

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 assigning meaning to words of Scripture.

Weekly Readings For the Sabbath of August 22, 2009

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 13.

Commentary: In the reading for August 1st, comments were made concerning Stephen's recounting Scripture, with Stephen's recounting revealing his limited access to Scripture. In Acts 13:20, however, Paul's words cause endtime disciples difficulty; for how to interpret Paul's reference to 450 years remains problematic. Plus, Luke having τὸ πνεῦμα τὸ ἅγιον [*the breath the holy*] speak (as the breath of an unseen person speaking in another room is heard) has been long used to justify assigning personhood to the breath of God. But a person watching television in the living room of his or her home would not usually assign personhood to the voice of the person's spouse when the spouse tells the one watching television to go to the store. Even without seeing his or her spouse, the person watching television will recognize the voice, will know who the speaker is, and will (hopefully) obey the voice or at least respond promptly to the voice, which is the spouse's modulated breath passing from one room into another room. So Luke in recording that the prophets [προφήται] and teachers [διδάσκαλοι] of the church at Antioch included Barnabas and Saul (and others) whom the breath of God said to set apart to the work for which προσέκλημαι [*I have called*] them (Acts 13:2) doesn't have the breath of God being the one who has called them, but the speaker, God, whose breath is heard as words being the one who has called them. And while it is unusual for disciples to actually hear the breath of God as spoken words, Paul was called "to hear a voice from his [God's] mouth" (Acts 21:14). The others named by Luke in Acts 13:1 also heard a voice from God's mouth and were thus able to testify as to the truth of Paul hearing God actually speak to him in words and not by groaning or inner feelings.

Words come to readers or hearers (auditors) without meaning. It is the auditor that assigns meaning to a word and meaning to a series of words. Therefore, the importance of the words on the page and whether these words accurately represent the speech of the speaker or the deeds of the doer (such as

does Luke faithfully record the speeches of Peter, of Paul, of the speakers he cites) is tempered by auditors necessarily having to assign meaning to these words. And if the auditor does not hear the words of Jesus, with the ability to hear His words predicated upon whether the auditor believes the writings of Moses (John 5:46–47), it doesn't really matter whether the recorded words accurately represent the speech of a speaker or the deeds of a doer; the auditor will be unable to assign the meaning the Lord intends to the received words. The auditor will get Scripture wrong. But if the auditor hears Jesus' voice and assigns Jesus' meanings to the recorded words, it again doesn't really matter if what is recorded accurately represents the speech of the speaker or the deeds of the doer; the auditor will assign the meaning that Jesus intends the words to have. And it is only the assignment of meaning that has importance; for the recorded words are the "authoritative word of God" regardless of whether the words of, say, Luke are an absolute word-for-word transcription of what Paul said.

Because endtime disciples understand (or at least should understand) that since Babel words and their meanings have been separated so that the meaning of the word (the object the word represents; the bricks being laid for the tower) has no hard relationship to the sound or the image of the word [linguistic icon] — meaning is assigned to words by reading communities — endtime disciples understand that God has allowed his sons to write Scripture without every word being dictated by the Lord. In His trust of disciples, the Lord has let mature, born of God disciples write their opinions and experiences into Scripture; for understanding of what is written comes by hearing the voice of Jesus. The reader community to which disciples should belong hears the voice of Jesus and assigns to the authoritative words of Scripture the meanings that Jesus intends that these words have. Therefore, the actual word recorded as authoritative may or may not be the word spoken in an impromptu situation by the Apostle Paul, but is what Paul intended to say, with Jesus making sure that the meaning He intended in the situation is "heard" by His disciples.

Before the spirit [$\pi\nu\epsilon\upsilon\mu\alpha$ θεοῦ] was given, Scripture was dictated by the Lord through many, *Thus says YHWH*. The one recording Scripture functioned as stenographer. But Israel was still unable to "hear" what the Lord said through the stenographer, for hearing the voice of the Lord either through written words or by the groaning of the spirit [$\pi\nu\epsilon\upsilon\mu\alpha$ θεοῦ] requires that the auditor believe the writings of Moses and not merely give lip-service to Moses.

Christians suffer from the same inability to hear the words of the Lord as ancient Israel (the chiral image of the Christian Church) experienced, with a prime example being the assignment of personhood to the breath of God [$\pi\nu\epsilon\upsilon\mu\alpha$ θεοῦ]. It took almost five centuries for this piece of foolishness to enter Christian dogma, but now there are disciples who are willing to die physically and spiritually in support of this nonsensical doctrine. Nothing any disciple can do or say will convince them not to assign personhood to the breath of God; such is the depth of the delusion that has come over them because of their unbelief, their unwillingness to believe Moses ... they actually cannot believe the writings of Moses, the necessary prerequisite to hearing the voice of Jesus. The Father prevents them from believing Moses for they say that they see when they are blind; thus, their blindness is permanent.

Meaning comes to Scripture only through inwardly hearing the words of Jesus. It is the words of Jesus conveyed by His voice as modulations of His breath [πνεῦμα Χριστοῦ — from Rom 8:9] in the disciple that permits the disciple to understand the things of God, those things that are conveyed by τὸ πνεῦμα τῆς ἀληθείας [*the spirit of the truth*] through the παράκλητον [*parakletos/n*], with this Comforter not leaving the disciple to wander alone through the morass of unbelief and confusion that forms today's Christianity.

The faith that the Father and the Son have in maturing disciples is great; for to let mortal men (and women) write their opinions, experiences, and judgments into Scripture, when this portion of Scripture will likely be dismissed because it is not the dictated words of God or of angels, takes faith that these sons of God will speak the words of their Father and of their Elder Brother. So the arguments made by faithless theologians that call into question whether a Aramaic-speaking small businessman on the Sea of Galilee (what a commercial fisherman would be) would speak in the words recorded in the Gospels of Luke or of John have very limited merit—and Jesus was not a carpenter; he was a carpenter's son who most likely was apprenticed to Joseph of Arimathea once Joseph, His visible father, died so it is very likely that Jesus was a fluent Greek speaker ... in order for Joseph of Arimathea to claim Jesus' body (i.e., to ask Pilate for Jesus' body), Joseph of Arimathea needed to be a near relative. So while Scripture is silent about what the relationship was, Roman law did not permit any but near relatives to claim the bodies of those who had been crucified.

While those disciples who have succumbed to the Sacred Names heresy will insist upon a Hebraic pronunciation of Jesus' name, with little agreement among themselves about the true pronunciation, the larger question is, did Paul speak in the language Luke wrote, with Luke's language varying little from his prosaic rendering of events to his recording of the speech of many differing speakers? Do we hear many differing voices in Acts? Does each character speak in a manner distinctive to the character? Or do they all speak as Luke wrote? The latter seems to be the case.

Did Jesus speak to His disciples in Greek when no one was around, or did He speak in Aramaic? From what He calls Peter [Cephas — from John 1:42] disciples know that Jesus spoke to Simon, son of John, in Aramaic, not Hebrew or Greek, with John, decades later, recounting the conversation in Greek, not Aramaic or Hebrew. We also know that two days before He was crucified, by the choice of words that Matthew records, Jesus spoke to the Sadducees in Greek but minutes later spoke to the Pharisees in Hebrew. So for disciples to insist that extended dialogue passages, transcribed years and sometime decades later, are the exact words spoken—words worthy of being printed in red font—pushes credibility and actually harms other disciples. The recorded dialogue passages are inspired and are, again, the authoritative word of God, the words to which Jesus will assign meaning when the disciple inwardly hears Jesus' voice. They are not inaccurate. But they are probably not the actual words spoken in impromptu dialogue.

It is not necessary for the Philippian jailer to have actually uttered the words, Κύριοι, τί με δεῖ ποιεῖν ἵνα σωθῶ [*Sirs, what for me is necessary to do that I may be saved*] (Acts 16:30) for these words to be the authoritative words of God. The words that were recorded in the 1st-Century would have been written in

uncials [all capital letters] and written without breaks between the words and with no accents or punctuation. What the jailer asked of Paul and Silas was the simple question of *what must I do to also be a Christian*. It is unlikely that the jailer thought in terms of being “saved” as Christians use the word; for the first language of a person determines the reality of the person, meaning that two individuals who do not have a common first language do not perceive phenomena in the same way even though both see and hear and experience the same event. What is seen and heard is filtered through the person’s first language. Thus, an Arabic speaker will experience a differing reality from an English speaker when both experience the same phenomenon.

There is no universal reality. There is not even a universal agreement on what colors exist. Thus, since salvation has come to all peoples, those who are called by God must necessarily hear the voice of Jesus before meaning can be assigned to Scripture, with the necessity to assign meaning to words forming one of the strongest arguments for typological exegesis.

Scripture accurately contains the essence of what was said in any speech, but the actual words spoken have been filtered through the writer and have, most likely, become the words of the writer, inspired by the spirit of God. To argue that the words recorded are the actual words spoken would have common Aramaic-speaking fishermen speaking in stilted Greek.

The Greek historian Thucydides in his *History of the Peloponnesian Wars* (i, 22, 1) admitted that he could not always recall speeches word-for-word, but he presented speeches as demanded by the occasion, subjecting his recounting of speeches to the literary necessities of the narrative. And all writers do some variation of this, with the writer Truman Capote even going so far as to give readers the moment-by-moment thoughts of real life killers.

All of the above has significance within the failing Sabbatarian churches of God, in which the Sacred Names heresy have caused many disciples to insist that Jesus’ name be pronounced in a certain way and in no other way, for by no other name but that of Jesus can men be saved. This heresy places importance on the “sound” uttered, not on whom the name represents. And the smallness of men (and women) who have been cut off from Christ by the Father is most visibly apparent in this heresy.

Again, a common characteristic of Evangelical theology is that Scripture is the infallible word of God, but “infallible” pertains to the receipt of the text, meaning that an infallible text can be understood in only one true way, a way that can be ascertained by diligent study; that meaning is not dependant upon hearing Jesus’ voice but upon text, lexicons, and historical-grammatical exegesis, all making for a convenient means to exclude Moses from Christianity and to promote the practice of lawlessness by those who should cover themselves with obedience. If Scripture is the infallible word of God, with this infallible text delivered to disciples in the 1st-Century, then Jesus’ voice can only be heard through correctly reading the text. Jesus’ participation in the lives of endtime disciples is for “feel-good” purposes, and not as the determiner of text. And nothing could be farther from the truth.

Unless a person believes the writings of Moses and hears the voice of Jesus (again, John 5:46–47), the person cannot understand Scripture regardless of how

well the person speaks Koine Greek, Aramaic, and Hebrew. The biblical scholars in whom no belief remains—the scholars that draw salaries from prestigious universities—have less understanding than the least educated Sabbatarian disciple who only knows that to please God and worship Christ he or she needs to keep the commandments to the best of the person’s ability.

Hearing Jesus’ voice is not a matter of intellect or great learning, but a matter of believing God.

In his first recorded epistle to the Corinthians, Paul acknowledges the schism or schisms that had already developed within the Church when he wrote, “For, in the first place, when you come together as a church, I hear that there are divisions among you. And I believe it in part, for there must be factions among you in order that those who are genuine among you may be recognized” (11:18–19). Factions (denominations), according to Paul, are a necessary part of separating those who are of the one true Church from those who merely claim to be *Christian*. Factions in the Christian Church can now be then compared to a stack of screens that separates crushed aggregate into varies sizes of gravel, for the number of factions have at least kept pace with the number of years that have passed since Calvary? In recent history, denominations have increased exponentially, leaving the decomposing corpse of Christ in such bad shape that restoration to life will necessarily be traumatic.

But it is Paul’s reference to 450 years that illustrates the difficulty in assigning meaning to the words of Scripture: καὶ καθελὼν ἔθνη ἑπτὰ ἐν γῆ Χανάαν [*And having destroyed nations seven in land of Canaan*], κατεκληρονόμησεν τὴν γῆν αὐτῶν [*he gave as an inheritance the land of them*] ὡς ἔτεσιν τετρακοσίοις καὶ πενήκοντα [*about years four hundred and fifty*]. καὶ μετὰ ταῦτα ἔδωκεν κριτὰς ἕως Σαμουὴλ προφήτου [*And after these things he gave judges until Samuel (the) prophet*] (Acts 13:19–20).

Paul says that about 450 years passed from when Israel received the land of Canaan until the age of the judges ended with the prophet Samuel, but 1 Kings 6:1 reads, “In the four hundred and eightieth year after the people of Israel came out of the land of Egypt, in the fourth year of Solomon’s reign over Israel, in the month of Ziv, which is the second month, he began to build the house of the Lord.”

If David’s reign over Israel is 40 years long and if Saul’s reign is also 40 years long, then 83 years (in the *fourth year* doesn’t mean four years, but three years plus some months) pass from when Samuel, as an old man with grown sons, appointed Saul to be the commander of Israel. If, now, the account in 1 Kings 6:1 is true that 480 years occur between when Israel leaves Egypt and construction on the temple begins under Solomon, then there are less than 400 years between when Israel leaves Egypt and when Israel rebels against the Lord and asks for a king, with Israel spending 40 of these years in the desert and with Joshua being commander of Israel for 25 years. This would leave Israel being governed by the judges, with Samuel being counted as the last of these judges, for 331-332 years. So if what Paul states is true, then the ending date for the “about 450 years” isn’t Israel’s rebellion when the nation asked for a king to rule over it, but Jeroboam’s rebellion against God when he “appointed priests from among all the people, who were not of the Levities” (1 King 12:31).

The math now is, add 37 years to the 480 years mentioned in 1 Kings 6:1 and subtracts 65 years (the 40 Israel was in the wilderness, and the 25 years of Joshua) from this total, leaving 452 years, or about 450 years.

But does Scripture support an ending date concurring with Jeroboam's rebellion?

The One who destroyed seven nations in the land of Canaan was the Lord; it was the Lord who gave the land of the Canaan as an inheritance to Israel. So the protagonist of what Paul writes is the Lord, not Israel or any man. And the Lord told Solomon, "Since this [not keeping what the Lord commands] has been you're your practice and you have not kept my covenant and my statutes that I have commanded you, I will surely tear the kingdom from you and will give it to your servant. Yet for the sake of David your father I will not do it in your days, but I will tear it out of the hand of your son" (1 Kings 11:11–12).

Jeroboam could have kept the commandments of God; he could have trusted God and believed that because God gave him all but one of the tribes of Israel. But he didn't believe God, and Israel never left the sin with which Jeroboam shackled the nation. The official fall of the house of Israel (the northern kingdom of Samaria) came long after the nation's spiritual fall: "And the people of Israel did secretly against the Lord their God things that were not right. ... When he [the Lord] had torn Israel from the house of David, they made Jeroboam the son of Nebat king. And Jeroboam drove Israel from following the Lord and made them commit great sin. The people of Israel walked in all the sins that Jeroboam did. They did not depart from them, until the Lord removed Israel out of his sight, as he had spoken by all his servants the prophets" (2 Kings 17:9, 21–23).

Israel's separation from God occurred not when Assyria took Israel captive, when Israel's captivity would seem to have happened, but when God tore Israel from the house of David because of Solomon's sins in taking many foreign wives and setting up idols in the land of Israel for these wives. The land of Canaan (i.e., Judea) ceased being Israel's inheritance when the Lord tore the ten tribes of the northern kingdom away from the house of David ... after Assyria took the northern kingdom captive [ca 721 BCE] and Babylon took the southern kingdom captive [ca 586 BCE], Israel had already shrunk in size until it was no larger than the polis of Jerusalem. It shrunk further until it was no larger than the temple mount when a remnant of Israel, as servants of the king of Persia, returned to Jerusalem to build a house of God for King Cyrus. So, yes, the land of Canaan ceased being Israel's inheritance when the Lord tore Israel from the house of David and gave the nation to Jeroboam, a servant of King Solomon.

But the question remains: is this what Paul meant when he said *about 450 years*?

The Geneva Study Bible says, "There were from the birth of Isaac until the destruction of the Canaanites under the governance of Joshua four hundred and forty-seven years, and therefore he [Paul] adds in this place the word about, for three years are missing; the apostle, however, uses the whole greater number." But where in what Paul writes is Isaac mentioned.

Jamieson-Fausset-Brown Bible Commentary says,

Taking the words as they stand in the Greek, thus, "after that, by the space of four hundred fifty years, He gave judges," the meaning may

be, that about four hundred fifty years elapsed from the time of the covenant with Abraham until the period of the judges; which is historically correct, the word "about" showing that chronological exactness was not aimed at. But taking the sense to be as in our version, that it was the period of the judges itself which lasted about four hundred fifty years, this statement also will appear historically correct, if we include in it the interval of subjection to foreign powers which occurred during the period of the judges, and understand it to describe the whole period from the settlement of the tribes in Canaan to the establishment of royalty. Thus, from the Exodus to the building of the temple were five hundred ninety-two years [Josephus, Antiquities, 8.3.1]; deduct forty years in the wilderness; twenty-five years of Joshua's rule [Josephus, Antiquities, 5.1.29]; forty years of Saul's reign (Ac 13:2); forty of David's and the first four years of Solomon's reign (1Ki 6:1), and there remain, just four hundred forty-three years; or, in round numbers, "about four hundred fifty years."

But Josephus is at odds with 1 King 6:1, which assigns 480 years to this period from the Exodus to the construction of the temple, not 592 years.

The sense of what Paul said doesn't begin with the Exodus from Egypt, but with Israel receiving the land of Canaan as an inheritance after the Lord destroyed seven nations. So to begin the count of the 450 years with the Exodus is intellectually dishonest. The count needs to begin either during the period when Joshua is commander or at the end of Joshua's life when Israel began to be ruled by judges, with Samuel, the prophet, being the last of the judges.

Does any of the above matter one whit when it comes to salvation? No, it does not. But it illustrates the problems involved with assigning meaning to the words of Scripture, especially when the voice of an unseen speaker is heard through the speaker's "breath" producing audible words heard by the prophets and teachers that were at Antioch. It is simply too easy to put the mind in neutral and coast downhill, going along with the crowd and being sort-of convinced that the spirit of God can speak as if this "spirit— $\piνεῦμα$ " were a person.

Most disciples desperately want Scripture to be infallible, the one thing in this world upon which they can count. But Scripture is inspired, not infallible, for meaning must be assigned to the words of Scripture so Scripture is not "complete" until it is read by the person who believes the writings of Moses and hears the voice of Jesus. It is the meaning produced in the minds of mature disciples who believe God that is infallible, not the inscribed linguistic icons composing the text; for the problems of transcription and translation cease to exist when disciples hear the voice of Jesus.

When the words of the oldest and best texts are studied as if in these linguistic icons lies salvation, the one who studies will inevitably be without understanding; for it is the person who believes the Lord that will be justified and glorified. Too often disputing about words destroys faith.

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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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