

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 second Elijah's preaching of repentance and baptism*.

## **Weekly Readings For the Sabbath of March 17, 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 Acts chapter 8.*

**Commentary:** Before the stoning of Stephen, “many signs and wonders were regularly done among the people by the hands of the apostles” (Acts 5:12), so many that multitudes of men and women “carried out the sick into the streets and laid them on cots and mats, that as Peter came by at least his shadow might fall on some of them” (v. 15), and “they were all healed” (v. 16).

Healing has not been well understood by the Church, either in the 1<sup>st</sup>-Century or in the 21<sup>st</sup>-Century. Certainly, healing was and is understood to be the renewing of the body of the one who lay sick. But why healing occurs, and how it occurs is one of those things that is difficult to explain (Heb 5:11) to those who are dull of hearing, an aggressive beginning to a subject that was central to Jesus' ministry and His credibility. Thus, the argumentative claim is here made: healing is a speech-act of God the Father that occurs when He sends forth His divine Breath [Πνεύμα Ἅγιον] as a human being utters words through modulation of his or her deep physical breath [πνεύμα].

The Psalmist wrote, “When you [YHWH] hide your face, they [the great creatures of the sea] are dismayed; / when you take away their breath, they die / and return to their dust. / When you send forth your Spirit [Breath as in shouted sound], they are created, / and you renew the face of the ground” (104:29-30) ... God's Breath—the Holy Spirit [Πνεύμα Ἅγιον]—is a renewing force. When God sends it across dimensions it gives life to what was dead, thereby raising the dead (John 5:21). It gives physical life to what was physically dead as in when YHWH Elohîm breathed into the nostrils of the man of mud (Gen 2:7), causing animation to occur in this clay vessel that is the first Adam. It also gives spiritual life to what was spiritually dead, as in a living human being animated by physical breath in this physical realm but without life in the heavenly realm. **Note:** *A living human being prior to being born of Spirit is the spiritual equivalent to the physical corpse that would become the first Adam when Elohîm [singular in usage] breathed life into his nostrils.*

Thus, all healing comes through the renewing divine Breath of God [Πνευμα Ἅγιον] passing over or remaining on (or in) a person as it visibly did in the form of a dove descending upon Jesus when He emerged from being baptized (Matt 3:16).

Human utterance [speech] is confined to modulations of breath that form sound waves heard with physical ears. The dullness of hearing that Israel suffered in Isaiah's day and was still suffering throughout Jesus' ministry and was suffered by the saints to whom Hebrews was written did not come from any inability to hear physical utterances, but from an inability to perceive that miracles were modulations of the divine Breath of God, with these modulations forming renewing speech-acts that transcended controlled sound waves. The seven recorded miracles Jesus performed on Sabbaths were the speech-acts of the Father as he placed His approval on Sabbath observance; for it was within the power of God to cause these miracles to occur at another time. And since Jesus did not speak His own words but only the words of the Father throughout His ministry, those things that Jesus uttered and those things that Jesus did, together, can be positively identified as the speech-acts of the Father as He modulated His divine Breath to produce what was not before done. This is why Jesus said, "If I am not doing the works of my Father, then do not believe me; but if I do them, even though you do not believe me, believe the works, that you may know and understand that the Father is in me and I am in the Father" (John 10:37-38). To *believe the works* is to believe the Father, for the works of Jesus are the utterances of the Father.

Repetition is sometimes necessary for emphasis: The one who believes the works of Jesus by extension hears the words of Jesus and believes the one who sent Him (John 5:24). This person passes from death to life and does not come under judgment. This person will have been born of Spirit. Thus, to believe the works requires the ability to hear spiritual things, spiritual utterances, and is an aspect of the sheep knowing the Shepherd's voice.

So it was not Peter's shadow that healed, but the Breath of God that was transferred to Peter when Jesus breathed on ten of His disciples (John 20:22). Literally, Peter as a vessel of clay was overfilled with the Holy Spirit, and was used by God as the spokesman for the Apostles. Therefore, the speech-acts (the utterances) of the Father, passing through Peter and the others, all having been drawn by the Father (John 6:44) and given to Jesus to keep in the Father's name (John 17:12), caused healings to occur after Jesus' death and glorification. These healings happened when even the shadows of the Apostles fell across someone needing to be renewed by the divine Breath of God; hence, the Father was doing and saying much in the first years following Calvary. The Body of Christ was alive, even if crucified with Jesus.

Healings occur in this world when the Father speaks through a human individual. And healings do not occur when the Father withholds His speech-acts and remains silent. It's as simple as that.

At a certain point in early Church history the healings stopped occurring. The Father quit speaking. Why? What changed?

The answer to this question has puzzled theologians for centuries: most theologians agree that the age of public miracles ended. The Church was and is still in need of miracles, but something happened. *Restorationists* will claim that the Church made a wrong turn, that if endtime disciples can return to the point where this wrong turn was made then the miracles will again occur. But what these *restorationists* don't understand is that it was not a wrong turn that was made, but the crucifixion of the Body

of Christ. The Body died from loss of divine Breath just as Jesus' physical body died on the cross at Calvary. There was no one left for the Father to speak through.

In all things spiritual, the visible reveals the invisible (Rom 1:20), and the physical precedes the spiritual (1 Cor 15:46). What happened to Jesus' visible, physical body is what happens to His invisible, spiritual Body. And what happens is that disciples are crucified with Christ, die with Christ, lay dead in the heart of the earth until the end of the third day, then are resurrected to life; for the gates of Hades shall not prevail over the Body (Matt 16:18). When the Body is resurrected to life, miracles will again occur as the Father speaks through those human beings that then form the empowered Body. Thus, the beginning reveals the end, with both the beginning and the end being Christ Jesus (Rev 22:13).

This is all too easy an explanation for why no miracles—but too easy for whom? Not for those ready for spiritual meat, the *beef-eaters*. It may, however, be too simple to be comprehensible by those disciples still nursing the milk of Paul's epistles or by those disciples who avoid eating meat.

The visible ministry of John the Baptist preceded the visible public ministry of Jesus. Likewise, an invisible or mostly so ministry like that of John the Baptist will precede the endtime invisible ministry of Christ Jesus during the first half of the seven endtime years of tribulation—prior to the beginning of these seven endtime years, an invisible or nearly so ministry will again baptize disciples into repentance as it makes straight the endtime way to the Lord.

Repentance from what? From lawlessness! Sin! From transgressing the commandments of God: John's baptisms were not of Gentiles, but of physically circumcised Israelites who realized, by hearing his preaching with their ears, that they needed to repent of their transgressions and to return to God. John did not baptize for inclusion into the commonwealth of Israel, nor did he baptize hypocrites or the religious leaders of the temple. He baptized sinners who understood that they were indeed sinners. His voice was the one physically heard crying from the wilderness, "Make straight the way of the Lord," as Isaiah prophesied. But there will be another, an endtime one who is not necessarily physically seen nor heard, whose voice is spiritually heard, "Make straight the way of the Lord."

About John the Baptist, Jesus said, "For all the Prophets and the Law prophesied until John, and if you are willing to accept it, he is Elijah who is to come. He who has ears to hear, let him hear" (Matt 11:13-15). Elsewhere Jesus, in answering His disciples' question about why the scribes say that first Elijah must come, said, "Elijah does come, and he will restore all things. But I tell you that Elijah has already come, and they did not recognize him, but did to him whatever they pleased. So also the Son of Man will certainly suffer at their hands" (Matt 17:11-12) ... if John the Baptist were the endtime Elijah who restores all things and turns the hearts of children to their fathers and the hearts of fathers to their children (Mal 4:5-6), then Jesus would not have said, *He who has ears to hear, let him hear*. Throughout His ministry, Jesus utters only the words of the Father—by His own declaration, He speaks none of His own words. Thus, to "hear" what Jesus said about John being the Elijah who is to come, endtime disciples need to "hear" spiritually, which will have John the Baptist being a shadow and copy, a type, of the endtime Elijah in a relation similar to how Jesus in His earthly ministry formed a shadow and copy of the glorified Jesus in His endtime spiritual ministry, during which He will be invisible throughout the first half of the seven endtime years but works

through the two witnesses, the two olive trees or two anointed ones who stand by the Lord (*cf.* Zech 4:3, 12, 14; Rev 11:4). During the second half of the seven endtime years, the 144,000 follow the glorified Jesus wherever He leads (Rev 14:1-5), so He remains concealed from the world, but not from the elect of natural Israel. Therefore, in tiered layering, the first Elijah (a visible human being with use of the Holy Spirit, but not born of Spirit) in some way precedes and is the shadow of John the Baptist (a visible human being with use of the Holy Spirit, but not born of Spirit), who in turn precedes and is the shadow of an endtime human being who is born of Spirit and who preaches repentance and who in turn is a precursor to the endtime Elijah who restores all things. The one who restores all things is the glorified Christ Jesus, not a human being or even two human beings. Thus, it is only the identity of the endtime one who preaches repentance, thereby making straight the way of the Lord, that remains unknown; and this endtime one might well not be a single individual, but the two witnesses or a fellowship of Spirit-born disciples.

So there is no mistake: the position of *The Philadelphia Church* is that the endtime Elijah who restores all things and who turns the hearts of the sons of God to the Father and the Father's heart to His sons is the glorified Christ Jesus. This endtime Elijah is not a human being, and is certainly not (as some who misuse the name *Philadelphia* claim) a dead human man who got prophecy wrong.

The one[s] who from a spiritual wilderness makes straight the endtime way of the Lord will preach repentance, and will baptize born-of-Spirit Israelites into repentance. And because of the empowerment of the twelve Paul baptized at Ephesus, those who have been baptized into repentance will be empowered by the Holy Spirit when the Body of Christ is resurrected from death at the second Passover liberation of Israel.

Again, John the Baptist was baptizing those who were already of Israel. His baptism was not a rite comparable to circumcision, but something new ... baptism of itself was not new. A Gentile convert to Judaism in the 1<sup>st</sup>-Century would have been circumcised, baptized, and would have made an offering at the temple. Circumcision was the inclusionary ritual for all who are of Israel. Circumcision remains the inclusionary ritual, only now, circumcision is of the heart, not of the foreskin. Make no mistake, physical circumcision is unnecessary and is actually spiritually harmful to the Christian, who is not the outer man, but the inner new creature born of Spirit. Physical circumcision is only of the flesh, and has no relevance to the inner new creature, a son of God. Therefore, physical circumcision of a disciple will always cause the disciple to look at physical things, and not at spiritual things. Thus, if a Christian convert is not physically circumcised, he should remain uncircumcised. But no one can be of endtime Israel who is not spiritually circumcised; i.e., circumcised of heart and mind. Therefore, circumcision remains the inclusionary rite to membership in Israel, only now this circumcision is not of the flesh but of the new creature born of Spirit.

Understanding that circumcision is the inclusionary rite, baptism now is for the death of the old self, a symbolic death certainly, but a real death as far as God is concerned. Baptism represents in an individual way the Flood of Noah's day—Noah was a preacher of righteousness. To be saved from death, a person must repent from the evil ways of this world (Gen 6:5-7). A person must hear the preaching of righteousness and figuratively get on the boat, the spiritual Ark of the Covenant. Thus, baptism represents the death of the old self through repentance from sin or disobedience.

What happens when a person who is a so-called Christian and truly believes that he or she has been born of Spirit, finds that he or she has been living in a lawless manner, transgressing the commandments of God? The answer is that this person should be baptized [that is fully emerged or submerged] in water for repentance. Then this person should take to the temple the only acceptable offering: serving God for the remainder of his or her natural life ... the person is the temple of God; so to take an offering to the temple creates odd dynamics. But by surrendering the person's life to God, ceasing to follow after the ways of this world and after the things of this world, the person presents the temple itself to God to do with as He pleases.

We are now ready to return to Philip, one of those scattered by Saul's persecution of the saints, and one who went about preaching the word of God. Philip was one of the seven who were of good repute, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, and who had been chosen to wait tables so that the Apostles could devote themselves to preaching the word of God (Acts 6:2-5). As one of the seven, Philip was set before the Apostles, and they prayed and laid hands on them ... note here: hands were laid on Philip by the Apostle, and Philip was full of the Holy Spirit, but when Philip baptized the people of Samaria, they did not receive the Holy Spirit. Peter and John had to come and lay hands on them before they received the Holy Spirit (Acts 8:12-17).

Peter could not transfer authority to bestow the Holy Spirit unto others. Only God can. Only the Father decides through whom He will speak, for the Holy Spirit [Πνεῦμα Ἅγιον] is His divine Breath, not another person within the godhead. And again, only the Father decides when He speaks and through whom.

Whereas Philip could not impart the Holy Spirit to the Samaritans, the Ethiopian eunuch was another story: apparently this Ethiopian was born a Hebrew. It is unlikely that he would have been coming to Jerusalem to worship if he was not of natural Israel, and his status as a eunuch would not have removed the evidence of his physical circumcision ... it is likely that the prophet Daniel was a eunuch, based upon the Chaldean practice of making eunuchs from captives. Thus, what is seen in the story of the Ethiopian is belief followed by repentance in a manner seen on that day of Pentecost that followed Calvary (Acts 2:38), with baptism being unto the death of the old self which is replaced by the new self, a son of God born of Spirit. And while precise language that says the Ethiopian received the Holy Spirit is absent, the Holy Spirit at the time had fallen on natural Israel but not on Gentiles (*cf.* Acts 8:16; 10:44); so it is safe to assume that when "the Spirit of the Lord carried Philip away" (Acts 8:39) the Ethiopian received the Holy Spirit. The Body of Christ was, at this time, alive but crucified with Christ. It dies when the second [or third] generation does not make a journey of faith equivalent to the physical journey of faith made by the patriarch Abraham; thus, hearts of this second [or third] generation are not cleansed, and if not cleansed, then these hearts cannot be spiritually circumcised. And without hearts being spiritually circumcised, there ceases to be any spiritual Israelites. The Church dies on the cross from loss of the Holy Spirit [Πνεῦμα Ἅγιον] as Jesus died on the cross from loss of His physical breath.

Now to what takes spiritual discernment: the Apostle Paul lays the foundation for the spiritual house of God, not Peter, John, James, and any of the first Apostles. The spiritual house doesn't descend through the Apostle Peter, just as it doesn't descend through Philip. It descends through Christ Jesus only, and the foundation that Paul laid is that of Christ Jesus (1 Cor 3:10-11). Therefore, the narrative thread that will again be

picked up is the story of those twelve Israelites baptized with the baptism of John that Paul rebaptizes at Ephesus (Acts 19:1-7). Those twelve were circumcised and baptized into repentance, but they had not received the Holy Spirit ... Philip baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus (Acts 8:12), but the Samaritans receive the Holy Spirit. Paul baptizes in the name Lord Jesus, and the twelve at Ephesus receive the Holy Spirit and receive empowerment by the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit had not yet fallen on those who are of Israel and who have been baptized upon repentance, but who were not also of Paul, who tells Gentile disciples to imitate him and walk as he walks (Phil 3:17).

The Church is not divided: Peter does not teach a different gospel than does Paul, nor does John teach a different gospel. But it was to Paul that the Father consigned the ministry of the Gentiles, and He confirms Paul's ministry by having Paul deliver His speech-acts in this world.

Peter said that Paul was hard to understand, and that the lawless twisted his epistles to their own destruction (2 Pet 3:15-17). If the one who makes spiritually straight the endtime way of the Lord is a type of John the Baptist, who preached repentance, and if this endtime way builds on the foundation that Paul laid, then Paul did not preach lawlessness, but that the uncircumcised person who keeps the precepts of the law shall have his uncircumcision counted as circumcision (Rom 2:26). Paul preaches to the inner new creature that is not born consigned to disobedience; that is not male nor female, Jew nor Greek, free nor bond; that is not of the flesh, but is of Spirit. Therefore, what Paul preaches is to be received by the inner new creature, not necessarily by the flesh which, if ruled by this inner new creature that is circumcised of heart and mind, will by faith walk as a Judean, walk as Jesus walked (1 John 2:6).

The person who refuses, by faith, to keep the commandments builds on another foundation, its footers in Babylon or in the sands of western Iraq.

Those teachers of lawlessness who would have the Body ignore the commandments of God will be denied when their judgments are revealed (Matt 7:21-23). They are the spiritual descendants of 1<sup>st</sup>-Century teachers of lawlessness, who were the reason why John the Baptist had a necessary ministry before the coming of Jesus' ministry. It is necessary today to again preach repentance as John preached repentance.

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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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