

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 power of the law is its ability to sentence a person to death.

## **Weekly Readings**

### **For the Sabbath of December 19, 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.*

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In those days and in that time, declares the Lord, the people of Israel and the people of Judah shall come together, weeping as they come, and they shall seek the Lord their God. They shall ask the way to Zion, with faces turned toward it, saying, "Come, let us join ourselves to the Lord in an everlasting covenant that will never be forgotten."

My people have been lost sheep. Their shepherds have led them astray, turning them away on the mountains. From mountain to hill they have gone. They have forgotten their fold. All who found them have devoured them, and their enemies have said, "We are not guilty, for they have sinned against the Lord, their habitation of righteousness, the Lord, the hope of their fathers." (Jer 50:4-7)

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When Israel goes from being a physical nation to being a spiritual nation—a nation whose heart has been cleansed by faith and circumcised by spirit—its habitation goes from being a physical dwelling (a structure of wood and stone) or a physical landscape (Judah) to being "righteousness" as expressed by belief in God and belief of God unto obedience. Those disciples who hold that endtime Israel is the physical nation of Israel or is the English-speaking peoples are very poor readers of Scripture: they have been lead astray by their shepherds, or by the fat sheep that push them about after the Lord becomes their Shepherd ...

It is fat sheep (from Ezek 34:20-24) that presently rule over the Sabbatarian Churches of God, with some of these sheep much fatter (greater in wealth and authority) than others of the fat sheep, but with none of these fat sheep having a calling to the position these "leaders" hold. Understand, if a person has *a heart for the Lord*, a euphemistic expression for having a desire to serve God, the person tends to believe that he or she has been called to a position in the greater Christian Church, with this

“position” determined by the established leadership in the Church. Therefore, the person who desires to serve God often ends up going down a career path that will have the person pasturing a congregation, or more than one congregation, preaching what the trustees of the fellowships approve. One such individual pastors a Sunday fellowship in Loysburg, Pennsylvania, and the German Seventh Day Baptist fellowship in New Enterprise, preaching to his Sunday congregation what he knows won’t offend this congregation and preaching to the Sabbath-keepers spiritual Pabulum.

The person who pastors a congregation of the Christian Church most likely has not been called by God to be a pastor, but has chosen the ministry as a vocation in which the person can serve others ... the desire to serve is genuine, but pastoring disciples is a usurped position. And Christian hubris is a very serious problem within the Church, especially within the Sabbatarian Churches of God. To assume that God has called a person to teach others when no such call was heard from the mouth of God is always problematic. Then to build a ministry on such a call as seen in the splinters of the former Worldwide Church of God (WCG) is doubly problematic. Thus, it isn’t just the larger slivers of WCG that have taken to themselves authority not given them by God, it is also the so-called “independent” congregations that of their own volition continue to teach an errant message and Herbert W. Armstrong’s skewed understanding of prophecy.

If the Father and the Son choose to end a work that has gone astray, Jesus Christ doesn’t whisper into the ear of those who have gone astray—they went astray by not listening to the voice of Christ Jesus. Rather, the work dies spiritually by the Father calling no further disciples into the work, but the work will continue on physically for some period of time as chickens run around after having heads chopped off. Eventually, the work runs out of resources and fails, or is taken over by a coup, or simply slows down to where it grows only by familial association as the Seventh Day Baptists say of themselves [*familial association* means as members have children; there is no outside recruitment]. And in the history of the Sabbatarian Church of God, two deaths of ministries stand out, the first being the death of Andreas Fischer’s ministry when he was beheaded in 1540 CE (he had been hung twelve years earlier so they weren’t going to hang him again). His ministry continued in some form or another until approximately 1577, but before Fischer was martyred, Fischer wasn’t condemning the practice of physical circumcision and was slowly edging into advocating a return to circumcision. He did not truly understand what circumcision represented [a making naked before God so that the person was only covered by his own obedience and not by the mantle of Christ’s righteousness] so rather than let the error of returning to circumcision do greater harm to disciples, it became time to end Fischer’s ministry, sealing Fischer in death as a genuine martyr.

The other easily seen example is that of Herbert Armstrong’s ministry, with Armstrong apparently being genuinely called by God to do a work but with Armstrong beginning that work while he was still a spiritual novice. Armstrong never understood spiritual birth although he thought he did. Because he never understood spiritual birth, he never understood that endtime Israel is a nation circumcised of heart, with these hearts first being cleansed by faith. Therefore, he never understood biblical prophecy although he built a work based on his skewed understanding of prophecy ... today, late 2009, the amount of knowledge that *The Philadelphia Church* possesses is, in comparison to the amount of knowledge the Remnant will have immediately preceding the return of Christ Jesus, equivalent to the geographical territory under Israel’s control

under Samuel in relationship to the territory over which King David ruled at the end of his administration. There is much to be learned, but *The Philadelphia Church* is a self-aware text and understands how much it doesn't yet know, a realization that tends to deflate egos and nip hubris in the bud. For when a person or an association realizes that it has only begun a journey to recover knowledge that Christ Jesus (but not necessarily the first disciples) had, the person or association is certainly "open" to learning even when the world cannot consciously assist—the *learning* will come from hearing the voice of Christ Jesus, and the prerequisite for hearing the voice of Jesus is believing the writings of Moses, understanding that Moses got Israel to the plains of Moab when the children of Israel (that were not before the people of God) had life and death placed before them: to continue ahead, following Joshua [in Greek, Ἰησοῦ — *Jesus*] into the Promised Land of God's rest was to choose life, but to remain where Moses spoke the book of Deuteronomy as rabbinical Judaism has spiritually done was to choose death, for no Moabite shall enter the kingdom (Ruth crossed the Jordan with her mother-in-law to become an Israelite).

On the plains of Moab and according to the terms of the second covenant (see Deut 29:1), the children of Israel, both those then present and all who were not present [not yet born physically], were to choose whether they would keep all that Moses spoke that day—this "all" recorded in the Book of Deuteronomy—or whether they would do evil, thereby bringing upon themselves death ... Judaism and especially rabbinical Judaism have not done what Moses commanded when he said,

The Lord your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among you, from your brothers—it is to him you shall listen—just as you desired of the Lord your God at Horeb on the day of the assembly, when you said, "Let me not hear again the voice of the Lord my God or see this great fire any more, lest I die." And the Lord said to me, "They are right in what they have spoken. I will raise up for them a prophet like you from among their brothers. And I will put my words in his mouth, and he shall speak to them all that I command him. And whoever will not listen to my words that he shall speak in my name, I myself will require it of him. (Deut 18:15–19)

The Lord raised up a prophet greater than Moses, and rabbinical Judaism has not and will not listen to Him; thus, the Lord has required Judaism to pay a very high price for its rejection of Moses' writings. It is not okay to pick and choose what the person will believe, choosing to believe that the Christian disciple should have tassels on the corners of his garment when the "garment" that covers the Christian disciple is Christ Jesus' righteousness, the mantle of grace ... who is the person that will undertake to sew tassels on the corners of Christ Jesus? Who would be so bold, so filled with hubris? It isn't neglecting to put tassels on the corners of garments that Jesus references when He said, "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 5:19) as some Messianic Christians contend.

When the Torah is written on hearts and place in minds under the New Covenant, will any Israelite need a tassel to remind the Israelite to keep the commandments? No, none will.

The visible Christian Church chooses to keep the commandment directing disciples to honor father and mother, and to keep the commandment against murder, and the

commandment against adultery, and the commandment against stealing, and the commandments not to covet, but the visible Church refuses to keep the commandment to remember the Sabbath because Israel was delivered from slavery (Deut 5:15). Is this because circumcised-of-heart has not yet been delivered from bondage to sin and death? If this is the case, will Israel keep the Sabbath after the Second Passover? Some of Israel will, but most of the nation will rebel against God and return to Sunday observance, with the Arian Church not even permitting the seventh day to be called the Sabbath.

From whom would such authority come? From whom comes any authority within the Christian Church? The obvious answer would be from Christ Jesus, but is this really the case when Paul lacked the authority necessary to command Galatians to cease physically circumcising themselves ... if Paul would have better understood spiritual birth and what physical circumcision represents, he could have presented the Galatians with a better argument, but in the argument Paul makes to them, endtime disciples get to see the limitations in understanding Paul possessed. After all, Paul writes that he laid the foundation for *God's building*, the temple of God—and the foundation is not the completed building; for James adds to what Paul writes about the faith of Abraham, with James' addition (Jas 2:21–24) forming a necessary part of the house of God even though James' addition has not been well understood by those lawless disciples who twist/twisted Paul's epistles into instruments for their own destruction (2 Pet 3:16–17).

Faith, of itself, is incomplete, and must be made *complete* through the addition of being manifested in deeds. Paul assumed that Christian converts would manifest these deeds that form the fruit of the spirit. Peter writes that faith must be supplemented by virtue, to which is added knowledge, to which is added self-control, to which is added steadfastness, to which is added godliness, to which is added brotherly affection, to which is added love (2 Pet 1:5–7), thereby making faith merely the beginning of a journey that will see a disciple mentally trek from spiritual Babylon to the plains of Moab, then across the Jordan and into Sabbath observance, the earthly manifestation of God's rest (*cf.* Heb 3:16–4:11; Ps 95:1–11; Num chap 14).

In this world, men [humankind] rule over other men, with their authority to rule derived from God having consigned all of humankind to disobedience [sin] (Rom 11:32) so that He could have mercy on all. All of humankind was delivered into the hand of the Adversary for the destruction of the flesh so that the spirit might be saved when judgments are revealed, a principle Paul understood when he told the saints at Corinth to deliver the man who was with his father's wife to Satan (1 Cor 5:5) ... before Paul could command the saints at Corinth to deliver the one who was with his father's wife to the Adversary, Paul had to make a case for having the authority to do so.

Paul begins his epistle to the Galatians with a very good, classic Aristotelian argument, presenting his strongest point first: "For I would have you know, brothers, that the gospel that was preached by me is not man's gospel. For I did not receive it from any man, nor was I taught it, but I received it through a revelation of Jesus Christ" (1:11–12). And Paul begins his first recorded epistle to the saints at Corinth in a similar manner: "I appeal to you, brothers, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree, and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be united in the same mind and the same judgment" (1 Cor 1:10). Thus, the need for unity—no divisions, for Christ is not divided (*v.* 13)—is foremost in everything Paul will write in this epistle, and Paul begins by saying, "For it has been reported to me by Chloe's people that there is quarreling among you, my brothers. What I mean is that each one of you says, "I follow

Paul,” or “I follow Apollos,” or “I follow Cephas,” or “I follow Christ” (vv. 11–12). So Paul gives the source of his information and the essence of what has been reported to him for he proceeds to tell them that when he was with them, he couldn’t address them as spiritual people (i.e., mature Christians) but as “infants in Christ” (1 Cor 3:1), that he fed them spiritual milk for they were not, and are not now, ready for solid food, the reason being that “one says, ‘I follow Paul,’ and another, ‘I follow Apollos’” (v. 4).

Everything Paul writes to the saints at Corinth is prefaced with the concept that Christ is one, that Christ is not divided, that there should be no divisions among the saints. His epistle to the Corinthians isn’t the tight Aristotelian argument he makes to the Galatians, but it is a well reasoned argument holding that permitting any sort of immoral behavior—regardless of whether that behavior is sexual or fiscal or personal such as being a drunkard—destroys unity within the fellowship and sets brother against brother. Therefore, disciples are to judge the Church in order that unity is maintained. And his authority to elevate unity to a divine edict comes from the nature (composition or form) of the human body, a type of the Body of Christ.

A disciple can walk into the shambles and stand among the slaughtered carcasses of livestock, and the flesh of the disciple will not be confused for the butchered meats on the open air shelves or for the guts, offal, and blood thrown into the runnel. Likewise, those “Christians” who practice sexual immorality or who are greedy, idolaters, revilers, drunkards, or swindlers will not be confused for the Body of Christ in the heavenly realm. It is only here on earth where the distinction is harder to make; thus, disciples are to judge those who practice immorality and are to remove them from their fellowships, with every disciple having both the responsibility and obligation to righteously judge the Body, beginning with the person. Hence, Paul had the authority to command the saints at Corinth to deliver the man who was openly practicing immorality to the Adversary. Plus, Paul chided the fellowship for not putting the man out: “It is actually reported that there is sexual immorality among you, and of a kind that is not tolerated even among pagans, for a man has his father’s wife. And *you are arrogant! Ought you not rather to mourn?* Let him who has done this be removed from among you” (1 Cor 5:1–2 emphasis added). So in Paul commanding the saints at Corinth to deliver the open sinner to the Adversary, he did not take to himself any authority but that given to every disciple, for judgment is now on the household of God (1 Pet 4:17) ... Paul judged the matter within the prerogative of every disciple to judge righteously.

All authority to rule over other men must, in this era, pass through the Adversary even though that authority has come from God. In commanding the saints at Corinth to deliver the immoral person to the Adversary, Paul did not usurp authority that has to pass through the Adversary, but directed that the man who remained the bondservant of sin be returned to his owner—Paul ordered that the Adversary’s slave be returned to him. And again, every disciple has this obligation.

Therefore, within the Body of Christ, authority exists to purge immorality from the Body by commanding that those who, after baptism, still belong to the Adversary be returned to the Adversary and not stolen from him. This authority resides in the common fellowship, the reason why Jesus said,

If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault, between you and him alone. If he listens to you, you have gained your brother. But if he does not listen, take one or two others along with you, that every charge may be established by the evidence of two or three witnesses. *If he refuses to listen*

*to them, tell it to the church. And if he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector.* (Matt 18:15–17 emphasis added)

The authority for hierarchal leadership in a Christian sect or denomination is problematic. This authority exceeds that which would be necessary to purge immorality from the fellowship or to assure that all things are done decently and in order within Sabbath services. It is authority like that which the world employs in maintaining control of worldly organizations—and all worldly authority comes from the Adversary. So hierarchal authority within a sect or denomination comes at least through the Adversary, meaning simply that by establishing church governance within a sect or denomination, these Christians have invited Satan into their midst—and once invited in, the Adversary doesn't leave until he has devoured disciples and destroyed the organization.

If a person wants to understand what happened to the former Worldwide Church of God, the person needs look no farther than to when Herbert W. Armstrong abandoned his initial understanding of church governance and adopted, in the late 1930s, governance similar to that of the Roman Church. He wanted the tithes and offerings of disciples living in areas around Portland, Oregon/Vancouver, Washington. He didn't believe he could continue to grow his radio ministry without those tithes: he coveted the money, and he got it, paraphrasing a line of Robert Service's poetry. But in doing so, he made a deal with the devil that would eventually be the undoing of his ministry. He began the practice of all moneys being sent to headquarters and then headquarters doling money out as it thought best. If there wasn't enough money to buy radio time and pay salaries, then salaries weren't paid. If there was enough money, then top church administrators (all of whom were "evangelists" regardless of whether they preached) would be paid as if they were executives in Fortune 500 companies. For an organization built on the tithes and offering of mostly poor members, top *evangelists* and the *Pastor General* were very well compensated. But then, allegedly these top men were God's representatives here on earth—and there was no retirement plan in place, not even Social Security, an *oversight* that prevented open dissent when a younger generation, taking control of the organization after Armstrong's death, scrapped Armstrong's theology. Dissent was stifled by threatening to cease paying retirement stipends.

Returning to the words of Jeremiah, the people of God have been lost sheep—

Jesus sent the twelve first disciples out with the instructions, "Go nowhere among the Gentiles and enter no town of the Samaritans, but go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel" (Matt 10:5–6). These twelve, however, did not fulfill all that Jesus said, for He continued, saying, "Brother will deliver brother over to death, and the father his child, and children will rise against parents and have them put to death, and you will be hated by all for my name's sake. But the one who endures to the end will be saved. When they persecute you in one town, flee to the next, for truly, I say to you, you will not have gone through all the towns of Israel before the Son of Man comes" (*vv.* 21–23). The twelve first disciples were a shadow and type of the seven named churches at the end of the 1<sup>st</sup>-Century, which in turn form the left hand enantiomer of the seven spiritual churches at the end of the age, with these latter seven churches going to the lost sheep of the house of Israel, not with them being the lost sheep.

The contention of those Sabbatarians who cling to Armstrong's error of identifying the English-speaking peoples as being the endtime nation of Israel is that repentance

must be preached to America, Canada, Great Britain, Australia, New Zealand, South Africa, other nations peopled by Anglo-Saxons ... there is nothing wrong with preaching an unfocused message of repentance other than many resources are wasted.

When a disciple realizes the greater Christian Church is endtime Israel and it is the greater Church that needs to hear an endtime message of repentance, then resources need not be wasted for the Christian Church chooses not to hear the voice of Jesus, and by extension, will not hear the voices of endtime disciples. Sabbatarian disciples can shout, *Repent! Repent! Repent!*, with all of their might—and silence will follow. Jesus forewarned disciples that if Israel would not listen to Him, Israel would not listen to them ... Israel will not listen to endtime disciples warning the nation to repent. It doesn't want to repent, and it might well not be capable of repenting; for a peculiarity of human beings is that the mind is only capable of changing belief paradigms once, twice at the most. Thus, the person reared as a Roman Catholic has not changed a belief paradigm for as long as the person remains a Catholic. But, say, this person becomes a Mormon, the person makes a radical change in beliefs—and really, the person is not again able to make such a radical change; thus, the person will remain a Mormon for the remainder of his or her natural life.

The criteria for a second major change to occur will have the person undergo an extremely traumatic experience that challenges the person's core belief. Whether consciously or unconsciously, the person will reexamine all that he or she believes and will be stronger in the faith the person holds if possible or will jettison that faith and cling to another paradigm ... the convert to Christendom doesn't become an easy convert to Islam, nor does the convert to the Sabbatarian Churches of God become an easy mark for Evangelical Christendom. It is the person who has been reared in a belief paradigm that is the easy convert to another paradigm. Thus, those members of the former Worldwide Church of God who went to Imperial Schools and to Ambassador College [this is the paradigm in which they were reared] can be easily picked off by the Adversary. It is the second generation of a belief paradigm that returns to the paradigm[s] their parents left, with this seen in the 1<sup>st</sup>-Century Church as well as in the late 20<sup>th</sup>-Century Church.

Understanding that the above informs *The Philadelphia Church's* allocation of its limited resources until the Second Passover liberation of Christendom, a truly traumatic event, answers the question of why there are no billboards lining the highways of America, warning Christians to repent of their lawlessness. There is little reason to preach repentance to those who have converted to Christianity, or who have converted from one form of Christianity to a radically different form.

Converts will come, fruit will be borne as the Father calls disciples out from this world, but that fruit will come (with exceptions) from those Christians who have remained in the belief paradigms in which they were reared. However, out of love for those genuine disciples trapped within the greater Church—disciples presently covered by grace if they have not willingly returned to sin as its slave—a message of repentance must be proclaimed in such a manner that it is available to the disciple seeking truth. But no great expenditure of resources is needed to keep this message of repentance where it can be found by the greater Church.

The Son of Man did not come during the lifetimes of the first disciples who did not, when first sent out, flee from town to town but were rather well received. So in sending

His disciples out, Jesus referenced a future sending forth of disciples to the lost sheep of Israel, with the one who would betray Him being among those disciples sent.

Visible Christendom is today a “nation” of lost sheep and a nation that will not welcome disciples sent forth by Christ Jesus; for greater Christendom has its own “Jesus,” a very different man from the historical figure who lived as an Observant Jew of physically unremarkable characteristics. Actually, Christendom has several “jesuses,” none of whom lived as an Observant Jew ... a person could attend most “Christian” churches for a lifetime and not realize that Jesus kept the Sabbaths of God, that disciples reckoned time by the Sabbath (by how many days before or after the Sabbath the day was), that Paul kept the Sabbath, that Peter taught Gentile converts to live as Judeans, that James told Paul to purify himself at the temple, that James correctly points out that Abraham’s faith that was counted to him as righteous was not made complete until he offered up Isaac, a work of faith. A Christian can sit in a pew for decades and never hear preached that the first covenant, the covenant made when the Lord took the fathers of the children of Israel by the hand to lead them out of Egypt, the covenant that was old and “becoming obsolete” and was about “ready to vanish away” (Heb 8:13) a quarter century after Calvary was not abolished at Calvary—it couldn’t have been abolished at Calvary if it was about ready to vanish away more than two decades later. This first covenant remains in effect to this day; it is still old, becoming obsolete and about ready to vanish away, but it has done none of those things and won’t until the Second Passover. So, yes, it remains in effect, and it is the reason that disciples take the sacraments of bread and wine annually on the First Unleavened, the dark portion of the 14<sup>th</sup> of Abib, when Jesus established these sacraments. But then, the person warming a pew in a Christian church wouldn’t know that the first covenant remains in effect if the person believes the pastor that preaches love and family values when Jesus said, “Brother will deliver brother over to death, and the father his child, and children will rise against parents and have them put to death” (Matt 10:21), and, “Do not think that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I have not come to bring peace, but a sword. For I have come to set a man against his father, and a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law. And a person’s enemies will be those of his own household. Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me, and whoever loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me” (vv. 34–37).

The endtime lost sheep of Israel are “lost” because they will rebel against God when the man of perdition is revealed. They are not lost because they have journeyed to some corner of the earth where satellite television doesn’t broadcast the Christian message; they are not lost because they have no Bibles, no hymnals, no teaching aids. They are lost because they believe a lie, and they believe it with such sincerity that even after they have been liberated from indwelling sin and death by being filled with the spirit, they will eagerly return to the lie they presently believe. They will take sin back inside themselves when they have no covering for their lawlessness but their obedience; they will commit blasphemy against the spirit that cleansed them and empowered them and made it possible to faithfully keep the commandments of God. But they will refuse to love the truth; they love the lie they presently believe. Therefore, God will send a strong delusion over them so that they cannot repent, cannot believe what is true, but will continue to believe what is false so that they are condemned to the lake of fire.

The very serious consequences of believing what is false should frighten endtime Christians, but the lake of fire has no more meaning to today’s typical Christian than



“death” had to the first Eve when the serpent told her that she would not die: the Christian simply refuses to believe that a person born of God can die or will be condemned to the lake of fire. The concept of *once saved, always saved* has been woven into the fabric of the Evangelical message, but the concept is a lie. Eternal life is the gift of the Father in Christ Jesus (Rom 6:23). A person is not born with eternal life dwelling with the person; no person is humanly born with an immortal soul. So being born of God does not mean the person is saved, but that the person finally has received a second breath of life, that the person has received indwelling eternal life that comes under judgment at baptism, that the person will now determine the person’s fate by whether the person does those things the person knows is right. A person isn’t judged on what the person doesn’t know, but upon what the person knows and whether the person by faith will do what the person knows is right. As the inner infant son of God grows in grace and knowledge, with “grace” being the garment of Christ Jesus’ righteousness, this son of God matures as a human infant matures. This son of God gets spiritually larger thereby needing additions to the garment of grace; hence, the person grows in grace. This inner new self does not grow in forgiveness—a person either is or isn’t forgiven—but rather grows in spiritual size as the son of God gains knowledge and wins battles against the law of sin that continues to dwell in the person’s fleshly body. And this inner new self will not defeat the law of sin that cohabits the person’s fleshly body in every battle, what the Apostle Paul discovered to his surprise (see Rom 7:15–25). But as the inner new self grows spiritually larger this son of God will win more and more battles.

The Tribulation is about moving the inner new self’s war against the law of sin from inside the person to outside the person so that every entity can see victories that lead to life and defeats that lead to death. The Second Passover will bring about the liberation of the disciple’s fleshly body from indwelling sin and death so that what has been concealed will be known to all; for in sending His disciples out to the lost sheep of the house of Israel, Jesus said, “So have no fear of them [those who persecute the ones sent], for nothing is covered that will not be revealed, or hidden that will not be known” (Matt 10:26).

Today, Christians hide behind a variety of masks and façades, reserving their best behavior for when they are in the presence of their pastors. They lie, cheat, steal, lust after those who are not their spouses, and transgress the Sabbath as if these things were expected of them. They are not moral people when no one but angels see them. They are exactly like the world, only hypocrites. They have near identical divorce rates and number of incest or child molestation incidents. They drive over speed limits and fudge income tax returns ... the cable television channel TRU TV airs a reality show called *Bait Car*, in which the Los Angeles County Sheriff’s Department sets up sting operations: a special task force makes it easy to steal a car by leaving the keys in the ignition and sometimes the driver’s door open. A few people will walk by the vehicle and not take it. But far too many will get in and drive away, going just far enough to establish that they intended to steal the vehicle, not just move it into a more appropriate parking place. And when apprehended, most tell the deputies the same lie, swearing that their lie is true even though video exists to contradict what they claim.

Most of the late teenage youth or young adults that steal the bait car would identify themselves as Christians: they have been reared in a home in which their mother is openly religious. Despite wearing gang apparel, most wear a crucifix—and it isn’t that

these opportunists are immoral; they are amoral. They respond to stimuli as if they were beasts, not principled human beings and certainly not as disciples of Christ Jesus.

Christians from the Bible Belt will quietly condemn those who take the bait car as if the thieves were sewer rats that needed trapping; yet when Grizzly Industrial, Inc., holds its one day tool sale—always held on the Sabbath—tens of thousands of Bible Belt Christians crowd into the big tent to grab the bargains ... before God, is there any difference between a Latino who sees a Cadillac Escalade with an open driver's door and keys in the ignition and a Baptist woodworker vying to purchase a showroom-dinged 15" planer when both will transgress one or more of His commandments? Yes, it's easy to condemn the Latino who goes for a joy ride, or heads for a chop shop. It's more difficult to see what's wrong with a good Christian standing in line on the Sabbath to purchase a joiner or planer or bandsaw. And that is the failing of the 20<sup>th</sup>-Century, now 21<sup>st</sup>-Century Christian Church: Christians have become not amoral, but immoral, doing deliberately what they know is wrong, for really, what Christian doesn't know that the Sabbath is the seventh day of the week, and that the Sabbath Commandment is part of the Decalogue?

Answer the question if you can.

What Baptist doesn't know that the seventh day is the Sabbath? What Catholic? What Lutheran? What Methodist? What Jehovah Witness?

What Christian truly doesn't know that Jesus was a Jew, a descendant of King David? What Christian doesn't know that Jesus cleansed the temple at the Passover, once early in His ministry and then again at the end of His ministry? What Christian doesn't know that Jesus kept the Passover, that the so-called Last Supper was the Passover meal? What Christian doesn't know that Jesus said He would give one sign that He was from God, the sign of Jonah, that as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the great fish, the Son of Man would be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth? What Christian doesn't know that Jesus said not to think that He came to abolish the Law or the Prophets? What Christian can stand before God and claim that he or she didn't know that 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. For truly, I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not an iota, not a dot, will pass from the Law until all is accomplished. 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 emphasis added)

Who will be great in the kingdom of the heavens? The answer is right there: the person who keeps the commandments and teaches others to do likewise. And who will not be in the kingdom?

Not everyone who says to me, "Lord, Lord," will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. On that day [when judgments are revealed] many will say to me, "Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name?" And then will I declare to them, "I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness." (Matt 7:21–23)

The one who is a worker of iniquity, a teacher of lawlessness, the pastor who teaches his or her congregation to ignore the commandments—this person will be denied when judgments are revealed, regardless of the great and mighty works the person has done in the name of Christ Jesus, regardless of whether this person is a Billy Graham or a John Paul II. Goodness in this world is of no value to the person when that goodness had the person teaching infant sons of God to transgress the commandments.

The Christian Church has not been steadily growing in grace and knowledge, but has been drifting farther and farther away from God—the Church is, collectively, now so far from God that it would be difficult for it to get farther away. And this is what Christians do not want to accept: they sincerely believe they have an excellent relationship with God when they have no relationship ... how can two walk together unless they agree on such fundamental concepts as whether Jesus came to bring peace to this earth, or how important is the family and familial relationships, or whether the Law [Torah] has been abolished when under the New Covenant this same Law [Torah — from Jer 31:33] will be written on hearts and placed in minds. Christians deceive themselves when they believe that they are presently under a dispensation of grace whereas Jews were under a dispensation of law when Jesus delivered His Sermon on the Mount; thus, what Jesus said doesn't pertain to them. Nothing could be farther from the truth. Jesus changes naught (Heb 13:8). It has been the Church that changed, that left Jesus, that left Paul, that left John, that left the commandments, the Sabbaths, the Passover, and it will be the Church when set back on the straight path (the Way) leading to salvation that rebels against God in the great falling away (2 Thess 2:3) when the man of perdition is revealed.

It is the greater Christian Church that cannot repent even after the Second Passover.

Sadly, there is not much any disciple—including the two witnesses once the Tribulation begins—can do to prevent the Rebellion of Christendom 220 days into the Tribulation. If today's Christians were simply ignorant of what God requires of disciples, then an individual increase in knowledge would prevent the Rebellion. If Christians were simply deceived by the Adversary, then showing that the Adversary's ministers are false would prevent the Rebellion. But Christians are complicit in their deception: they simply refuse to love the truth. They do not hunger and thirst for *truth*; they are not willing to give all they have for *truth*. They want the good things of this world as well as the good things of God. They eagerly believe the *prosperity gospel*, or a message about the good God has planned for them. They seek escape from the evil that will befall and has befallen this world. They want someone to feed them when they are hungry, and clothe them when they are naked, but they do not want to obey God. They do not want to appear out-of-sync with the world around them. They are the first to get their Christmas lights up each year and the last to take them down; the first to volunteer when a local disaster strikes, the first to donate financially, the first to donate blood. They are "good" people, but they absolutely will not keep the commandments or even make an attempt to do so. After all, they will tell any who ask that they are under grace; they are not under the law. But in transgressing the commandments, they place themselves under the law which would have no claim on them if, by faith, they had strived to keep the commandments ... they do not understand what *being under the law* means.

Americans use the expression *under sentence of death* or *under a death sentence* when a person has been sentenced by a court to die. Language users understand that the

person under a death sentence will die in the foreseeable future, but these same language users don't seem to realize that they, too, will die in the foreseeable future. Therefore, every person when humanly born is under a death sentence which the person cannot escape by running or hiding or living in a cabin in rural Alaska. The death of the person will occur. Perhaps the person will live long enough to pass his or her genes on to another person also born under the sentence of death; perhaps the person will not. Regardless, the person will die—and in the course of time, the person will die sooner rather than later.

The power of the law is its ability to sentence a person to death. The law has no power over anything it cannot sentence to death; thus, the law has no power over the non-living. The non-living is already “dead” by virtue of being without life, which is why Jesus said, when a disciple asked to first go and bury his father before following Him, “Follow me, and leave the dead to bury their own dead” (Matt 8:22) ... because human beings are naturally born without indwelling eternal life, they are the dead, those who are under a death sentence that will be executed before the person reaches great age. Unless the person receives a second breath of life either while physically alive or after the person returns to dust, the person will, when he or she dies, cease to exist and will be no more.

Because the power of the law is its ability to condemn the living to death, *the dead* are not under the law. Paul words this concept slightly differently when he wrote, “Therefore, just as sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all sinned—for sin indeed was in the world before the law was given, but *sin is not counted where there is no law*. Yet death reigned from Adam to Moses, even over those whose sinning was not like the transgression of Adam, who was a type of the one who was to come” (Rom 5:12–14 emphasis added). If sin is not counted where there is no law, then the living (where there is no law) are under a natural form of grace that is akin to disciples being covered by the righteousness of Christ Jesus, meaning that receipt of physical life by those not under the law (i.e., human conception and birth) is analogous to receipt of spiritual life (πνεῦμα θεοῦ) by those not under the law. Since Sinai when the commandments were given and sin was made alive (Rom 7:8), physically circumcised Israel has been under the law, sentenced to death because of its transgressions, with its death sentence “covered” by animal sacrifices until the Lamb of God was sacrificed as the reality of every animal sacrifice.

Israel is not, now, a physically circumcised nation but the nation that is circumcised-of-heart, with the sins of this nation “covered” by Christ Jesus bearing them in the heavenly realm as the reality of the *Azazel* goat.

It is here where we will begin 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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