

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 *baptism & Anabaptism*.

Weekly Readings For the Sabbath of March 24, 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.

In a departure from the usual format of reading Scripture passages followed by commentary, the essay format will be employed to continue the discussion about adult baptism:

Anabaptists: Re-Baptizers or Adult Baptizers

What Daniel Liechty writes in his many works is probably a fair and accurate analysis of what happened to Anabaptists in the 16th and 17th Centuries when abuses by the Roman Church energized reform movements in Europe, but as good history should be, what Liechty writes is presented without capturing the emotional and theological enthusiasm that initially produced separation from the "old Church" [the Roman Church] and then from the "new Church" [the Reformed Church]. What Liechty writes is descriptive accounts of what happened, and descriptive accounts are, necessarily, confined to the past and do not well address the future unless included in the account is the awareness that the past reflects the future, a concept that works against the usual perception of the future reflecting the past. Scripturally, *death* precedes *life*; for Jesus said that the Father raises the dead and gives them life (John 5:21), with the "dead" being those who hear Jesus' words and believe the One who sent Jesus, for it is these "dead" ones that pass from death to life (v. 24). Thus, the things of God work against the "natural" chronology of events that has death following life, with judgment to follow a man dying once (Heb 9:27). Baptism is unto the death of the old man or old creature, that "personhood" which gives self-awareness to the flesh; the personhood crucified with Christ Jesus.

Baptism is not unto life, but symbolically represents the immersion of the world in water—the Flood of Noah's day—and the loss of natural life that comes with drowning, the loss of breath [*pneuma*] that comes from the lungs filling with water. For Believers, baptism becomes the "death" that precedes judgment; for judgment is now upon the household of God (1 Pet 4:17).

Jesus gave only one sign, the sign of the prophet Jonah: Jesus said, "For 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). The sign of

Jonah is not that Nineveh was a great city three days' journey in breadth (Jon 3:3), or that an unrecorded solar eclipse might have occurred, but that Jonah was cast into the sea, swallowed by a great fish, and was in the belly of this fish for three days and three nights, an expression that lacks ambiguity in Hebrew, where "day" is the hot portion of a twenty-four hour period and where "night" is the twisting away or turning away from the light. So the sign of Jonah is not, as some foolish individuals contend, the time that Jesus was in Jerusalem before He was crucified. It is the period, physical and spiritual, when the Son of Man, Head and Body, would be dead from loss of breath and concealed in the heart of the earth. And herein is what has previously been undisclosed: the Body of Jesus is the Body of the Son of Man, and this spiritual Body will die spiritually from loss of the Holy Spirit [*Pneuma 'Agion* or Breath Holy] as the physical body of Jesus died on the cross from loss of natural breath. But as the gates of Hades would not prevail over the physical body of Jesus, the gates of Hades will not prevail over the spiritual Body (Matt 16:18), when after the third day (Gen 1:9-13), those Believers who have brought forth fruit worthy of repentance will be born of Spirit, born filled with the Spirit, born empowered by the Spirit, born liberated from indwelling sin and death at the second Passover. The Body of Christ will be resurrected from death through being filled with the Holy Spirit as the natural body of Christ was resurrected from death after laying dead for three days and three nights in the Garden Tomb.

Baptism is unto repentance for the death of the old self, consigned to disobedience (Rom 11:32). And in this era and throughout the first three and a half years of the Tribulation, the Believer will be born of Spirit following repentance, baptism in water, and demonstrated obedience. This was not the sequence of events in the 1st-Century after Cornelius was visibly baptized in Spirit prior to being baptized in water, nor will this be the sequence of events after the Holy Spirit has been poured out on all flesh halfway through the Tribulation, but this has been the sequence since the spiritual Body of Christ, crucified with Christ, died and was concealed in the heart of the earth.

Baptism has long been recognized as being spiritually equivalent to physical circumcision, with baptism being the inclusionary ritual for membership in the Body of Christ, but this perception of baptism is overly simplistic and woefully inadequate. When baptism is correctly perceived to be the "drowning" of the old self, infant baptism makes a mockery of the rite; for the infant's old self is neither "old" nor fully formed. The infant or child neither understands repentance nor understands spiritual accountability. Therefore, the baptism of an infant is not a rite acknowledging the repentance of the individual, but simply the wetting of the child. It is of no value to the infant. Its only worth is in making parents "feel better" if something untoward happens to the child.

Spiritually, however, infant baptism is of great significance: the Body of Christ is to dwell in heavenly Jerusalem, and to dwell in this heavenly city, a Believer must be spiritually circumcised (circumcised of heart and mind – Deu 30:6; Rom 2:26-29). To be spiritually circumcised, the Believer, a son of God, must first be born of Spirit in a manner analogous to how a human infant is born of the water of the womb (John 3:3-8). A human infant is not a member of Israel, the firstborn natural son of God (Exod 4:22), until this infant is circumcised on the 8th day. A born of Spirit Believer is not a member of [spiritual] Israel until this Believer, by faith, makes a mental journey equivalent to the physical journey of the patriarch Abraham before he was circumcised, a journey from Ur of the Chaldeans to Haran in Assyria, then into the Promised Land of

God's rest. If the Believer who has been born of Spirit does not make a journey of faith, the Believer is not spiritually circumcised and does not dwell in heavenly Jerusalem, for dwelling in God's rest is the precursor to dwelling in heavenly Jerusalem. Thus, the "Christian" who does not make a mental journey from the land of the Chaldeans [Babylon] to Judea is not spiritually circumcised and as such is not part of the Body of Christ, but is spiritually to the Body as an uncircumcised Gentile was to Israel. This is correct! The Believer who does not enter into God's rest when the promise of entering stands makes him or herself into a spiritual Gentile, a "Christian" who lives as a Gentile and walks as a Gentile and not as Jesus walked (1 John 2:6). Therefore, inevitably, the "Christian" who lives and walks as a Gentile becomes focused on the things of the flesh, the foremost of which is the governance of this world. And this "Christian" is spiritually dead.

Participation in the governance of this world remains undertaking a joint venture with the prince of this world, who rules over humankind by controlling the mental topography of humankind, not through swords and muskets, kings and elected assemblies. As King Nebuchadnezzar ruled the post-Flood boundaries of pre-Flood Eden through the might of his armies—and served as an instrument that God used to chastise lawless and idolatrous Israel—the fallen and defeated but not yet replaced prince of this world is the spiritual king of Babylon that reigns over the mental landscape from which thoughts sprout as weeds or wheat. God has used and still uses this spiritual king of Babylon (Isa 14:4) as an instrument to chastise lawless and idolatrous Israel, now not the physically circumcised nation, but a new nation that was not before a people (1 Pet 2:9-10), a nation circumcised of heart and mind by the Spirit and not by the law (*cf.* Rom 2:26-29; 2 Cor 3:3). And the god or prince of this world was still in place when Paul wrote epistles to the saints at Corinth (2 Cor 4:3-4) and at Ephesus (Eph 2:1-3). This defeated prince will not be replaced until the single kingdom of this world is given to the Son of Man (*cf.* Dan 7:9-14; Rev 11:15-18) when that old dragon is cast to earth (Rev 12:9-10). Thus, what is now seen in Scripture is what was understood darkly by those Anabaptists who first left spiritual Babylon in a *Logos*-centered belief paradigm, the only means out of the mindset of spiritual Babylon to which God had exiled the Church in a manner analogous to God sending the physically circumcised house of Judah and all of Israel that remained in Jerusalem into physical captivity in physical Babylon, and in a manner analogous to Paul instructing the saints at Corinth to deliver the man who was with his father's wife "to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, so that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord" (1 Cor 5:5 ESV). But here is where what Liechty writes about Anabaptist history ends.

If a Believer is spiritually minded, the Believer will understand that the Elijah to come, the Elijah who will restore all things, the Elijah that turns the hearts of the sons to the Father and the heart of the Father to His sons is the glorified Christ Jesus, not any human being. And in the restoration of all things, the last Elijah does and will do spiritually what the first Elijah did physically—and the first Elijah raises the widow of Zarephath's son from the dead. Jewish tradition holds that this child was the prophet Jonah. And it is at this juncture of Scripture and tradition where Jesus giving the sign of Jonah as the sign of who He was injects complexity into the story of His death, burial, and resurrection; for the first Elijah did not raise the son of the widow woman in one attempt.

The person conducting the service should read or assign to be read 1 Kings chapter 17, verses 17 through 24.

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The first Elijah took the son of the widow “from her arms and carried him up into the upper chamber where he lodged, and laid him on his [Elijah’s] bed. ... Then he stretched himself upon the child three times and cried to the Lord, ‘O Lord my God, let this child’s life [breath] come into him again’” (vv. 19, 21). Christ Jesus, as the last Elijah, has taken His dead Body, the Church He founded, *up into the upper chamber where he lodges* in the heavenly Jerusalem, and has twice stretched Himself upon this lifeless Body. The first time was when Anabaptists separated themselves from the prince of this world.

The spiritually circumcised nation of Israel into which Christ Jesus as the last Elijah breathed His breath and life in His first “stretching Himself over the Church to resurrect His Body” as the first Elijah resurrected the child who would (again, according to Jewish tradition) be the prophet Jonah separated itself mentally and spiritually from the kingdom of the prince of this world a quarter of the way through the 16th-Century. Twelve hundred years after the Church formally entered spiritual Babylon as a spiritually enslaved nation at the Council of Nicea (ca 325 CE) a remnant of the reformers separated themselves from Swiss Protesters by being rebaptized as adults (ca 1525 CE). This remnant began the long trek back across the doctrines and traditions of the lawless Church, but the descendants of this remnant, with very few exceptions, have not yet completed the long mental trek back across the 3rd, 2nd, and 1st Centuries to the foundation of the house of God that Paul laid (1 Cor 3:10-11) in the heavenly city of Jerusalem, a city that was emptied of its inhabitants through infant baptism.

Paul writes that the visible things of this world reveal the invisible things of God (Rom 1:20), and the physical things of this world precede the spiritual things of God (1 Cor 15:46) in the manner that the first Adam preceded the last Adam, the man Christ Jesus. By extension, the visible and physical kingdom of Babylon reveals what can be known about the invisible and spiritual kingdom of Babylon in the same way that the visible, physically circumcised nation of Israel reveals what can be known about the invisible, spiritually circumcised nation of Israel. (Paul writes that not all of the children of Abraham are his offspring, nor do all who descended from Israel belong to Israel [Rom 9:6-7]—not all who claim to be Christians belong to Christ, so the actual invisible spiritually circumcised nation of Israel is “concealed” within Christendom.) Therefore, the geography of pre-Flood Eden reveals the mental topography over which the defeated prince of this world still reigns. And this geography has Egypt south of the Promised Land and ruled by the king of the South, Assyria to the north and ruled over by the king of the North, and Babylon to the east and ruled over the spiritual king of Babylon (Isa 14:4). This geography also has Egypt representing sin, Assyria representing death, and Babylon representing the co-joined law of sin and death that still dwells in the fleshly members of disciples (Rom 7:13-25, especially 21-25). Since all of humankind has been “concluded” or consigned to disobedience (Rom 11:32), Babylon represents the kingdom over which the prince of this world reigns—and since God consigned all of humanity to disobedience so that He could have mercy on all, God will “liberate” His people from indwelling sin and death as He liberated physical Israel, His firstborn physical son (Exod 4:22) from physical bondage to Pharaoh. The born-of-Spirit new creature is born free and is not born consigned to disobedience; its Father is God. But the flesh of every disciple was fathered (however times removed) by the first Adam and remains

consigned to disobedience and death. Not until the flesh puts on immortality will “life” be given by Christ Jesus to the flesh as “life” is given by the Father to the new creature born-of-Spirit (John 5:21). And when the flesh rules over the infant son of God born of Spirit, the new creature that is spiritually circumcised becomes as the physically circumcised nation was when it refused to keep the laws of God and profaned the Sabbaths of God (see Ezek chap 20).

Anabaptists left spiritual Babylon in the 16th-Century when they separated from governing this world. They then began a long spiritual trek that would take them to heavenly Jerusalem, with this invisible journey physically seen in the geography from physical Babylon to physical Jerusalem, with two significant geographical landmarks forming spiritual markers on the road to the heavenly city. The first of these landmarks is the plains of Moab, where the second covenant (Deu 29:1) was made with Israel, a nation that then consisted of the mixed circumcised and uncircumcised children of the nation that left Egypt forty years earlier. This is the eternal covenant between God and Israel to which better promises were added when Christ Jesus became its mediator [better promises cannot be added to what has been abolished, a reality check no one of Israel should ever forget]. This covenant is “not like the covenant that [God] made with their fathers on the day when [God] took them [Israel] by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt” (Heb 8:9 with the citation from Jer 31:33), a covenant made in the flesh and that was abolished at Calvary (Eph 2:13-16). This second covenant is not made on “the day” when God lead Israel out of Egypt, but forty years later when God was about to lead Israel into “His rest” (cf. Ps 95:10-11; Heb 3:16-4:11). This is the covenant in which “circumcised hearts and souls [nephesh]” are first mentioned (Deu 30:6). This is the covenant that Paul identifies as “righteousness based on faith” (Rom 10:6 – cf. Deu 30:11-14; Rom 10:6-8). This covenant requires action based on faith (Deu 30:1-2), for it takes faith in God to turn to God when in a far land and begin anew to love God and to keep His commandments. And Israel cannot enter heavenly Jerusalem unless this new nation chooses life (Deu 30:15) on the plains of Moab, a spiritual landscape that has the disciple out of Babylon but not yet into the Promised Land, God’s rest.

No Moabite will enter the kingdom of God; yet Ruth was of Moab. Marriage between the men of Israel and foreign women was prohibited; yet Ruth is in the lineage of King David and of Jesus of Nazareth. And what it seen is that no person may remain in Moab and enter the kingdom of God. By faith and with love for God, the one who dwells on the plains of Moab must take up that which tethers the person to these plains, choose life (Deu 30:15), and cross the spiritual Jordan River to dwell in this *Land Beyond the River* that is God’s rest. Being of foreign birth is not the problem as the story of Ruth reveals. Remaining on the plains of Moab, however, is the problem, for every Believer’s kinsman-redeemer dwells in heavenly Jerusalem, not on the plains of Moab or in the sand hills of Babylon.

Consider why Anabaptists today do not have the type of enthusiasm and growth that was seen in the 16th and 17th Centuries: what has happened?

What happened is that the 16th-Century rush from the old Church stalled in the sands of western Iraq ... Liechty well documents where, when, and how the enthusiasm of Anabaptism became mired in desert sands. And Anabaptism will remain spinning its wheels, unable to move forward, able only to back-up and to return to Babylon (what is seen in liberal fellowships) until another generation has the courage and faith of 16th Century disciples to use the *Logos*-centered belief paradigm to begin living as Jesus

lived, walking in the same way that Jesus walked (1 John 2:6). For whoever says that he or she knows Jesus but does not keep His commandments is a liar (*v.* 4), and one of the commandments that the *Logos* as the Word of God uttered was to observe and remember the Sabbath because Israel was once a nation enslaved to disobedience (note the difference between Deu 5:15 and Exod 20:11 – this is a difference that matters). The arguments of Andreas Fischer in particular anticipate typological exegesis, the means through which renewed enthusiasm will spiritually push Anabaptists of the next generation out of the deserts sands and begin a new rush across the River Jordan, the second landmark, and on to heavenly Jerusalem and glory. The old generation will either die in the desert sands, or will lead as Joshua and Caleb led. But leading requires having the faith to live as Jesus lived, knowing beforehand that living as a spiritual Judean in this world will again cause disciples to experience persecution similar to that which 16th Century Anabaptists experienced. Of course, a person can always “play it safe” by rejoining the world and making a covenant with death that will not hold (Isa 28:14-15).

The Anabaptist who, by repentance and separation from this world, reaches the plains of Moab and stands before Moses, who wrote of Christ Jesus (*cf.* John 5:46-47; Deu 18:15-19), is finally in position to enter into the second covenant, the everlasting Moab covenant to which better promises were added when the glorified Jesus became its mediator. If this Anabaptist shies away from Moses, this Anabaptist also shies away from Jesus. This person is not worthy to follow Jesus (Matt 10:38). Of course, this person will admit that he or she is not worthy to follow Jesus and will insist that no one is worthy to follow Jesus even though Jesus instructed His disciples to follow Him—and this admission of not being worthy will have the person choosing death (Deu 30:15, 17-18), for this person will not pull up the “stake” that tethers this person to the ways of this world. The foremost means by which this person remains visibly tethered to this world is discernable is by the person attempting to enter God’s rest (*cf.* Ps 95:10-11; Heb 3:16-4:11; Num chap 14) on the 8th-day. This person would force his or her way into the kingdom if he or she could, and this person will, ultimately, successfully force his or her way into the lake of fire.

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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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