

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 Christology.

Weekly Readings For the Sabbath of June 21, 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 Acts chapter 15 and chapter 16, verses 1 through 5.

Commentary: Christian orthodoxy teaches some form of *the Jerusalem conference determined for all time that "Christians" do not have to keep the Law of Moses*, but what is this Law of Moses that Christians do not have to keep? Where is it found? Certainly not in the writings of Moses about which Jesus said. "If you believed Moses, you would believe me; for he wrote of me. But if you do not believe his writings, how will believe my words" (John 5:46-47). Plus, Jesus said in story, ""If they do not hear Moses and the Prophets, neither will they be convinced if someone should rise from the dead"" (Luke 16:31). In addition, Jesus said, "Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them. ... Therefore whoever relaxes one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do the same will be called least in the kingdom of heaven, but whoever does them and teaches them will be called great in the kingdom of heaven" (Matt 5:17, 19). So if only the person who believes Moses' writings is able to hear Jesus' words—the logical application of what Jesus said—and if the person who keeps the commandments Moses lugged down from Mount Sinai will be called great in the kingdom of heaven, then perhaps the dispute was not with the law of Moses but with the necessity to circumcise Gentile converts.

As has been said before, modern scholarship is about challenging traditions and traditional understandings, with the loss of belief that results from these challenges masked by an advocacy of form that elevates the noble intentions of humankind to godliness. Evangelical Christian orthodoxy professes to come from a "plain text interpretation" of Scripture, a.k.a. *sola scriptura*, but considering that Jesus only spoke to His disciples in figurative language during the portion of His ministry recorded in Scripture, any *plain text interpretation* neglects the metaphorical or second tier application of His words. Occasionally in Scripture disciples see in text a second or higher tier application of a passage such as is seen when the angel Gabriel says of John the Baptist, "And he will turn many of the children of Israel to the Lord their God

[κύριον τὸν θεὸν αὐτῶν—Lord the God of them], and he will go before him in the spirit and power of Elijah, to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just, to make ready for the Lord a people prepared” (Luke 1:16-17). The words given to the prophet Malachi were that an Elijah to come “will turn the hearts of the father to their children, and the hearts of children to their fathers, lest I [YHWH] come and strike the land with a decree of utter destruction” (Mal 4:6). Thus, turning *the hearts of children to their fathers, lest the Lord comes and strikes the land with a decree of utter destruction* becomes when moving to a higher tier turning *the disobedient to the wisdom of the just, to make ready for the Lord a people prepared*. And it is this level of physical to spiritual transformation that is entirely lost in any plain text interpretation of Scripture. Lost are hypertext juxtapositions like the intertext juxtaposition Paul makes that has a remnant of Israel returning to the Promised Land (Isa 10:22) becoming a remnant receiving salvation (Rom 9:27).

It has been argued at least as far back as the Qumran community that the prophets of old spoke and recorded the words they received from God without themselves understanding these words. This argument inherently requires that a *Teacher of Righteousness* or some other prophecy pundit explicate these prophecies, thereby telling those who live at the end of the age how to read and to apply prophecies given millennia earlier to peoples who no longer live—and to prophecies that seemingly have been fulfilled, except for a verse here and there that refers to the end of days. It is these sprinkled verses that justified application of a seemingly fulfilled prophecy by the Qumran sons of light to endtime events, and it is the gospel writers’ application of apparently inconsequential prophecies to Jesus that further justify endtime disciples applying mostly fulfilled prophecies to endtime events. But—and this is a huge “but”—a prophecy that was mostly fulfilled by the physical nation of Babylon or by physically circumcised Israel or by any other human nation in ancient times is not about another physical nation of Babylon or about the physical nation of Israel, but about a spiritual nation of Babylon over which the Adversary reigns as king (Isa 14:4) and about the spiritual nation of Israel, a nation circumcised of heart by spirit and not a nation that is today circumcised in the flesh by human hands. Therefore, when applying ancient prophecies typologically, endtime disciples should not look for prophecies about the recovery of Israel from the North Country (i.e., from Assyria) to pertain to the recovery of Jews from Russia or to the recovery of English-speaking peoples from German enslavement (as was taught by Herbert Armstrong), but the recovery of the Christian Church from death ... the lawless Church will die physically and spiritually because of its unbelief that long ago became disobedience. It is analogous to Israel in the wilderness of Paran believing the ten spies instead of the two, then rebelling against God (Num chap 14). And because of its lawlessness (its active sinning), at the beginning of the seven endtime years of tribulation God will deliver the Church into the hand of the man of perdition for the destruction of the flesh so that the spirit of some might be saved when judgments are revealed. This is the reason why Paul commanded the saints at Corinth to deliver the man with his father’s wife to Satan (1 Cor 5:5), and this is the reason God sent Israel into Babylon captivity in the 6th-Century BCE.

Unfortunately, what was seen when God sent Israel into Babylonian captivity is that the entire nation, with very few exceptions, bowed down and worshiped Nebuchadnezzar’s golden image (Dan chap 3) ... with very few exceptions, Christendom worships the golden images that the spiritual king of Babylon has erected for all the

world to worship, images that are types of this old dragon, when cast from heaven, requiring all who buy and sell to take upon themselves the mark of the beast, the mark of death. Christians have been active participants in the governance of this world; Christians remain as active participants in the prince of this world's reigning coalition. They partner with Satan to bring forth both abortion clinics and protests to abortion clinics; gay marriages and protests against gay marriages; wars and war protestors—all that happens in this world is permitted by God but comes from the ruler of this world, the defeated but still reigning Adversary. So for all of Israel's good intentions, Israel in Babylon has done as Babylonians do. They have become indistinguishable from the world. Christians have become a third of the world and will become all of the world half way through the seven endtime years of tribulation, but, unfortunately, too many of these Christians willingly made themselves bondservants to sin and agents of Satan, who doesn't appear "evil" but as an angel of light (2 Cor 11:14-15). And because they willingly made themselves bondservants of sin when sin had no dominion over them (Rom 6:14, 16)—if a person doubts that they have made themselves bondservants of sin, make a tour of church parking lots on a Sunday morning, Sunday being a day about which God said nothing concerning entering into His rest—these Christian disciples of Christ Jesus voluntarily placed themselves under the Law, for the power of the law is its death penalty. Only when a Christian presents his or her members to God as instruments for righteousness does the Christian come under grace, which is the mantle or garment of Christ's righteousness. The Christian who willfully transgresses a commandment of God makes him or herself a willing slave to sin and to the Adversary, and the Sabbath commandment is, for Christians, a celebration of liberation from bondage (Deut 5:15)—but how can a Christian celebrate liberation from bondage when this same person has willingly presented him or herself as a bondservant to sin and to the prince of this world by transgression of the Sabbath commandment?

But isn't the Sabbath commandment part of the Law of Moses?

Again, find the Law of Moses in Scripture. Jesus told Pharisees that none of them kept the law even though they would circumcise an infant on the Sabbath "so that the law of Moses may not be broken" (John 7:23). So is the law of Moses a law about physical circumcision; for the issue to be considered by the Jerusalem conference was the *necessity to circumcise converts and to order them to keep the law of Moses*, which if the law of Moses were a law about circumcision would have these converts then in turn circumcising their sons and grandsons.

Paul writes to the saints at Ephesus,

Therefore remember that at one time you Gentiles in the flesh, called 'the uncircumcision' by what is called the circumcision which is made in the flesh by hands—remember that you were at that time separated from Christ, alienated from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. For he himself is our peace, who has made us both one and has broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility by abolishing the law of commandments and ordinances, that he might create in himself one new man in place of two, so making peace, and might reconcile us both to God in one body through the cross, thereby killing the hostility. (Eph 2:11-16)

The *law of commandments and ordinances* that was abolished was not any of the covenants of promise mediated by Moses—and circumcision of the heart comes by promise from the Moab covenant, which will have Israelites when in a far land turning by faith to God to love Him with heart and mind, keeping His commandments and all that is written in the book of Deuteronomy. So what was abolished was the offense of physical circumcision that had caused the “uncircumcised” to be a different people from the “circumcised.”

If the Law of Moses were the covenants of promise, beginning with the Passover covenant which promises to Israel forgiveness of sin (Matt 26:27-28), or the remade Sinai covenant (Ex chap 34) that promises Israel status as the holy nation of God (1 Pet 2:9), or the Moab covenant by which life and death are set before Israel (*cf.* Deut 30:15-20; John 5:28-29), then those Gentile converts who have come to Christ have no reason for doing so. So no! these covenants of promise are not abolished at Calvary; they were not nailed to the cross. What has been abolished is the need for physical circumcision; for the new creature born of spirit as a son of God is not the fleshly body of the Gentile convert, but dwells in this tent of flesh as an alien life form. This new creature has everlasting life for it is of the supra-dimensional heavenly realm, but it has that everlasting life in this earthly realm where all that live are under sentence of death. This new creature, however, was born not under dominion to sin but was born free to keep the commandments of God and was born covered by the mantle of grace; i.e., Christ’s righteousness. As long as this new creature chooses life—chooses to keep the commandments, loving God and neighbor with heart and mind—this new creature remains under the garment of grace with no sin imputed to this new creature, and remains slated to have the mortal flesh put on immortality when judgments are revealed. But when this new creature consciously chooses death by willingly presenting himself to sin as its bondservant, the new creature slips out from under grace and because this new creature knows God, this new creature is under the law, with the power of the law being its ability to condemn a person to death. This new creature who is a willing slave to sin will be made into a vessel of wrath, destined for destruction, endured for a season in order to made known the riches of glory that have been prepared for vessels of mercy (Rom 9:22-23). Then repentance will not occur; the conscience will be seared; and though repentance might well be sought with tears and many supplications, the *Christian* will be as those Israelites were who tried to enter into God’s rest on the following day (Num 14:22-23, 40-41).

The Apostle Paul writes elsewhere,

For circumcision indeed is of value if you obey the law, but if you break the law, your circumcision becomes uncircumcision. So, if a man who is uncircumcised keeps the precepts of the law, will not his uncircumcision be regarded as circumcision? Then he who is physically uncircumcised but keeps the law will condemn you who have the written code and circumcision but break the law. For no one is a Jew who is merely one outwardly, nor is circumcision outward and physical. But a Jew is one inwardly, and circumcision is a matter of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the letter. His praise is not from man but from God. (Rom 2:25-29)

Inward circumcision or circumcision of the heart is a matter of keeping the law—how much more plain can Paul make his case that disciples are not tents of flesh circumcised or not circumcised by hands, but are the inner new creatures that dwell in these tents of

flesh? Disciples are neither male nor female, Jew nor Greek (Gal 3:28). But a Gentile convert when born of spirit doesn't suddenly cease being male or female. The tent of flesh remains as it was: it remains circumcised or uncircumcised, Jew or Greek, male or female. It is the inner new creature, a real alien life form that has come from God as a son, that is (because it has come from God, who is not a physical entity) neither Jew nor Greek, male nor female.

Being male or female is descriptive of attributes of the flesh that pertain to this world. A son of God is not a biologically sexual being, but a spirit being without substance in this world—a spirit being with no house in this world but the tent of flesh in which it resides. Paul writes, “For we know that if the tent, which is our earthly home, is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens” (2 Cor 5:1). But *Christians* do not get to occupy this eternal house, a staying in the Father's house (John 14:2), if they are not circumcised of heart, a circumcision that is preceded by a journey of faith that cleanses hearts as wine or alcohol cleanses penises prior to circumcision.

The life that comes from receiving the Holy Spirit when a person is drawn by the Father from this world (John 6:44) is real life in that portion of the heavenly realm within the bottomless pit. And in the realm where these new creatures have life, obedience to the laws of God functions as clothing functions in this physical world. Faith functions as goodness, believing God as righteousness. Thus, the person who hears Jesus' words and believes the One who sent Him does not come under judgment but has everlasting life, having passed from death to life (John 5:24). But no one who fails to call on the name of the Lord believes, and no one can believe unless the person has heard of the Father and the Son, and no one can hear of the Father and the Son unless someone who has been sent by God preaches the good news of Christ to the lawless of this world (Rom 10:13-15) ... Paul was someone sent to preach the good news of Christ to sons of disobedience; Paul was sent to lay the foundation for the house of God, with Christ Jesus being both the already laid cornerstone and the temple's future capstone. And all in Asia had left Paul while he still lived (2 Tim 1:15). Those in Achaia questioned whether Paul was really of God, and those in Judea were seeking to kill Paul. Why? Because the concept of the inner new creature being an entity separate from the tent of flesh in which this entity resided was outside the frames of reference of Jews and Greeks. Few were able to grasp the concept that only life that has come from heaven will return to heaven, that human beings are not born with immortal souls, that no person has eternal life dwelling within the person until the tent of flesh receives this life as the gift of God through Christ Jesus (Rom 6:23). A person does not receive eternal life through fornication in the backseat of a Chevrolet, or from a man having his way with a maid everywhere else.

Therefore, when some men (converted Pharisees) came from Judea and were teaching the brothers (i.e., Gentile converts) in Asia Minor that unless converts become physical Jews (or Jews according to the flesh) they could not be saved, Paul and Barnabas contended greatly with them (Acts 15:1-2) ... today, men come from Rome or from Salt Lake City or from a host of other geographical locations and teach converts and biological sons and daughters of converts that unless these infant sons of God transgress the laws of God, they will in no way be saved. Yes, that is exactly what the lawless teachers of Israel proclaim to the world from pulpits, by radio and television, and in personal evangelistic campaigns. These workers of lawlessness [οἱ ἐργαζόμενοι

τὴν ἀνομίαν], who send many infants sons of God into the lake of fire by teaching these babes that because Jesus fulfilled the law they do not have to keep the law, will be denied by Christ when their judgments are revealed (Matt 7:21-23). But this hasn't stopped, or even slowed them from continuing to teach disciples to transgress the commandments of God, thereby causing hearts to remain uncircumcised. And it is with these workers of iniquity that those who are of *Philadelphia* vigorously contend today and will contend at least until the middle of the Tribulation as Paul and Barnabas contended with the Circumcision Faction.

The contending is now of a different sort than in the 1st-Century, but it's no less spirited or antagonistic. If anything, the task is even greater today than what Paul faced, for Christendom has made itself the able and willing servant of the prince of this world. But because war is presently occurring within Satan's reigning hierarchy, the "smallness" of this restorative work of God and the hedge Christ has placed around *Philadelphia* has caused *Philadelphia* to be a mostly unobservable entity, thereby escaping detection by the prince of this world, who is, frankly, too busy with his own problems to be much worried about what *Philadelphia* does.

Presently, being of small size and of little power gives the blessing of invisibility. After all, what entity in this world wants to become a spiritual Goliath, set up to be slain by a cast stone? Who is brave enough to challenge a spiritual David? Who is brave enough to take on Christ Himself?

Asserting here (because of the length of this reading) what can be shown in a longer work, the issue to be addressed by the Jerusalem conference was causing offense to little ones, with the conference addressing specifically the offense of physical circumcision. The "law of Moses" is a very imprecise referring expression that can include the entirety of the Torah and the covenants of promise, or can be narrowed to mean only physical circumcision, about which Moses said nothing to Israel while in the wilderness—and did not cause the children born to Israel in the wilderness to be physically circumcised (John 5:2-7). Thus, to interpret the law of Moses as the commandments of God that Moses twice carried down from atop Mount Sinai discloses that the person is one of the lawless people who have twisted Paul's epistles into instruments for their own destruction (2 Pet 3:16-17). This person will, most likely, be unable to repent of his or her lawlessness, having seared the person's conscience through the continued transgression of the law of God; so while this person needs to be resisted, little or no fruit will come from striving with this person. At best someone of *Philadelphia* striving with such a person will cause those who follow the person to rethink their salvation and leave off doing what is dishonorable, thereby transforming these people into vessels for honorable usage in the house of God (2 Tim 2:21). Usually, though, nothing comes from such striving other than exercising the spirit of God to build growth in grace and knowledge, growth that will permit the *Philadelphian* to better address future situations in which the *Philadelphian* will find him or herself.

When Peter stands to speak, he reminds everyone, "Brothers, you know that in the early days God made a choice among you, that by my mouth Gentiles should hear the word of the gospel and believe. And God, who knows the heart, bore witness to them, by giving them the Holy Spirit just as he did to us, and he made no distinction between them and us, having cleansed their hearts by faith" (Acts 15:7-9). This is Paul's argument to the Ephesians: God doesn't look on the flesh to make a distinction according to the flesh. Rather, God looks at the heart to make a distinction of the same

type and after the same manner as was previously made through physical circumcision. Hence, spiritual circumcision or circumcision of the heart is what God sees—and this spiritual circumcision comes after hearts have been cleansed by faith. Before hearts are cleansed by faith, no one can please God or does please God. All human righteousness is as a woman's menstrual rags, bloody with the promise of life sloughed away.

Peter's argument is that if God has chosen someone from among the uncircumcised to be His as He [θεός] chose Israel to be His firstborn son (Ex 4:22), then disciples are not to place a yoke on the uncircumcised that they cannot bear, or place a stumbling block before them over which they trip. This, now, is the subject of Romans chapter 14. Passing judgment upon one weak in the faith, with this weakness manifest through eating or not eating meat, drinking or not drinking, or in observing days [the lawless will construe this to mean Sabbath observance], becomes a cause of offense when these physical activities become tests of righteousness, for "the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating or drinking" (Rom 14:17). It is also not a matter of disobedience and willful transgressions of the commandments. No one born of spirit, with a mind set on the things of the flesh can please God or can obey God, for the mind set on the things of the flesh is hostile to God, and does not submit to God's law (Rom 8:7). Therefore, the observance of days about which Paul writes is not the observance of the Sabbaths of God: the mind set on the things of God will compel the flesh to observe the Sabbaths of God. To do otherwise is *prima facie* evidence of the mind being set on the things of the flesh, the desire of the flesh and the desires of the eyes and pride in possessions (1 John 2:15-16).

The issue of causing infant sons of God to stumble and fall away from God is a "big deal" with the Father and the Son; therefore, if physical circumcision would cause a Greek convert to stumble and fall away, physical circumcision is gone! And this is especially true when disciples understand that physical circumcision is a making naked of the person before God, thus requiring that the person cover himself with his own obedience. This was not a problem when Israel had no spiritual life, but only received the promise of eternal life after (or following) demonstrated obedience to God. But it becomes a major issue when disciples receive spiritual life prior to demonstrated obedience—and one of the better promises added to the eternal Moab covenant is spiritual life prior to demonstrated obedience. Hence, every infant son of God needs the covering of Christ's righteousness while this son learns to walk uprightly before God. Circumcision negates this covering of grace and leaves the disciple naked before God while still learning to walk uprightly as a biped.

The Greek convert who ceases to live as a "Greek," meaning ceases to offer sacrifices to idols, ceases to frequent temple prostitutes and be involved in other sexual immoral practices, ceases to eat meats that come from strangled animals so as to retain the blood, ceases to eat blood has ceased to live as a *Greek* and now lives as proselyte even though this convert remains physically uncircumcised. Therefore, this convert will cause a natural Israelite to be jealous (Rom 11:14), the reason Paul gives for why Gentiles have been called into fellowship: "So I ask, did they [natural Israel] stumble in order that they might fall? By no means! Rather through their trespass salvation has come to the Gentiles, so as to make Israel jealous" (v. 11).

Will a Greek living as a Greek make an Observant Jew jealous? No, will not happen.

Will an Observant Jew believe that his or her God has offered salvation to the Greek who lives as a Greek? No, never!

But will an Observant Jew be jealous of a Greek who keeps the commandments of God, observes the Sabbaths of God, refrains from eating unclean meats, refrains from all forms of sexual immorality, refrains all forms of idolatry, and professes faith in the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob? What do you think? There might well be jealousy, might there not? You know there will be jealousy, for it will seem to this Observant Jew that our Greek is poaching in the Jew's private spiritual domain.

The conclusion of the Jerusalem conference was that if a Greek—a person who did not before have knowledge of God or any relationship with God, but was separated from the commonwealth of Israel by his uncircumcision—abstained from things polluted by idols, from sexual immorality, from what has been strangled, from blood, this Greek has made a theological journey of sufficient distance to cleanse the heart so that it can be spiritually circumcised. Everything else this Greek needs to know can be learned for “from ancient generations Moses has had in every city those who proclaim him, for he is read every Sabbath in the synagogues” (Acts 15:21). So the Greek whose heart has been cleansed by faith (only by faith will a Greek cease living as a Greek and begin living as a Jew) will learn whatever else this Greek needs to know by hearing Moses read every Sabbath.

But the determination of the Jerusalem conference does not pertain to 2nd-generation converts ... every generation must cleanse hearts by making a journey of faith equivalent to Abraham's physical journey of faith from Ur of Chaldea to the Promised Land.

Now, why did Paul, upon leaving the Jerusalem conference, have Timothy circumcised (Acts 16:3)? Luke tells us: Paul wanted Timothy to accompany him, teaching the gospel in synagogues throughout Asia Minor. Timothy's uncircumcision would have been a stumbling block to Jewish converts, as well as to unconverted Jews in these synagogues. Therefore, in compliance to the spirit of the Jerusalem conference about no stumbling blocks, Paul has Timothy circumcised.

If the issue under discussion at the Jerusalem conference were either circumcision or keeping the commandments, then there would have been no reason for Paul to have Timothy circumcised unless the Circumcision Faction had prevailed at this conference—and this is definitely not the case. The issue was not causing offense or setting stumbling blocks in front of those whom God was obviously calling to be part of the Body of Christ. And frankly, Sunday observance is a primary cause of offense that has prevented natural Israel from carefully examining what Jesus said, what Paul wrote, what endtime disciples building on the foundation Paul laid are now saying. Sunday observance is as offensive to genuine endtime disciples of Christ as circumcision was in the 1st-Century to Greek converts.

This subject will be revisited in next Sabbath's reading.

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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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