

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 typology.

## **Weekly Readings For the Sabbath of August 9, 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 service should read or assign to be read Ephesians chapter 3.*

**Commentary:** In his claim that the mystery of God was made known to him, Paul says he received knowledge of this mystery by revelation (v. 3), the same claims he makes in his letter to the Galatians (1:11–12). The evidence of having received knowledge by revelation is “my insight into the mystery of Christ” (Eph 3:4), which to other generations of men was not made known (v. 5).

Paul's supporting evidence for having received a revelation is what he writes, which makes him having a revelation subject to the “truthfulness” of what he writes as he delivered his insights in his epistles.

If a person thinks about what Paul claims and the evidence he cites to support his claim, a person can begin to understand why his ministry fell upon hard times while he still lived: if a person, using the first person “I” claims to have received a revelation, what means exists to proof-test the person's claim? The claim either must be believed, or must be rejected. The person has, by making the claim of direct revelation, excluded every other possibility. Either the person received the revelation, or the person didn't. The extraordinary miracles done by the hands of Paul and the healings that came from a cloth touching Paul's body being carried away to the sick (Acts 19:11–12) are not today observable, and the only testimony that they happened is offered by Luke, who remained with Paul to the end and whose testimony about Paul is presently questioned by doubters. Peter mentions only the wisdom given Paul. So it really is only Paul's claim of understanding the mystery of God that supports him having a revelation from God.

Many have come claiming to have a revelation from God. The number is too great to count, with one Sabbatarian recently announcing that he is one of the two witnesses and his wife is the other, indicating that in his marriage two are not one. But his claims are not true although he has apparently profited by declaring himself a prophet, thereby disclosing to all how easily some can be fooled into accepting anything.

The prophet Hananiah, son of Azzur, spoke to Jeremiah, the priests and all the people, saying,

Thus says the Lord [*YHWH*] of hosts, the God of Israel: I have broken the yoke of the king of Babylon. Within two years I will bring back to this place all the vessels of the Lord's house, which Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon took away from this place and carried to Babylon. I will also bring back to this place Jeconiah the son of Jehoiakim, king of Judah, and all the exiles from Judah who went to Babylon, declares the Lord, for I will break the yoke of the king of Babylon. (Jer 28:2–4)

Zedekiah, king of Judah for three and a half years, might not have been too happy hearing that he would be replaced as king, but otherwise the revelation that Hananiah proclaimed was good news for the house of Judah, for the God of Israel had relented of the punishment with which He was punishing Israel. Even Jeremiah said, “Amen! May the Lord do so; may the Lord make the words you have prophesied come true, and bring back to this place from Babylon the vessels of the house of the Lord, and all the exiles” (Jer 28:6).

The knowledge of the mystery of Christ that Paul had received was, “This mystery is that the Gentiles are fellow heirs, members of the same body, and partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel” (Eph 3:6) ... to the Gentiles, what Paul received by revelation was as good of news as what Hananiah delivered to the house of Judah.

But Jeremiah, applauding the good news Hananiah delivered, said:

Yet hear now this word that I speak in your hearing and in the hearing of the people. The prophets who preceded you and me from ancient times prophesied war, famine, and pestilence against many countries and great kingdoms. As for the prophet who prophesies peace, when the word of that prophet comes to pass, then it will be known that the Lord has truly sent the prophet. (Jer 28:7–9)

Prophets are not needed to deliver good news—that's not the function of a prophet. Prophets are called to warn of what is about to happen, with the things about which the prophet warns all being bad news.

Hananiah didn't like Jeremiah calling into question whether he really had a revelation from the Lord, the God of Israel, and he took the yoke that Jeremiah had been wearing upon instructions from the Lord, and he broke these yoke-bars, saying, “Thus says the Lord: Even so will I break the yoke of Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon from the neck of all nations within two years” (Jer 28:11).

Jeremiah had nothing more to say and went his way, with the priests and all the people of Judah excited about the good news brought from the Lord by the prophet Hananiah.

The many Gentiles who heard the good news [gospel] that the offense of circumcision was abolished and that they would be brought near to the commonwealth of Israel and the covenants of promise (Eph 2:12–14) were and are just as excited as were the people of Judah after Hananiah the prophet from Gibeon spoke.

If we stopped right here, the recent criticism of Paul and the questioning of whether he was of God, especially in light of similar 1<sup>st</sup>-Century questioning of whether he was of God, might be justifiable for we know the rest of the Hananiah story:

Sometime after the prophet Hananiah had broken the yoke-bars from off the neck of Jeremiah the prophet, the word of the Lord came to Jeremiah: “Go, tell Hananiah, ‘Thus says the Lord: *You have broken wooden bars,*

*but you have made in their place iron bars.* For thus says the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel: I have put upon the neck of all nations an iron yoke to serve Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon, and they shall serve him, for I have given to him even the beasts of the field.” And Jeremiah the prophet said to the prophet Hananiah, “Listen, Hananiah, the Lord has not sent you, and you have made the people trust in a lie. Therefore thus says the Lord: ‘Behold, I will remove you from the face of the earth. This year you shall die, because you have uttered rebellion against the Lord.’” (Jer 28:12–15 emphasis added)

Daniel tells Nebuchadnezzar that even the beasts of the fields have been given into his hand (Dan 2:38), for this human king of Babylon was the shadow and type of Satan as the king of spiritual Babylon (Isa 14:4).

The Lord didn’t immediately appear to Jeremiah and tell him to refute what Hananiah said; He waited some period of time, all the while Jeremiah was probably questioning whether he really heard what he had been told by God. And all this while, even if only days, the people were celebrating Hananiah and the message Hananiah had received from the Lord. Who wants to believe bad news? Certainly not a people subject to death and facing imminent death—believing that the person will be saved by professing that Jesus is Lord (Rom 10:9), and will go to heaven immediately after death is even better news than what Hananiah delivered to the people of Judah. Likewise, at the end of the age a prophet with a revelation about *Christians* being bodily raptured to heaven to escape the Tribulation, or going to a place of physical safety to escape will deliver equally good news and will be equally false.

To the angel of the church at Philadelphia, the Lord said, “I know your works .... Because you have kept my word about patient endurance, I will keep you from the hour of trial that is coming on the whole world, to try those who dwell on the earth. I am coming soon. Hold fast what you have, so that no one may seize your crown” (Rev 3:8, 10–11). The Lord has set before Philadelphia an open door that no one can shut (v. 9). Is this door radio and television as was taught by the former Worldwide Church of God before that door was shut to that work by doctrinal changes? The Lord says nothing to the angel to Philadelphia about shutting that door. He says He has the power to shut, but He says He is coming soon and that He will keep Philadelphia from the hour of trial. He says that the synagogue of Satan will bow down before the feet of Philadelphia and learn that the Lord loved this church, and that will not happen if the door is shut and the message Philadelphia was to deliver hasn’t gone forth to the world for twenty years.

The Lord says nothing of shutting that open door placed before Philadelphia, so that open door is most likely not radio and television for the cost of both is prohibitive to a work of little strength. Likewise, the cost of printing and distributing free a quality magazine is prohibitive. Just in terms of human resources the cost is prohibitive, especially so when the work does not ask for tithes or offerings even when in need as the Apostle Paul did not do (2 Cor 11:7–15).

The former Worldwide Church of God taught that being kept from the hour of trial coming upon the whole world meant going to a place of physical safety ... is there a reason why this “hour [ὥρα] of trial” should be read as being three and a half years long? The Greek icon /ὥρα—*hōra*/is usually assigned as its linguistic object a figurative or literal hour, with a figurative hour being any short period of time, with three and a half years being outside this range of a short while. So would this *hour of trial* not be

better read as “an hour” (sixty minutes) of trial, the length of time [the short while] it takes for death angels to pass over the world slaying firstborns not covered by the Lamb of God? The death angel passed throughout the land of Egypt at the midnight hour, but when dealing with a worldwide work and a worldwide hour of trial, there is no physical midnight hour. The spiritual midnight hour would be when humankind is farthest from the “light” that is God. And because implementation of the new covenant requires first ending the Passover covenant made with Israel when the nation left Egypt/Sin, blood must twice be shed as blood was twice shed to implement the covenant: Israel shed blood when it sacrificed paschal lambs, a lamb [sheep or goat] for each household, a lamb appropriate to the size of the household. Then the Lord shed blood when He sent the death angel throughout the land to slay the firstborn of man and beast not covered by the blood of a paschal lamb. And with the second shedding of blood, Pharaoh sent Israel out from Egypt.

This Passover covenant will end as it was implemented: Israel shed the blood of the Passover Lamb of God at Calvary. The nation completed its position of ending the covenant by which the sins of Israel were covered. Jesus set before His disciples bread and wine as the sacraments representing His body and blood; so *Israel*, a nation now circumcised of heart, eats of the Passover Lamb of God when it takes the sacraments on the night that Jesus was betrayed. On every other night of the year, bread and wine are the fruit of the earth, Cain’s offering to God.

The writer of Hebrews, speaking of the new covenant that will replace the Passover covenant, says, “[Jesus] makes the first one obsolete. And what is becoming obsolete and growing old is ready to vanish away” (Heb 8:13) ... *what is becoming obsolete and growing old* was not the covenant made at Sinai, for the first covenant made at Sinai (Ex chaps 20–24) was broken forty days after it was made, with the sons of Levi’s shedding of blood (Ex 32:25–29) marking the end of this covenant that made all of Israel holy and able to enter into the presence of God. So the Lord made a second covenant with Moses and with Israel (Ex chap 34) that permitted Moses and Israel to enter into the presence of God, with the shining of Moses’ face the better sign ratifying this second Sinai covenant—and because this second Sinai covenant was not ratified by blood, but by a better sacrifice, it is an eternal or heavenly covenant (see Heb 9:23). It was not the new covenant, nor was it the Sinai covenant usually identified as the “old covenant.”

The covenant that was *becoming obsolete and growing old* was the covenant made on the day when the Lord took Israel by the hand to lead the fathers of the nation out of Egypt (Heb 8:8–9); it was the Passover covenant, with the blood of the paschal lamb covering the firstborn of every Israelite household. Today, the new creature or new self born of spirit is the firstborn son that dwells in the tent of flesh of the old man [the house of the father]. Taking the Passover sacraments on the night that Jesus was betrayed “covers” this firstborn son as eating the physical paschal lambs covered the firstborn of Israel in Egypt. Thus, this Passover covenant was *becoming obsolete and growing old* for Israel had shed the blood of the Passover Lamb of God to end this covenant: all that was needed to end this Passover covenant was for God to cause death angels to pass over all the land, slaying firstborns not covered by the sacrifice of the paschal Lamb of God.

As the Passover covenant made with Israel in Egypt was *becoming obsolete and growing old* in the 1<sup>st</sup> Century CE, it remains in exactly this same state in the 21<sup>st</sup>-

Century—for Israel still awaits God sending forth death angels to pass over all the land, thereby liberating Israel from sin and death ... Israel awaits the event that has been hanging over the head of the world for the past two millennia: the *hour of trial coming upon the whole world*. Philadelphia will be kept from this “hour of trial” by having kept Jesus’ word about patient endurance, literally by the work done with little strength through the open door placed before Philadelphia. But this does not mean that Philadelphia will go anywhere, for *to hold fast what Philadelphia has so that no one takes its/their crown* suggests that Philadelphia needs to keep on doing exactly what it has been doing.

If someone remembers what was taught by the former Worldwide Church of God or what is presently being taught by Gerald Flurry’s Philadelphia Church of God, the person will see how equivocation transforms this *hour of trial* into an accursed gospel message about physically escaping to a place of safety ... equivocation is a descriptive term for changing meaning of a word without giving linguistic clues disclosing the change. It is slipping one gospel in for another, and it has been practiced throughout Christendom’s history, with the splintered Churches of God having mastered this substitution of error for revelation by being derivatives of that work which promised physical deliverance of its members by escaping to physical Petra.

Paul’s insights have been misread and subjected to equivocation for so long that Sabbatarian disciples have a tendency to avoid reading Paul, who said to the Ephesians, “For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them” (2:8–10). What good works were prepared beforehand that we should walk in them? Those lawless disciple who twist Paul’s epistles love to quote, *For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast*, but they neglect to cite the remainder of what Paul said about walking in good works, which would require “works.”

Paul told the Corinthians, “Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ” (1 Cor 11:1). He told the Philippians, “Brothers, join in imitating me, and keep your eyes on those who walk according to the example you have in us” (3:17). He said of himself, “Neither against the law of the Jews, nor against the temple, nor against Caesar have I commit any offense” (Acts 25:8). So in Paul’s gospel, it would seem that *the good works prepared beforehand in which converts are to walk* are the good works of Christ Jesus, a man without sin, without transgression of the law; for the Apostle John wrote,

Everyone who makes a practice of sinning also practices lawlessness; sin is lawlessness. You know that he [Jesus] appeared to take away sins, and in him there is no sin. No one who abides in him keeps on sinning; no one who keeps on sinning has either seen him or known him. Little children, let no one deceive you. Whoever practices righteousness is righteous, as he [Jesus] is righteous. Whoever makes a practice of sinning is of the devil, for the devil has been sinning from the beginning. The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the works of the devil. No one born of God makes a practice of sinning, for God’s seed abides in him, and he cannot keep on sinning because he has been born of God. By this it is evident who are the children of God, and who are the children of the devil: whoever

does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor is the one who does not love his brother. (1 John 3:4–10)

Paul's message to the Gentile converts at Ephesus is the same message that John delivers nearly three decades later: salvation is the gift of God, not a matter of works, but of faith that will have the convert walking as Jesus walked, transgressing no law [or striving hard not to transgress any commandment], with the walk of Jesus prepared beforehand by Moses when the law was twice given from atop Mount Sinai, and given a third time on the plains of Moab. If Paul, himself, commits no offense against the law of the Jews, and if Jesus did not sin, and if Paul walked as Jesus walked, how is a Gentile convert going to imitate Paul and continue living as a Gentile? How is this Gentile going to walk as Jesus walked (1 John 2:6) when he or she practices sinning and remains a child of the devil?

No one in the evolution of the Jesus Movement did anything that Hananiah the prophet didn't do; i.e., cause the people to believe a lie.

Causing the people of Israel, again now a nation circumcised of hearts, to believe a lie will cause Jesus to deny this teacher of Israel when judgments are revealed.

The reliability of Paul rests on correctly reading what Paul wrote: the covenants of promise made with physically circumcised Israel were not abolished when the offense of outward circumcision was abolished, for how is it possible to bring the *Uncircumcised* near these promises by the blood of Christ if these promises have been abolished? These covenants of promise were made with Israel, and how can the *Uncircumcised* be brought into these promises if the *Uncircumcised* are not also Israel?

Paul wrote,

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. (Rom 2:25–29)

The foundational construct of Paul's gospel—the knowledge of the mystery of Christ that he received—was circumcision had become a matter of the heart, that the prophet Jeremiah's words had come to pass: “Behold, the days are coming, declares the Lord, 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). The Jews—his kinsmen—were merely circumcised in the flesh: their circumcision had become uncircumcision because they broke the law, which would have them loving their neighbors as themselves. Although the lawyer who could answer Jesus correctly about what was required to receive eternal life, this lawyer did not “know” who his neighbor was, and could not accept Samaritans as his neighbor (Luke 10:25–29).

According to the revelation Paul received, circumcision was a matter of the heart by spirit and not by hands (Col 2:11), and because circumcision is now a matter of the heart and not of the flesh, the Israel that will be saved according to the covenants of promise is

not a people “of flesh” that can be physically circumcised, but a nation born of spirit by promise. Evidence of inner circumcision is that a person will walk as Jesus walked, imitating Paul as he imitated Jesus, meaning that this person would also not commit any offense against the law or the temple or Caesar, with the “temple” now being both the flesh of the person (1 Cor 3:16–17; 2 Cor 6:16) and the Church.

How would a person commit an offense against the flesh of the person? Adultery. Lying. Stealing. Coming into God’s presence on the 8<sup>th</sup> day instead of the 7<sup>th</sup>. Eating what has not been sanctified by God. How many more ways would you like?

**Any commandment broken will be by either the weakness of the flesh to keep the law, or by an offense committed against the flesh by the new creature, a son of God born of spirit.** So when you break a commandment, which is it, weakness of the flesh—you want to keep the law but find that you can’t no matter how hard you try? Or do you willfully commit an offense against the flesh by doing what you know is false, thereby becoming a hypocrite, a person whose righteousness does not exceed that of the scribes and the Pharisees (Matt 5:20)?

A born of spirit son of God commits an offense against the law and against the temple when this son of God neglects so great a responsibility as to bring the “temple” into the presence of God on the Sabbath—whereas God entered the earthly temple once a year on *Yom Kipporim*, literally bringing His presence into the temple, the non-symmetrical mirror image will have Israel bringing the “temple” into the presence of God on the *Sabbath*, which includes all of the Sabbaths listed in Leviticus chapter 23 as John used *Sabbath*.

Committing an offense against Caesar is as easy as exceeding the posted speed limit by any amount, even when knowing that law enforcement will allow a driver to travel five miles an hour over the posted speed limit. Committing an offense against Caesar is any violation of civil or criminal law, with the only excuse for such a violation being the faithful preaching of the gospel of God. But preaching a false gospel is an affront to God and an offense to the law, the temple, and often to Caesar.

If Paul taught by revelation that circumcision was now a matter of the heart and not of the flesh, and that Israel was a nation circumcised of heart, and that Gentile converts were to imitate him as he imitated Christ, thereby walking as Jesus, an Observant Jew, walked—then Paul did not teach Gentile converts to worship God on Sunday, or to live how they had previously lived as Gentiles, aliens from the commonwealth of Israel and cut off from God, or to eat what they had previously eaten as Gentiles when they were not holy as God is holy (1 Pet 1:15–16 — *cf.* Lev 11:44–45).

It is the spiritual descendants of the prophet Hananiah that teach *Christians* to believe in a lie, to believe that they can walk as Gentiles and be saved.

So the textual support for Paul having received a revelation is just what he claims: “my insight into the mystery of Christ” (Eph 4:4). Without having been with Jesus during Jesus’ earthly ministry, Paul nevertheless delivers the same gospel message that John delivers, Matthew delivers, Luke delivers. His epistles form a gospel unified in thought and message, with greater detail than any of the other writers with the possible exception of John. He consistently teaches Gentile converts that they are to inwardly live as Jews [i.e., to be Judaizers], that it isn’t the flesh that will enter heaven but the new creature born of spirit as a son of God, that this new creature must be spiritually circumcised after having cleansed the heart by a journey of faith equivalent to Abraham’ physical journey of faith. And it is the lawless—those who are sons of the devil—that

twist Paul's epistles into instruments for destruction of the flesh and the spirit when they use these epistles, by taking a line from here and one from there, to teach infant sons of God to ignore the commandments and to make no attempt to keep the commandments.

Grace is sufficient for salvation, but grace does not cover the "Christian" who has made him or herself into a willing bondservant to sin (Rom 6:12–16), presenting his or her members to sin as instruments for unrighteousness—and *transgressing the Sabbath commandment is sin of the same order and magnitude as murder and adultery*.

Paul genuinely received knowledge of the mystery of Christ by revelation as evidenced by his insight of this mystery. To say otherwise causes the person to commit blasphemy against the Holy Spirit. But—and here is the caveat that divides the sons of God from the sons of the devil—to use the epistles of Paul to teach a disciple to transgress the commandments is also blasphemy against the Holy Spirit. And many have blasphemed the Holy Spirit with apparent impunity, but then, judgments have not yet been revealed.

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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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