions or offices that are God's to give to whom He will. A person loves his or her neighbor by worshiping the Most High, by not having idols in his or her front lawn or garden or on the rooftop, by not blaspheming the Father and Son by making their breath like them, by assembling together on the Sabbath not on the 8th day, by honoring parents as he or she honors God. Every commandment is about how to love God and neighbor.

A person's neighbors will see and note how a person worships God, and it is not love to these neighbors to miss-teach them through wrong examples. And God sees and notes how a person's professed love for Him is revealed in how the person treats his or her neighbors. It isn't the tongue that is to be believed, for the tongue will lie when the truth

is more easily uttered. It is the behavior of the person that “speaks” truth, understanding of course that on occasion the behavior will fall short of what it should be. It is on these occasions when God watches most closely for Jesus covers the shortfall with His righteousness. He knows what happened, and why.

So the example of the Pharisees and Sadducees asking for a sign is not to be emulated: it is an evil and adulterous [as in having an affair with false gods and demons] generation that seeks a sign. Besides, a sign will not be believed by those who ask for it. Jesus said He would give the sign of Jonah as the only sign of Him being the Messiah, and while false teachers of spiritually circumcised Israel attempt to squirm out from under the shadow of Jonah, saying that the sign of Jonah was an eclipse over Nineveh or some other nonsensical drivel, the sign of Jonah was resurrection to life after being three days [the hot portion of a 24 hour period] and three nights [the twisting or turning away from the light portion of a 24 hour period] in the belly of a great fish (Jonah 1:17 or 2:1 in Hebrew). It was after these three days and three nights that Jonah prayed from the belly of this great fish; it was after life had returned to Jonah.

Read Jonah closely, especially the end of chapter one and all of chapter two. Jonah loses his life; then has his life returned: “you [O Lord] brought up my life from the pit” (2:6). He lost his life remembering the Lord, praying to the Lord, who heard his prayer (v. 7). And now that he lives again, he will, with thanksgiving, sacrifice to the Lord, paying what he has vowed, for salvation belongs to the Lord (v. 9).

Jonah was dead for three days and three nights ... forty years ago, Seventh Day Adventist scientists sought and contended that they found a whale in which a person could survive three days and three nights. They missed the point entirely. The great fish was prepared by God; it wasn't a whale or any other fish in which it might be possible for a person to live in its mouth for seventy-two hours. Jonah died and was dead three days and three nights; he didn't somehow supernaturally live. Rather, **the sign of Jonah is resurrection after three days and three nights.**

After Jesus told the Pharisees and Sadducees that He would only give the sign of Jonah He abruptly left those religious leaders and went to the other side of the Sea of Galilee. His first disciples realized that they had not brought anything to physically eat, and Jesus warned them to beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees ... what is the leavening Jesus references? Is it asking for a sign? Yes, it could be, but that is too shallow of a look at what “leavening” represents. The *leaven* of the Pharisees is the incorporated problem of no faith that is concealed in asking for a sign; it is more than just the teaching of the Pharisees. This unbelief is like yeast in that once it enters a disciple's thinking the disciple loses confidence in having heard the soft voice of Jesus and wants visible and audible signs from God. No longer is the disciple willing to proceed on faith.

Should a person come, or should the person go? He wants what God wants for him to do; so he asks for a sign from God. If God wants him to become involved in this business deal, he asks God to turn his white hair black again. Such a thing is not too difficult for God to do, considering that He raised Jonah from the dead. And after all, isn't the Church today the Body of Christ? If God can raise Jonah and resurrect Christ, then turning the bald head black again isn't a big deal, is it?

How does the man want his disbelief served to him that he may vomit it up a second time, with honey or with gall? A sugary cough syrup that takes away deep breath [πνευμα] by congratulating the man for his good sense in asking to see evidence of

God's involvement before committing to the project, is this how? Or a bitter tonic that turns the stomach and makes the man want to vomit again immediately, a tonic that makes the man sweat and stink and discloses to the man his contempt for God, contempt that he did not know he had, contempt that he would have denied having, contempt that would have kept him out of the kingdom of heaven, contempt stemming from his lack of faith. To ask for a sign is to slap God in the face. To ask for a sign is acknowledging that the person does not hear the voice of Jesus. To ask for a sign makes the person a hypocrite, professing faith in Christ Jesus and the Father yet denying this faith by asking for physical evidence. This person certainly has ingested the leavening of the Pharisees and will die from food poisoning.

The person will die if the person is not already dead.

Reach with one hand and feel your pulse on your other wrist. Feel the rhythmic throbbing, the strong pulses, the evidence that you live physically. But did you need this "sign," the feel of your pulse, to know that you were alive? Or did you know by having consciousness? Isn't it the person who is not inside you [your neighbor] that needs to feel your pulse to determine if you are alive? It is this second person, correct, who needs the sign. A sign isn't necessary for you to know.

Why, now, would you need a sign from God to know if the Spirit of Christ dwells within you? Have you lost this Holy Spirit? Are you a different person than the one who was born of Spirit? You make yourself so by asking for a sign from God. You make yourself a stranger to God.

If God wants to stop you from making a mistake, He will, as your physical parent would when you were an infant, prevent you from making that mistake. If what you intend is not permanently harmful to you, then God will watch to see what you do and how you handle whatever problems you create for yourself: your spiritual maturation as a son of God is what your time here in this world is about. And this spiritual maturation process requires, yes, requires, getting yourself into situations that stretches your character. And sometimes you will do the very thing you despise. Why? Neither you nor God knows for absolute certain where your breaking point is until you are pushed to your limits. It was only when Abraham had the knife in his hand and was about to strike that God said, "[N]ow I know that you fear God, seeing you have not withheld your son, your only son, from me" (Gen 22:12).

But Isaac was not Abraham's only son according to the flesh. Isaac was Abraham's only son according to the promise.

With God, those who are dead (as in not having been born of Spirit) are dead. Those who are not of the chosen cultivar are wild olives, fit only for the fire. Thus, Ishmael did not count as Abraham's heir, something that annoys Muslims to this day. This does not mean, however, that Ishmael will not be resurrected in the great White Throne Judgment and judged by those things that he did, with salvation extended to him on the same basis as it was extended to the thief on the cross. He will be. But he will not be one of the firstfruits, nor will Esau, nor will Tereh, the biological father of Abraham. They were not chosen.

Jesus was the First of the firstfruits, and at His coming, those who have been born of Spirit since Calvary will be resurrected, some to glory and more to shame. Plus, those to whom was promised the inheritance of everlasting life will be resurrected to glory. Everyone else will await resurrection until the great White Throne Judgment. So upon Jesus' coming, the righteous men of old and born-of-Spirit sons of God who are worthy

will enter the kingdom of heaven. They will be as once-fired bisque ware, with a second firing [that sets their glazes] to occur following the great White Throne Judgment when the new heavens and new earth come.

When Jesus asked his disciples who people say that “the Son of Man is” (Matt 16:13 – note the referent of the question, *the Son of Man*), they answered by saying John, Elijah, Jeremiah, one of the prophets (v. 14). The people did not know who the Son of Man was—and to this day, people, including most Christians, do not know who the Son of Man is, a claim which makes an extremely controversial declaration.

After His disciples said who people thought the Son of Man is, Jesus said to them (implying that He was the Son of Man), “But who do you say I am” (Matt 16:15).

Wisdom is here required to understand the metaphoric language that in translation seems fairly straightforward, but language that has been used as justification of the mass martyrdom of multiple tens of thousands in less than a decade in the 16th-Century ... Peter answered Jesus’ question, whether as spokesman for all the disciples or as the only one to know cannot be definitely ascertained. He said, “You are the Christ [Messiah], the Son of the living God” (Matt 16:16). Peter does not say that Jesus is the Son of Man. That implication is present, but that implication extends also to the Church, the Body of Christ. And without here presenting the argument for Christ Jesus and the Church, together, being the Son of Man, Head and Body, that assertion will be presented as a given.

After Jesus tells “Peter—Πετρος” that on this “rock—πετρα” He will build “the church—τὴν κκλησίαν” the question must be asked, What rock? Traditional interpretation by the Universal Church says that “this rock” is “Peter,” but when Peter took Jesus aside after Jesus began to reveal to His disciples that He must be killed in Jerusalem, Jesus rebuked Peter, saying, “Get behind me, Satan! You are a hindrance to me. For you are not setting your mind on the things of God, but on the things of man” (Matt 16:23). Certainly Jesus addressed Peter as Satan; so is the church built on Peter a hindrance to Christ Jesus, a manifestation of Satan, with its mind set on the things of man rather than things of God? Historically, that is certainly the case.

Every *Christian* who uses an icon to focus his or her prayers, praying through the icon to Mary or to Jesus or to the Holy Spirit or to some saint worships an idol and transgresses the commandments of God—this person does not pray to the Father, nor does this person worship the Father. Rather, this person prays to sticks and stones that are the things of man, not the things of God. This person is truly of the “Peter” who rebuked Jesus for disclosing that He, Jesus, had to die.

Before returning to the question of “what rock,” consideration of what Jesus said after He addressed Peter as Satan must be entered into this discussion: He told his disciples, “If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross [that which tethers him to where he is] and follow me. For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it” (Matt 16:24-25).

Disciples are those persons who voluntarily [arguable] come after Jesus; thus, disciples, if they are to find “life” must first lose their lives in this world, with “lose” used in the context of to utterly give up as in being dead in or to this world. This does not allow for any participation in the governance of this world; this does not allow for the accumulation of the things of this world. This really means being dead to this world, but alive to Christ, who will come to repay to each the person’s just due.

The Church built on “this rock” that was Peter is dead to this world, but alive in Christ. It cannot be alive in the form of the Universal Church that has been a major player in this world, accumulating wealth and property, becoming at one time the largest land holder in Europe, crowning kings and emperors, granting indulgences to the princes of this world. Rather, it is the Body of Christ that was crucified with Jesus, hung on the Cross as Jesus hung on the Cross, dying on the Cross, hanging there dead but visible from 3:00 pm to dusk, then dead and buried for three days and three nights before being resurrected as Jonah was and as Jesus was. The gates of Hades would not prevail against the Church, a statement that does not preclude the Church from dying but does preclude the Church from staying dead. So even though Satan took over the dead Body after it was buried in hell and called it the living Church of God, causing it to focus on the things of men rather than on the things of God, the Body of Christ was actually concealed in the heart of the earth.

Again, the gates of Hades would not prevail because the Body of Christ—the Body of the Son of Man—would be resurrected when the Holy Spirit empowered this lifeless Body at the second Passover liberation of Israel.

The above causes every Christian a problem: the Roman Catholic Church is an instrument of Satan, for it is built on “the Peter” who would have denied death to Jesus through assigning to Jesus an immortal soul, received from birth by the water of the womb. Evangelical Christianity would also deny death to Jesus, and would have Him harrowing hell for the two nights and one day they teach that He was in the grave. The Greek Orthodox Church also denies death to Jesus, as does the Mormons who have an angel inside every person. In fact, all of Christendom but the badly splintered Sabbatarian churches of God, which has been dead for forty plus years (since the Armstrongs refused revelation in 1962) deny death to Jesus.

The keys to the kingdom of heaven, keys that bind and loose, have lain unused since mid-1st Century CE, when the divine Breath of God left the crucified Body of Christ, thereby leaving the Body dead on the Cross, the food of ravens and jackals. A corpse cannot use keys. But life will shortly return to this corpse. The second Passover isn’t centuries in the future.

The disciple who is of *Philadelphia* stands on the foundation that the Apostle Paul laid, with the key of David opening Scripture to him or her. This key of David is not a key that binds or looses sins, but a key that opens long sealed prophecies regardless of where these prophecies are found in Scripture. And what the key of David has now opened is that the physical body of the man Jesus, crucified about noon on the 14th of Abib, dead about 3:00 pm and buried at dusk on the 14th, then dead and concealed from sight in the Garden Tomb throughout the 15th, the High Sabbath, the 16th, and the 17th, the weekly Sabbath, then resurrected from death (as Jonah was resurrected but still in the belly of the fish) at the beginning of the 18th, the first day of the week, then ascending to the Father where He was accepted as the Wave Sheaf Offering, the first sheaf of barley of firstfruits—all of this forms the lively shadow of the Body of Christ, the Church, now dead but awaiting resurrection on the second Passover when it will then await ascending to the Father at the end of the seven endtime years of tribulation. The Son of Man, Head and Body, is to preach repentance to the world as Jonah preached repentance to Nineveh, and when the Holy Spirit is poured out upon all flesh, the world will respond as Nineveh responded to Jonah, for one who is greater than Jonah will do the preaching.

The Universal [Catholic & Orthodox] Church was indeed built on the rock that Jesus identified as Satan. May this idolatrous Body rest in hell, where it presently dwells. The Church will be resurrected with new life in an untarnished Body, one empowered by the Holy Spirit, one in which there will be no indwelling sin or death. Disciples will have to be killed through martyrdom, and many will be so killed, thereby assuring them of crowns in the kingdom of heaven.

God does nothing without first revealing what He will do through His servants. This includes resurrecting the Body of Christ. And realizing that the Body of Christ is today dead in hell changes how "Christians" will interact with the world in which they live: every disciple presently is spiritually as a natural Israelite was spiritually in the 1st-Century CE. Coming to Christ prior to the resurrection of the Body requires coming under the terms of the second covenant, the Moab covenant, with faith manifested as demonstrated obedience preceding spiritual circumcision of the heart. Until being spiritually circumcised, a disciple is as a Hebrew male infant was prior to his eighth day of life. He was not yet counted as an Israelite. A disciple is not yet a part of the household of God until spiritually circumcised, which will have the laws of God written on the heart and placed in the mind of the disciple. This person will now live by the commandments, all of them, having love for both God and neighbor. This person will be a child of God, born in the wilderness of Sin, a child born before its time, one who will go to spiritual Nineveh to preach repentance to a people that doesn't know its right hand from its left, thereby eating with defiled hands. This person will be as Jonah was, a spokesman for God, spewed from the mouth of Dagon, the god that Nineveh worshiped.

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The person conducting the Sabbath service should close services with two hymns, or psalms, followed by a prayer asking God's dismissal.

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