

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 baptism.

[Printable/viewable PDF format to display Greek or Hebrew characters](#)

Weekly Readings *For the Sabbath of December 20, 2014*

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.

And James and John, the sons of Zebedee, came up to Him and said to Him, "Teacher, we want you to do for us whatever we ask of you." And He said to them, "What do you want me to do for you?" And they said to Him, "Grant us to sit, one at your right hand and one at your left, in your glory." Jesus said to them, "*You do not know what you are asking. Are you able to drink the cup that I drink, or to be baptized with the baptism with which I am baptized?*" And they said to Him, "We are able." And Jesus said to them, "*The cup that I drink you will drink, and with the baptism with which I am baptized, you will be baptized,* but to sit at my right hand or at my left is not mine to grant, but it is for those for whom it has been prepared." And when the ten heard it, they began to be indignant at James and John. And Jesus called them to Him and said to them, "*You know that those who are considered rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and **their great ones exercise authority over them.*** But it shall not be so among you. But whoever would be great among you must be your servant, and whoever would be first among you must be slave of all. For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give His life as a ransom for many." (Mark 10:35–45 emphasis and double emphasis added)

1.

Among disciples of Christ Jesus, the great of them shall not exercise authority over their brethren for both the great and the less are sheep of the same fold (Ezek 34:17–22) ... for a disciple to be baptized with the baptism of Jesus, the disciple will give his or her life as ransom for others. And while the preceding statement doesn't seem correct, it is despite Jesus having ransomed many, His life worth the lives of all humanity. Where then, an unbeliever might ask, is the need for His disciples to give their lives as ransom for some?

The baptism of Jesus and to be baptized with the baptism of Jesus must be placed in the context of serving and having authority over others; must be placed in the context of *becoming the slave of all*. And the person who is a slave is not free to live his or her own

life, but must live the life dictated by the person's master, with the master and teacher of every disciple being Christ Jesus.

There are psychological problems inherent to the concept of a free person becoming the slave of anything or anyone, problems foregrounded when a white police officer shoots an unarmed black man attacking him. What isn't realized is what Paul wrote, "Do you not know that if you present yourselves to anyone as obedient slaves, you are slaves of the one whom you obey, either of sin, which leads to death, or of obedience, which leads to righteousness?" (Rom 6:16).

Every person when humanly born is a slave of disobedience—sin—which leads to death (Rom 11:32; Eph 2:2–3). No person who counts the first Adam as his or her forefather is born free to keep the Commandments of God. The most pious person will still transgress one or more of the Commandments, thereby becoming a lawbreaker under sentence to death. And this includes all of the great of this world.

Paul wrote to the holy ones at Rome and said,

Let every person be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those that exist have been instituted by God. Therefore whoever resists the authorities resists what God has appointed, and those who resist will incur judgment. For rulers are not a terror to good conduct, but to bad. Would you have no fear of the one who is in authority? Then do what is good, and you will receive his approval, for he is God's servant for your good. (Rom 13:1–4)

Paul wrote as he did when he wrote to the holy ones at Thessaloniki and said,

For this we declare to you by a word from the Lord, that *we who are alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord*, will not precede those who have fallen asleep. For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the voice of an archangel, and with the sound of the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. Then *we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we will always be with the Lord*. Therefore encourage one another with these words. (1 Thess 4:15–18 emphasis added)

Are you encouraged by Paul's words that the Lord would come while Paul remained alive? Is not this what Paul declares? *We who are alive will not precede those who have fallen asleep; we who are alive will meet Christ in the air*. Yes this is what Paul declared and yes, Paul was correct in principle but not fully correct. The living will not precede the dead in the resurrection. But Paul really believed that Jesus would return while Paul lived—and about this, he was wrong. Likewise, he was wrong about God having appointed all governing authority, something he would have said to appease Roman authorities since he wanted to go to Rome and early Christendom refused to worship the Emperor as God.

There is a necessary element imbedded in what Paul wrote about governing authorities, civil or ecclesial: Rome was most concerned about maintaining good order in a far flung empire. It cost money to fight insurrections, not that Roman civil authorities ever expected to lose one of these fights; for Rome incorporated the soldiers and the technologies of all conquered peoples into its own army and battle strategies. So in all things military, Rome was state of the art, which was why the Teutoburg Forest defeat of three Roman legions on September 9–12, 09 CE, a battle in which 18,000 Romans and Cherusians Germans died, affected Roman policies toward Jews and obedient Christians ... when Roman couldn't defeat the united German tribes on its

frontier, Rome exploited the weaknesses of these tribes, their quarrelsome natures and petty jealousies by heaping favors on one tribe while neglecting other tribes, thus instigating German against German fighting.

On its eastern border, Rome had problems defeating the Seleucid Empire and its successor, the Parthian Empire, which at one time took the Roman Emperor captive and demanded ransom for him. So more than anything, Rome wanted peace in the Near East, and apparently Roman authorities didn't care much about secondary religions in the empire as long as good order and stability were maintained, which they believed came about by everyone worshiping the Emperor as the supreme deity and keeping established feast days. Hence, Christians were not persecuted because they were Christians, but because they refused to worship the Emperor in addition to worshiping the invisible Most High God. If they would have worshiped both, they would have been fine with Roman authorities, but not fine with God, what they knew.

The reputation of Christians not worshiping the Emperor as God preceded Paul to Rome. Therefore, in Paul's epistle to the holy ones at Rome, Paul *had to address the issue of civil authority*—and Paul did so by declaring that God had put the Emperor on his throne, which made the Emperor God's representative here on earth, a juxtaposition with which some of the later emperors could live ... for the Emperor, this meant that whatever he did, he did so as the face of God here on earth.

The only problem is what Paul wrote elsewhere in two previously referenced cites:

For just as you were at one time disobedient to God but now have received mercy because of their [Jews] disobedience, so they too have now been disobedient in order that by the mercy shown to you they also may now receive mercy. For *God has consigned all to disobedience, that He may have mercy on all.* (Rom 11:30–32 emphasis added)

And,

And you were dead in the trespasses and sins in which you once walked, following the course of this world, *following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience*—among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind. But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved—and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, so that in the coming ages He might show the immeasurable riches of His grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. (Eph 2:1–7 emphasis added)

If all human persons are humanly born confined to disobedience as sons of disobedience, and if the Roman Emperor is a human person, then he too is a son of disobedience and the bondservant of the Adversary; for he makes a practice of sinning, which leads to death (again, Rom 6:16). No Roman emperor practiced obedience to God which leads to righteousness. So what Paul wrote about *letting every person be subject to the governing authorities for there is no authority except from God* must be examined alongside the vision of Nebuchadnezzar that he relayed to Daniel,

I saw in the visions of my head as I lay in bed, and behold, a watcher, a holy one, came down from heaven. He proclaimed aloud and said thus: “Chop down the tree and lop off its branches, strip off its leaves and scatter its fruit. Let the beasts flee from under it and the birds from its branches. But leave the stump of its roots in the earth, bound with a band of iron and bronze, amid the tender grass of the field. Let him be wet with the dew

of heaven. Let his portion be with the beasts in the grass of the earth. Let his mind be changed from a man's, and let a beast's mind be given to him; and let seven periods of time pass over him. The sentence is by the decree of the watchers, the decision by the word of the holy ones, to the end *that the living may know that the Most High rules the kingdom of men and gives it to whom He will and sets over it the lowliest of men.*" (Dan 4:13–17 emphasis added)

Nebuchadnezzar would have been, according to the decree of the watchers, the basest of men. The Roman emperor—all of them—would have been the basest of men. President Obama, again according to the decree of the watchers, would be the basest of men. Same of Vladimir Putin. Same for Woodrow Wilson, Abraham Lincoln, George Washington. And immediately, the sentiments of some are offended.

Was not George Washington an honorable man? By this world's standards, yes he was. But what about by God's standards? Did Washington love God, neighbor and brother?

Did Washington believe God and strive to please God by keeping His commandments? No! Not in the least. For did not Washington join the rebellion against King George, whom Tories recognized as God's anointed according to the teaching of the Apostle Paul: *Let every person be subject to the governing authorities for there is no authority except from God.* Was Washington subject to King George III? He was early in his life, especially at the Battle of the Monongahela [Braddock's Defeat] in 1755, where he had several musket balls pass through his clothing without being hit. It seemed as if he had divine protection. And he may well have had for again, *there is no authority except from God*, and obviously, Washington had authority as commander of the Continental Army, then as the United States' first president. But does this mean that Washington wasn't the basest of men? Or is it that our definition of who is the lowest of the low differs considerably from God's definition?

In the second half of the 20th-Century, two presidents stand above others: John F. Kennedy and Ronald Reagan. I have never been a Kennedy fan because of how he handled the Cuban Missile Crisis and the Bay of Pigs Invasion, but setting Cuba aside, was Kennedy faithful to his wife? No. What's to be said about a man who more or less openly commits adultery? Is he not the lowest of the low, his wife being "one" with him and theologically representing his fleshly body? Can a man commit adultery and not despise his own body? He cannot. And if he despises his own body, created in the likeness of God, does he not involuntarily despise God? He does. And can not the same be said about Bill Clinton.

It is harder to fault Ronald Reagan unless a person looks overseas and in particular at American agricultural practices and how free market Capitalism—not applied in the United States where farms and farmers are subsidized—was exported as part of Food-Aid to African nations, where American aid could not be used to purchase local cereal grains but could only be used to export to famine-striven countries American subsidized cereal grains, thereby depressing grains prices in famine areas and driving local farmers out of business, assuring that the sub-Saharan famine of 1983–85 would be repeated in 2003 despite the previous years (2001–2002) bringing forth record harvests in the region ... free market Capitalism saw American farmers dump grain in Lake Michigan in the 1840s rather than sell at a loss before the Commodities Market developed, with its futures contracts that guarantee an agreed upon price for the commodity and

guarantees delivery of the commodity and the quality of the commodity at the time of delivery. Yet true believers in Reagan-economics insisted that African nations practice free market Capitalism without commodity markets, without reliable transportation systems, and without long-term storage facilities; without the infrastructure necessary for free markets to flourish.

Could Reagan have done something about the 400,000-plus that died in the Blue Nile drainage, some because of the drought; some because of the proxy war being fought with the Soviet Union? Yes, he could have done much more than he did. But to do more, he needed to more-highly value the lives of these black Africans. And Reagan placed America's interests ahead of the interests of other peoples and other nations. This seemed right and good to Americans, especially conservative Americans who hadn't elected a world-ruling autocrat. But Reagan had both the bully pulpit of the presidency and the resources of a super-power to do good for others. If he had truly wanted to serve more than the constituency that put him in office, he could have (and without spending additional moneys) more aggressively intervened to save lives. A few laws needed changed, and legal hypocrisy needed to be brought to an end. And the question asked, why would the greatest advocate for free market economics not work to practice the same at home as was attached to American Food-Aid?

American Food-Aid is an excellent example of doing good having unintended consequences—and a good example of national hypocrisy, demanding of others what we are unwilling to do here at home. Reagan had the opportunity but perhaps not the ability to bring to an end world hunger; for the Green Revolution was permitting much of the Third World to feed itself and to export cereal grains, thereby becoming competitors with American farmers. But farm lobbyists, clamoring for political protectionism, told story after story of how American farmers were suffering: they demanded that Reagan treat farm subsidies as sacred cows, too holy to milk, too righteous to butcher, too important to GOP politics to touch. And his opportunity to end hunger slipped through his fingers, then slipped from his mind.

One reason I know it is difficult to fault Reagan is that, while Governor of California, he and Nancy supported a school in Arizona for the mentally challenged ... he did his good works out of state and beyond news reporters and cameras so that what he did would not be known by others. His financial contributions to the school were large. Plus, he visited the school every year and spent time with the students. My aunt Ethel was the dietician at the school and served the Reagans in the school's cafeteria on several occasions.

Did Reagan know to keep the Commandments? Yes, he did. Did he? Like most Christians, he kept most of the Commandments most of the time. But what does James write,

If you really fulfill the Royal Law according to the Scripture, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself," you are doing well. But if you show partiality, you are committing sin and are convicted by the law as transgressors. For whoever keeps the whole law but fails in one point has become accountable for all of it. For he who said, "Do not commit adultery," also said, "Do not murder." If you do not commit adultery but do murder, you have become a transgressor of the law. So speak and so act as those who are to be judged under the law of liberty. For judgment is without mercy to one who has shown no mercy. (Jas 2:8–13)

Did Reagan show partiality, favoring American farmers over farmers in Ethiopia? He did, but how could he have done otherwise? He was not elected by Ethiopians. And the problem every governing authority has faced is manifested in who elected whom to office where?

The German people put Hitler into office in 1933, and Hitler took the authority granted him through election and greatly expanded it by figuratively crowning himself as Fuehrer [*Guide*] of the Germanic peoples ... how does what Paul wrote—*Let every person be subject to the governing authorities for there is no authority except from God*—pertain to Hitler? Or to Stalin? Or to Pol Pot?

It is easy to see how Hitler, Stalin, or Pol Pot were the basest of men, killing millions and becoming scourges to humanity. But it is not so easy to see how George Washington, Abraham Lincoln, or Ronald Reagan were the basest or men. Yet, if what the watchers told Nebuchadnezzar in vision is true, then all are—and all cannot be if human standards are used to judge who is and who isn't the basest of men. So there has to be a standard that is not of human perception, or at least not of the perception of sons of disobedience.

And we are back to the baptism of Jesus—

At the founding of the United States of America, in order to get a union of thirteen colonies, slavery was permitted. However, in the compromise that allowed a slave to be counted as six-tenths of a person for purposes of census appropriations and congressional representation, a slave was recognized as a human person, with this recognition setting up the Civil War that was sure to follow. No person is merely six-tenths of a person. The person is either a whole person or not a person. So indirectly, the six-tenths allowance of personhood was doomed from its inception, and certain to give way to full personhood and equal rights in the course of history.

Yet for Washington and America's founders, a union of colonies was more important than full personhood for human persons bought and sold as property—and this ought not have been so. A human person and by extension, human personhood is far more important than any secular political union that will never enter the kingdom of the heavens, nor has any possibility of entering.

When the children of Israel entered the Promised Land, were these children of Israel a sovereign nation? No, they were not. Under the judges, were the children of Israel a sovereign nation? No. So before God, what is so important about being a sovereign nation that sovereignty takes precedence over human personhood, already stripped from involuntary immigrants, slaves from Africa?

Does secular sovereignty aid a person in getting to heaven? Maybe a little, but what aids more is having love for neighbor and brother equal to the love a person has for him or herself ... is not this the message that should have been preached from pulpits across the Colonies? The baptism of Jesus will have the person willing to die—even dying—for his brother and neighbor as Jesus died for the redemption of His disciples. For a person to be baptized into the baptism of Jesus, the person counts his or her fleshly body as dead, a casualty of the Adversary's rebellion against God. Yes, the person may live physically for a while, but the person lives as a slave of obedience to God, this obedience leading to righteousness and life. And in living for a while, the person lives to serve

others, not by preaching to them what they as sons of disobedience do not want to hear, but by giving of the time the person has to brothers and neighbors.

Washington gave much to his neighbors; gave much to this country; but he didn't give the black man his freedom, his personhood. Plus, Washington placed a yoke around the necks of all Americans, the yoke common to kings and emperors, the yoke of taxation, which led to the Whiskey Rebellion of 1791–1794, really not much of a rebellion but rather an armed tax protest that dissipated in the face of a 13,000 man army raised by George Washington to suppress this revolt against taxation (allegedly without representation) on the western frontier of the nation.

Now back up to Israel asking for a king:

Then all the elders of Israel gathered together and came to Samuel at Ramah and said to him, "Behold, you are old and your sons do not walk in your ways. Now appoint for us a king to judge us like all the nations." But the thing displeased Samuel when they said, "Give us a king to judge us." And Samuel prayed to [YHWH]. And [YHWH] said to Samuel, "*Obey the voice of the people in all that they say to you, for they have not rejected you, but they have rejected me* from being king over them. According to all the deeds that they have done, from the day I brought them up out of Egypt even to this day, forsaking me and serving other gods, so they are also doing to you. Now then, obey their voice; only you shall solemnly warn them and show them the ways of the king who shall reign over them." (1 Sam 8:4–9 emphasis added)

To break away from King George III, rejecting him as their king, the people of the British Colonies had the opportunity to return to God, making God their king, but this is not what happened even though they knew the story of Israel's rejection of God as its king. Instead of trading one king for another, they established a representational democracy, what Korah and his friends wanted when they brought charges against Moses and Aaron.

Now Korah the son of Izhar, son of Kohath, son of Levi, and Dathan and Abiram the sons of Eliab, and On the son of Peleth, sons of Reuben, took men. And they rose up before Moses, with a number of the people of Israel, 250 chiefs of the congregation, chosen from the assembly, well-known men. They assembled themselves together against Moses and against Aaron and said to them, "You have gone too far! For all in the congregation are holy, every one of them, and [YHWH] is among them. Why then do you exalt yourselves above the assembly of [YHWH]?" (Num 16:1–3)

Here is where the United States of America in its founding went as far from God as any nation could get: in establishing a representation democracy, the founders of America assembled themselves against Moses and Aaron and figuratively said, *We shall make no law pertaining to the establishment of religion. We shall not privilege the Lord over Baal, or Moses over the magicians of Pharaoh. So why do you, Christians, exalt yourselves over Congress, over rulings of the Courts? Why do you protest abortions, the murder of unborns? Are you not yourselves guilty of murdering the spiritually unborn in your failure to keep the Commandments?*

If America's founders knew God, they rejected Him as God when they permitted unchecked idolatry to flourish by refusing to establish the sovereignty of the Most High God in the affairs of men ... it is inversely good that America's founders rejected God as America's king. If they had not, wars of persecution would have been America's history.

America's founders traded political expediency for national righteousness, a trade that has been good for theological dissidents, but a trade that is sure to produce another

Civil War. The only question that remains is when does the shooting begin, before or after the Second Passover liberation of Israel?

The Christian who counts righteousness to be of more worth than his or her physical life won't bear arms against the Federal Establishment, but will not—to the best of the person's ability—participate in the operation of a political system that opposes God. This Christian will not give aid and comfort to the Adversary, and as such this Christian will be a non-participant in all arenas of authority presently consigned to the prince of the power of the air.

James and John, in being baptized with the baptism of Jesus (and they were), did not and could not live their lives for themselves. They would have been compelled to live their lives serving others, even when this meant physical death, martyrdom.

The linguistic Greek icons <*baptisma/baptizomai*> pertain to being immersed or submersed in water as in drowning. Thus, baptism represents the dying of the self, with John the Baptist saying that he baptized in water for the forgiveness of sins,

John appeared, baptizing in the wilderness and *proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins*. And all the country of Judea and all Jerusalem were going out to him and were being baptized by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins. ...And he preached, saying, "After me comes he who is mightier than I, the strap of whose sandals I am not worthy to stoop down and untie. *I have baptized you with water, but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit.*" (Mark 1:4–5, 7–8 emphasis added)

The wages (as in what has been earned) of sin is death (Rom 6:23) ... in order for John's baptism to be about repentance for the forgiveness of sins, John's baptism in water had to represent real death.

The chiral image of John's baptism is Jesus' baptism, which isn't in water leading unto death, but in spirit leading to life and service to others, even to laying down one's life for his brother in Christ.

John's baptism would have left the disciple dead even when figuratively raised from death, the theological reason why the spirit of God [*pneuma Theou*] had to immediately descend upon the man Jesus and enter into Him (Mark 1:10) ... from death comes life. It isn't that life follows death. Rather, it's that death spawns life. Death is the necessary precursor to spiritual life.

Physical life is the non-symmetrical chiral image of spiritual life, and as death ends physical life, in the chiral image death produces the corpse, the clay vessel, that can receive, hold, and be animated by spiritual life. However, this clay vessel need not return to dust before the dead inner self of a physically living human person is resurrected from death and given spiritual life.

A young beast—from a kitten to a puppy to a kid goat—learns as a human infant learns. A cat is capable of learning to use its paw as a hand although most do not. Both cats and dogs learn a certain number of human words, with one dog in Austria having learned more than 350 words. In a thirty-years-ago study in England, ravens demonstrated their ability to solve problems. So physical intelligence isn't necessarily unique to human beings. What's unique is fidelity to an invisible deity, one that seems not to intervene in human affairs.

A dog knows its master, knows the one who feeds it, and seems to care about its master, often being fiercely protective of its master. But a dog can see, hear, smell its master, who is somebody that has a tangible presence in this world. ... The God of dead

ones was unknowable by the dead, who know nothing (Eccl 9:5). Therefore, in the natural realm, Paul writes,

For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith for faith, as it is written, "The righteous shall live by faith." For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth. For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. For His invisible attributes, namely, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse. For although they knew God, they did not honor Him as God or give thanks to Him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened. Claiming to be wise, they became fools, and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man and birds and animals and creeping things. (Rom 1:16–23)

Because carnally minded man could not see, hear, smell, or touch the God they knew, man abandoned Him as Israel abandoned Moses at Mount Sinai,

When the people saw that Moses delayed to come down from the mountain, the people gathered themselves together to Aaron and said to him, "Up, make us gods who shall go before us. As for this Moses, the man who brought us up out of the land of Egypt, we do not know what has become of him." (Ex 32:1)

And when man abandoned the Most High God, man began to worship what man could see, images of mortal men, birds, animals, creeping things, perhaps praying less to a cat than "through" the cat to the deity on the other side as Roman Catholics claim not to pray to plaster statuary but through the statuary to the one[s] represented by the statuary, the statuary merely serving to focus prayers.

The subject of baptism needs greater exploration, and will be the subject of forthcoming Sabbath Readings.

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