

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 will begin a series of readings addressing foundational constructs, with baptism being first.

Weekly Readings For the Sabbath of December 5, 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 Russian Orthodox Church Patriarch Alexy II died Friday at age 79. He will be remembered for having presided over the post-Soviet Christian revival that has seen approximately two-thirds of Russia's 142 million people return to an outward profession of faith, but most importantly for Sabbatarian Christendom, he will also be remembered for successfully lobbying for the 1997 law that restricts the activities of religions other than Orthodoxy (the Russian Orthodox faith), Islam, Judaism, and Buddhism within Russia.

It is easy to forget that Christianity in the 1st-Century CE was a sect of Judaism ... a Gentile proselyte to Judaism was required to be physically circumcised, to be baptized, and give an offering at the temple. Being circumcised was for inclusion into the nation of Israel, the firstborn son of God (Ex 4:22). In this scenario, being baptized was for the death of the old self, the former self who was not of Israel. And giving an offering was to show where the heart was.

The 1997 law that restricts religious activities in Russia shouldn't but probably will affect the activities of *Philadelphia* within the nation; for *Philadelphia* is a continuation of the sect of the Nazarenes that was a recognized sect of Judaism in the mid-1st Century CE.

Within the spectrum of religion that recognizes the patriarch Abraham as a forefather, the fellowships of *Philadelphia* are the only fellowships that stand on the foundation Paul laid in heavenly Jerusalem (1 Cor 3:10–11). The antiquity of *Philadelphia's* beliefs is without challenge, and this Sabbath reading will begin a series of readings addressing foundational constructs, with baptism being first.

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The person conducting the service should read or assign to be read Acts chapter 2.

Commentary: On that day of Pentecost following Calvary, the disciples were gathered together, and there came from heaven the sound like a mighty rushing, violent wind [πνοῆς—*pnoes*] that filled the whole house, thereby immersing or submerging the disciples in “spirit—πνεῦμα” ... the English word “baptize” comes from the Greek word

“*baptizein*—βαπτισθεῖς/ν,” meaning to dip or to submerge. Thus, *to baptize* in water is to dip into or to submerge in water as the world was submerged in water in the days of Noah; *to baptize* in spirit (i.e., the breath of God) is to dip or to submerge in spirit as the world was submerged in water in the days of Noah; thus, *to baptize* with fire is to submerge the world in fire as the world was submerged in water. And John the Baptist said, “I baptize [βαπτίσει] you with water for repentance,” but Jesus, who would come after John, will “baptize [βαπτίσει] with πνεύματι ἁγίῳ [spirit or breath holy]” and fire (Matt 3:11). Therefore, three baptisms exist: one with water, one with spirit, one with fire.

On that day of Pentecost, devout Jews “from every nation under heaven” heard the first disciples speak as the spirit “gave them utterance” (Acts 2:4–5). These devout Jews were perplexed in that each heard what was said in the language of their nation. Peter then spoke, and some of these devout Jews “were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, ‘Brothers, what shall we do?’ And Peter said to them, ‘Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit’” (vv. 37–38).

Baptism in the name of Jesus Christ was for the forgiveness of sin; the Holy Spirit was given as the free gift of the Father. Baptism for the forgiveness of sin is, now, the inclusionary rite of Christendom. With baptism, a person becomes a member of the household of God, upon which judgment has come (1 Pet 4:17). Baptism in water symbolically represents the death of the old self or nature.

In the days of Noah, the unrighteousness and ungodliness (the wickedness) of humankind grieved God, who regretted that He had made man (Gen 6:5–6). He determined that He would blot out all living things (v. 7), so He baptized the world unto death by bringing a flood of water over the face of the earth ... baptism by water is baptism into death. Likewise, baptism by spirit is baptism into life with baptism by fire is baptism into glory.

When the Son of Man is revealed or unclothed, a time like that of Noah’s age shall again be upon the earth. Only the Lord has promised not to again baptize the world into death by bringing another flood. He will instead baptize the world into life by submersing the world in spirit, which filled the room with the sound of a mighty rushing wind on that day of Pentecost almost two millennia ago. And all men [humankind] from every nation will hear the words of the Lord in their own language; for all will be born of spirit, and born filled with or empowered by the Holy Spirit. No longer will anyone be consigned to disobedience so all who endure to the end shall be saved.

Baptism has not been understood by Christendom: the usual teaching is that being *born of water* (John 3:5) means “being baptized,” but this would make baptism a prerequisite for being born of spirit—and Scripture does not support this teaching, for clearly Cornelius was empowered by the spirit before He was baptized.

- Baptism is for the forgiveness of sin, with this forgiveness coming through the death of the old self or old nature or old man.
- A person of the nations [a Gentile], unlike a natural Israelite, was not under the law and had no access to the promise of inheriting eternal life and did not seek God. This person was far from the covenants of promise.
- A Gentile had no reason to cease living as a Gentile, believing myths and fables about an after death afterlife.

- Therefore, when the offense of circumcision was abolished in the personhood of Christ Jesus and salvation was offered to Gentiles, who had no interest in the Lord, the Holy Spirit was given prior to repentance.
- For Gentiles, receipt of the Holy Spirit preceded baptism and the death of the old self and the forgiveness of sin.
- But receipt of the Holy Spirit (i.e., being born of spirit) is not a guarantee of salvation.

A concept that the Christian Church has overlooked for far too long is that since Cornelius receipt of the Holy Spirit precedes the death of the old self and the forgiveness of sin. No one far from the Lord (metaphorically, living in a far land — Deut 30:1) will come to the Lord unless the Father makes a first overture by drawing the person from this world (John 6:44, 65), and the Father draws a person by giving the person the earnest of the Holy Spirit ... earnest money given on a real estate contract is real money, just not the full amount of the purchase price. And earnest money is returned if the contract offer is rejected. Likewise, when the Father draws a person the Father gives the person real spiritual life in the inter-dimensional realm; the person has been born of spirit. But the person is spiritually as a newly born Hebrew male infant, who won't be circumcised until the eighth day, was physically. Until the person who has been drawn by the Father from this world undertakes a journey of faith equivalent to the patriarch Abraham's physical journey of faith, the heart will not be cleansed so that it can be circumcised. Thus, the Gentile to whom the Father has given the earnest of the spirit—this Gentile will either make a journey of faith and begin to live as a Judean (a Galilean) and thereby have his or her heart circumcised, or this Gentile will continue to live as a Gentile and as earnest money is returned when a purchase offer is rejected, the spiritual life received dies of spiritual SIDS. This son of God dies before the person is spiritually circumcised and comes under judgment. Unfortunately, too often this spiritual infant of less than eight days age begins to teach others even when it is spiritually dead—and it teaches other newly born spiritual infants to continue living as Gentiles.

Nicodemus recognized Jesus as a teacher come from God, but without a recorded question being asked by Nicodemus, “Jesus answered him, ‘Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God.’ Nicodemus said to him, ‘How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter a second time into his mother's womb and be born?’ Jesus answered, ‘Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God’” (John 3:3–5) ... if John's recounting of this exchange were stopped here, it might be possible to argue that Cornelius and his household were exceptions to the rule that baptism precedes being born of spirit. But the account doesn't stop here. Rather, Jesus goes on to say, “‘That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit’” (v. 6). And the juxtaposition is being born of water means to be born of flesh, whereas to be born of spirit is to be born again, or born from above.

Jesus adds, “‘Do not marvel that I said to you, ‘You [plural — “you” is plural throughout this passage] must be born again.’ The wind [πνεῦμα] blows where it wishes, and you hear its sound, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit [πνεῦμα]’” (John 3:7–8).

The new creature that is born of spirit is not the fleshly body of the person, but a “creature” like the self-awareness that imparts personhood to a human being. Since the empowerment of Cornelius, baptism is not a necessary prerequisite for either a natural

Israelite or a Gentile to receive a second birth through receiving the Holy Spirit. Rather, what is seen is that baptism is for the death of the old self or old nature who was a bondservant of the prince of this world.

The Apostle Paul wrote,

What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound? By no means! How can we who died to sin still live in it? Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life. (Rom 6:1–4)

What disciple has physically died to sin so that he or she is without sin? Paul will go on to write that his fleshly members still served the law of sin and death (Rom 7:13–25), so baptism isn't to the death of a disciple's fleshly members but only to the death of the old "personhood" or self-awareness that causes one person to behave differently than another person behaves ... every cat has characteristics common to all cats; every dog has characteristics common to all dogs. Yet each cat has its own personality as each dog has its own personality. Likewise, every human being has characteristics common to every human being; yet, each person is unique. So baptism isn't to the death of the flesh, but to the death of the old self or old nature that was consigned to disobedience because of the sin of the first Adam. It isn't the flesh that is buried into a death like that of Christ Jesus at baptism, but the self-aware nature that imparts personhood to the human being. And it isn't the flesh that is raised in newness of life when raised from the water, but the new creature or new nature that is like a Hebrew infant of eight days of age.

Paul continues:

For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his. We know that our old self was crucified with him in order that the body of sin might be brought to nothing, so that we would no longer be enslaved to sin. For one who has died has been set free from sin. Now if we have died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him. We know that Christ, being raised from the dead, will never die again; death no longer has dominion over him. For the death he died he died to sin, once for all, but the life he lives he lives to God. So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus.

The fleshly body or tabernacle of a disciple is not crucified as Jesus was crucified; only the old self or old nature (a non-physical attribute of a human being—the attribute that imparts personhood) is crucified with Christ and thus set free from sin. The flesh is not yet set free: a ransom has to be paid before the flesh is set free from sin.

All firstborns belong to God, who can use them as He chooses. In Egypt where Israel as the firstborn son of God (Ex 4:22) was held in bondage by Pharaoh, king of Egypt, God gave the lives of Egyptian firstborns as the ransom price for His firstborn son (Isa 43:3). He will again give the lives of men—firstborns not covered by the blood of Christ—as the ransom price for Israel, now a nation circumcised of heart.

But Christendom holds that at Calvary Christ Jesus paid the ransom price necessary to redeem all of humanity. Paul wrote:

I mean that the heir, as long as he is a child, is no different from a slave, though he is the owner of everything, but he is under guardians and

managers until the date set by his father. In the same way we also, when we were children, were enslaved to the elementary principles of the world. But when the fullness of time had come, *God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons.* And because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, “Abba! Father!” So you are no longer a slave, but a son, and if a son, then an heir through God. (Gal 4:1–7 emphasis added)

Paul writes that God sent His Son to redeem those who were under the law—those who were under the law were Israelites, not the peoples of this world. The Son redeems Israel that Israel might receive adoption as sons, but Paul writes as if the redemption of those formerly under the law was the prerequisite for the Galatians being adopted by the Father as sons, a juxtaposition that would seem to ignore Israel’s redemption from Egyptian slavery. If redemption were of the flesh, Israel was redeemed when the nation left Egypt; Israel was redeemed under Moses, for death reigned from Adam to Moses (Rom 5:14), not from Adam to Christ Jesus, the second Adam. Thus, spiritual death reigns spiritually from Christ Jesus to the two witnesses, the two who will be like Moses and Aaron, their ministry to begin when Israel is liberated from indwelling sin and death.

Today, the Church is as Israel was in Egypt—and as Israel was “baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea” (1 Cor 10:2), the Church will be baptized into the ministry of the two witnesses by the empowerment of the spirit. And as Israel chafed at the bit of Moses, who brought to Israel the promise of inheriting eternal life, the Church will chafe at the bit of obedience and will rebel against God as Israel rebelled in the wilderness of Paran (Num chap 14).

The Church has already been baptized in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit (Matt 28:19): this is the baptism unto the death of the old self, about which Paul writes, “For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus” (Gal 3:27–28). The person who has been baptized into this baptism has been set free from sin; yet sin will continue to dwell in the person’s fleshly members. The person will remain male or female, Jew or Greek, free or bond. So this baptism isn’t into the death of the flesh or for the liberation of the flesh from indwelling sin and death. Rather, this baptism by water is unto the death of the old self or old nature that enlivens the flesh. If it were unto the death of the flesh, then the disciple would be “dead,” a corpse to be buried in a grave. There would be no need for grace; there would be no growth in grace and knowledge.

Therefore, the baptism that has significance for the flesh is not baptism by water, but baptism by spirit at the second Passover. This will be baptism into life, not unto death, for the fleshly body of every person was baptized unto death in the days of Noah. A disciple needs to do nothing for the disciple’s tent of flesh to perish.

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The reader should now read Acts chapter 8, verses 26 through 40.

Commentary: There have been few in this age like the Ethiopian eunuch, who could father no physical children but could spread knowledge wherever he went, thereby leaving a legacy of spiritual children. That is what this reading seeks to prepare many to do.

Because of misunderstandings engendered by Christendom teaching that being *born of water* meant baptism rather than human birth (i.e., born of the water of the womb), the Church was ripe for division stemming from the issue of adult baptism; for baptism replaces outward circumcision on the 8th-day as the inclusionary rite for admission in the spiritually circumcised nation of Israel. Wide acceptance of baptism as this inclusionary rite caused early Catholic churches (Greek and Roman) to sprinkle newly born human infants in a baptismal ceremony that was utterly without spiritual significance ... until the Father draws a person from this world and gives to the person a second life through receipt of His divine “breath,” the person has no life but that which came from the first Adam. The person has no immortal soul. So to baptize a person for the death of the old self before the person has been drawn and called by God is without meaning; the old self doesn’t die for there is no new self or new nature present in the person. All that has happened is the person gets wet; so even full immersion baptism of infants, children, or non-believers is meaningless. And sprinkling is not baptism.

Baptism after spiritual birth is an outward profession of faith that places the new self or new nature into the household of God, and by extension, puts the new self under judgment. Until baptized, a born-of-spirit son-of-God is neither a part of spiritual Israel, nor under judgment, but is as a Hebrew male infant of less than eight days age was.

Because of the lawlessness of the early Church, God delivered the Church into the hand of the spiritual king of Babylon (Isa 14:4) as He delivered ancient Israel into the hand of Nebuchadnezzar, king of earthly Babylon. Spiritual Jerusalem was without inhabitants for 1200 years (325 CE to 1525 CE) as earthly Jerusalem was without the temple for 70 years (586 BCE to 516 BCE) — disciples are the temple of God (1 Cor 3:16–17; 2 Cor 6:16). And the means through which God kept the Church imprisoned in spiritual Babylon was through the death of the Body of Christ.

If the Body of Christ consists of all disciples who have been born of spirit and who have made a journey of faith comparable in distance to the patriarch Abraham’s geographical journey of faith (Rom 4:11–12) — this spiritual or mental journey of faith cleanses the heart so that it can be circumcised — then death of the Body would come when no born of spirit disciple undertakes a journey of faith comparable to Abraham’s physical journey of faith. And to keep the Body dead, the Christian Church baptized infants ... sprinkling before spiritual birth is not baptism of the old self unto a death like Christ Jesus’.

If believers are not baptized after becoming believers, there will be no inhabitants in heavenly Jerusalem. If adult baptism is necessary, then centuries of infant baptism produced a spiritual condition analogous to Jerusalem being abandoned for seventy years after Nebuchadnezzar sacked the city a second time. Of equal importance, though, is the theological location of heavenly Jerusalem: as long as a person remains in spiritual Babylon, the person is far from heavenly Jerusalem. As long as a “Christian” continues to participate in the governance of this world, the person remains in spiritual Babylon. As long as a “Christian” continues to worship on Sunday rather than the Sabbath, the “Christian” remains in Babylon, for Sabbath observance marks when a disciple enters into God’s presence or into His rest (*cf.* Heb 3:16–4:11; Ps 95:10–11; Num chap 14).

The geographical territory of ancient Judea is the shadow and type of 7th-Day Sabbath observance: to physically dwell in Judea equates to spiritually keeping the Sabbath. Therefore, an Israelite going to Jerusalem three seasons a year to observe the

high Sabbaths equates to a spiritually circumcised disciple keeping the annual Sabbaths. No disciple who does not keep both the weekly Sabbath and the annual Sabbaths has spiritually reached heavenly Jerusalem, regardless of what the disciple contends.

In the 16th-Century, 1200 years after when Emperor Constantine called together the Council of Nicea (ca 325 CE), Swiss Reformers broke with the Roman Church ... as a physical decree went out to rebuild the temple of God in physical Jerusalem, a spiritual decree went out to rebuild the temple of God in the Jerusalem above. Both Reformers and Radicals heard this decree. Reformers wanted to rebuild the temple where they were in Babylon; they did not want to journey to spiritual Judea. After all, physical Israel had prospered in Babylon. What need was there to journey to the land Beyond the River? Why not stay where the nation was? But Radicals set out for spiritual Judea.

As if the journey to Judea were a sprint race, Swiss Radicals accepted the New Testament as their only rule of faith and practice, broke with Catholic tradition, and rejected Luther's theory of forensic, solifidian justification, and the real presence. They believed it was possible to keep the law and to reach perfection. Hätzer and Denck doubted the doctrine of a triune deity. Some Radicals believed in the sleep of the soul between death and resurrection, a millennial reign of Christ, and final restoration. But the burning question was baptism: Radicals could not find infant baptism in the Bible, so they denounced it as an invention of popery. Baptism, they reasoned, presupposes instruction, faith, and conversion, which is impossible in the case of infants. (*History of the Christian Church, Volume VIII: "Modern Christianity. The Swiss Reformation"*)

A person must put the old self to death by baptism, represented typologically by the land of Haran where Abraham's father Terah settled and died—this is the land of Assyria. If the disciple will not leave the old self, the disciple will never enter into God's rest. The old self will continue to rule the fleshly tabernacle into which the infant son of God was born, and upon whom judgment has come; thus, the old self must be put to death.

"The demand of rebaptism virtually unbaptized and unchristianized the entire Christian world, and completed the rupture with the historic Church. It cut the last cord of union of the present with the past" (*History—Vol. VIII*).

In the 16th Century, the Reformers aimed to reform the old Church by the Bible; the Radicals attempted to build a new Church from the Bible. The former maintained the historic continuity; the latter went directly to the apostolic age, and ignored the intervening centuries as an apostasy. (*History—Vol. VIII*) And no better statements can be made about what is today occurring within greater Christianity than the above citation. Historical exegesis maintains theological continuity back to the Council of Nicea (ca 325 CE), when Constantine, the unconverted Roman Emperor, determined what would be sound doctrine for the Church. Errors introduced into the teachings of the Church in the 1st through 4th Centuries have been continued through elevation of the traditions of men to the status of Holy Writ. These long held errors, embodied in the sentiment behind the lyrics of "Give Me That Old Time Religion," will cause many born-from-above saints to rebel against God when the lawless one is revealed (2 Thess 2:3). These many rebelling saints, in denominations coming from Protestant reform of the old Church by the Bible and from in-house reform of the old Church, will use historical exegesis to support arguments for practices and dogma developed within the old Church long before any reform occurred. These arguments will cause saints to attempt entering God's rest on the following day, Sunday, when no covering for sin exists but obedience—

and God will, then, send a great delusion over the rebels so that they cannot repent (vv. 11-12). The rebels will be absolutely convinced that they alone represent the true Church, possessing the faith once delivered, and they will persecute endtime Radicals that have built a new Church from the Bible just as the Reformers hunted down and killed Radicals in the 16th and 17th Centuries.

For the past century, the Churches of God have sought to trace the history of the true Church through Sabbath observance. Thus, they assigned Sabbath observance to obscure religious factions that called Sunday the Sabbath, and they identified communities of crypto-Jews as factions of the true Church. Conversion of these crypto-Jews might or might not have been genuine, but it isn't by Sabbath observance that the true Church can be traced. Rather, it is through tracing the sacrament of baptism that history of the Church mirrors the history of the physically circumcised holy nation.

The physically circumcised nation of Israel didn't die out in Babylon, but thrived and prospered. Likewise, the born of spirit nation of Israel hasn't died out in spiritual Babylon, but has grown fat, soft and flabby. Only a remnant of the physical nation returned to Jerusalem. Only a remnant of the spiritual nation has returned to the Jerusalem above. And of the physical remnant that returned, only a remnant of this remnant accepted the deity of Jesus of Nazareth. Likewise, of the remnant of spiritual Israel that has returned to rebuild the temple of God, few will hear Jesus' voice and believe the One who sent Him. Many are called, but few are chosen (Matt 22:14). All have been invited to the wedding feast, but even among Sabbath-observing Christians, few strive for perfection; few strive to walk uprightly before God. Most behave as the Pharisees did—now that they have the Sabbath, they make an idol of it by making Sabbath observance the test of genuine discipleship. Break the Sabbath and the disciple is a "nominal Christian," an ugly identifying phrase that has an even uglier application.

The mission field for the spiritual remnant that has returned to the Jerusalem above is the 8th-Day Church. The mission is recovery of genuine disciples who are currently being taught not to undertake the difficult journey to obedience, to God's rest, to Sabbath observance. These disciples are, instead, taught to erase the laws of God if, perchance, they are written on their hearts and put into their minds. And whereas the 16th-Century Swiss Radicals were unable to refute the arguments of Zwingli against the necessity of adult baptism, overturning Zwingli's arguments are today child's play. Thus, the task that *Philadelphia* faces is getting disciples to cover themselves with the Passover sacraments of Bread and Wine so that these disciples will live through the liberation of the spiritually holy nation from bondage to sin. Too few disciples take the sacraments as Jesus established the example.

The second Passover is approaching. Those disciples who have been on a long journey or who have been spiritually defiled by touching a dead body (themselves) can take the sacraments—and should.

"The first and chief aim of the (Swiss) Radicals was not (as is usually stated) the opposition to infant baptism, still less to sprinkling or pouring, but the establishment of a pure church of converts in opposition to the mixed church of the world. The rejection of infant baptism followed as a necessary consequence. They were not satisfied with separation from popery; they wanted a separation from all the ungodly. They appealed to the example of the disciples in Jerusalem, who left the synagogue and the world" (*History—Vol. VIII*).

From the early Swiss Radicals come today's Sabbatarian Christians. The spiritual lineage is direct. And as the State Churches drove the Radicals from place to place, so too will Sabbatarian Christians be driven from place to place once the seven, endtime years of tribulation begin. If the Sabbatarian loves that portion of the world where he or she presently resides, the person will lose his or her physical life there; for the gospel will be spread during the Tribulation as it was spread by Swiss Anabaptists.

Philadelphia follows in and goes far beyond the steps of 16th-Century Sabbatarian Anabaptists, especially the steps of Andreas Fischer.

Baptism is the voluntary putting to death of the old self, thereby allowing judgment to come upon the born-from-above son of God that is a member of the household of God. Death precedes judgment (Heb 9:27), and judgment is today on the household of God (1 Pet 4:17). Physical circumcision occurred on the eighth day. A Hebrew infant lived a week before being circumcised. But a spiritual week is not linked to the passing of time.

Baptism by water is for the forgiveness of sins, and sprinkling is not baptism; so there are many who call themselves "Christians" who have not had their sins forgiven. And there are many more who have made only a half-hearted effort to walk uprightly before God. Their cars fill Church parking lots every Sunday morning.

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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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