

The following Scripture passages are offered to aid beginning fellowships. The readings and commentary are offered as openings into dialogue about the subject or concept. And the concept behind this Sabbath's selection returns to "knowing God."

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## Weekly Readings

For the Sabbath of October 22, 2005

The person conducting the Sabbath service should open services with two or three hymns, or psalms, followed by an opening prayer acknowledging that two or three (or more) are gathered together in Christ Jesus' name, and inviting the Lord to be with them.

*The person conducting the services should read or assign to be read Ezekiel chapters 1 through 3.*

**Commentary:** The prophet Ezekiel received a commission from YHWH, Israel's *Elohim*, to be a watchman for the house of Israel (Ezek 3:16). This watchman's commission was appropriated by the former Radio Church of God, and was applied to the physical descendants of the northern kingdom of Samaria. However, this northern house of Israel had been dispersed for approximately 120 years when Ezekiel lived. The holy nation had shrunk since its expanded boundaries under kings David and Solomon receded as if its borders were those of a wool mantle, laundered in hot water.

When the Chaldeans first sacked Jerusalem (ca. 606 BCE), the nation of Israel was no larger than the lands held by the house of Judah. And the Radio Church of God never understood that Israel was, foremost, the Promised Land representing God's rest (Ps 95:10-11 & Heb 3:19); thus, Judea was the visible representation of the mental typography of obedience to God. The weekly Sabbath is and remains a diminutive form of God's rest (Heb 4:9), which ultimately is heaven. Therefore, in typological shorthand, the geographical lands comprising Israelequate to the seventh day Sabbath, and represent being at one with God in the timeless dimension that flesh and blood cannot enter. The circumcised nation that received these visible lands equates to, and is a copy and shadow of the spiritually circumcised nation that has become a royal priesthood, a chosen people, a holy nation called out of darkness. The circumcised nation remains loved because of their ancestors, but it represents the broken-off natural branches that now must, as with the spiritual nation, be grafted onto the root of righteousness.

The physically circumcised nation is not, today, the Israel of endtime prophecies. However, when the Son of Man is revealed (Luke 17:26-30), the mantle of Grace will be removed through empowerment of disciples. The natural nation was, under the second covenant mediated by Moses (Deu 29:1 through 31:29), offered spiritual circumcision [a euphemistic expression for receiving the Holy Spirit]

upon returning to obedience when in a far land. Returning to obedience constitutes an act of faith, and the righteousness that comes from faith (Rom 10:6). So when the Body of Christ is revealed, the natural nation and the spiritual nation of Israel will both have to keep the laws of God through faith in God. One will have been born from above; the other will receive birth from above for demonstrated obedience, for the fullness of the nations will have been called. And the Sabbath commandment will become the test of obedience. Whereas the observant natural nation will not again abandon the Sabbath, the greater Christian Church will not keep the Sabbath, but will attempt to enter God's rest on the following day as did the nation liberated from bondage to Pharaoh (Num 14:40-41).

Watchmen for endtime Israel need to first identify Israel before sounding alarms—instead of assigning the identifying name *Israel* to any physical nation or ethnic peoples, endtime watchmen need to realize that the Christian Church is Israel. And the Church is presently enslaved by sin and death in spiritual Babylon in a manner foreshadowed by how the natural nation was enslaved in physical Babylon, and in physical Egypt. All peoples will eventually become one with Father and Son, or will be no more. This is the promise and the threat of Scripture, found in the statement that there is only one name through which salvation will come. Thus, the recovery of endtime Israel from the North Country and from the far corners of the earth is the recovery of humanity from death.

The natural nation of Israel will, through its observance of the Sabbath, be grafted back onto the root of righteousness when the fullness of the nations comes to God—when the Son of Man is revealed—and in this way, all of the natural nation will be saved (Rom 11:25-26).

Ezekiel was sent to the people of Israel, **to nations of rebels**, who have rebelled against the Lord (Ezek 2:3). These nations [plural], their fathers, and their descendants are impudent and stubborn, and would or would not hear Ezekiel, but they would know that there had been a prophet among them. Ezekiel was to eat [ingest] a scroll written within and without, with words of woe and mourning and lamentations...prophets do not bring good news.

*The reader should now read Jeremiah chapter 28.*

**Commentary:** Notice that when Hananiah spoke, claiming that the Lord would break the yoke of Babylon within two years, Jeremiah answered, saying that the prophets who preceded both Hananiah and himself prophesied war, famine, and pestilence against nations and peoples. They didn't prophesy peace and goodness. Nations and kingdoms didn't need to be warned about the coming of peace, promised for obedience to the laws of God. Prophets were, inevitably, watchmen, who gave the message of repentance to lawless peoples. And a people would know that a prophet had been among them when their failure to repent brought upon them the war, famine, or pestilence.

Ezekiel, after eating the scroll that was in his mouth as sweet as honey, was told to go to the house of Israel and to speak the Lord's words to this people, who wasn't of foreign speech or spoke a language

Ezekiel didn't understand. If Ezekiel had been sent to such peoples, they would have listened to him. But the house of Israel would not listen to a prophet bringing bad news; they would rather hear the messages of false prophets, such as Hananiah. Ezekiel was to deliver the words of the Lord he had received in his heart and had heard with his ears to the exiles, to his people (Ezek 3:10-11). And the Spirit or wind lifted him up and took him to the exiles at Tel-abib, who were dwelling by the Chebar canal (vv. 12-15). Ezekiel physically delivered the words he received to their intended physical audience.

For decades, the parent organization of the splintered Churches of God taught that Ezekiel had not delivered his words to the house of Israel—this parent organization recognized only the kingdom of Samaria as the house of Israel. As a result, this parent organization spent considerable resources delivering what it deemed Ezekiel's warning to the nations it identified as the endtime descendants of the Northern Kingdom of Samaria. And even today the splintered Churches of God fail to grasp that the hardheaded and stubborn-hearted house of Israel to which any endtime warning message must be delivered is the greater Christian Church. The remainder of the world does not yet have life in the heavenly realm. This remainder constitutes the nations [Gentiles] that have not yet come to God through being drawn by the Father (John 6:44). Their time of salvation remains ahead of them. Thus, only the greater Christian Church speaks the same language of salvation as the watchmen assigned to deliver to endtime Israel a message commanding it to quit its wickedness and mend its ways, or be resurrected to condemnation. Jesus said not to be surprised when some disciples are resurrected to life and some disciples are resurrected to condemnation or judgment (John 5:29). Hence, *Christians* who refuse to hear Moses, who wrote about the One to come, also refuse to hear Jesus (John 5:46-47). And the greater Christian Church teaches an errant gospel message that is exceedingly close to the false message of Hananiah—the Church is in bondage to the spiritual king of Babylon, whose yoke will not be broken until the midnight hour of this long night of watching that began at Calvary.

*The reader should now read Ezekiel chapter 4.*

**Commentary:** The overt symbolism of this chapter has been widely interpreted, so no unity of meaning exists. However, some aspects within the symbolism preclude various popular interpretations.

Ezekiel is instructed to inscribe or engrave on a brick a representation of Jerusalem under siege. There are, however, two Jerusalems (Gal 4:25-26), the present city here on earth that has been in existence since or before the time of Abraham, and the new Jerusalem, an existing heavenly city that will arrive here after death has been cast into the lake of fire (Rev 21:2). Baptized disciples are citizens of the Jerusalem above.

The relationship between Ezekiel, a living human being, and an inscribed image of Jerusalem on a clay brick is analogous to the relationship between the Lord and physically circumcised, but spiritually lifeless human beings...this is the juxtaposition of primary textual importance. The iron griddle becomes a visual representation of the Lord refusing to see (or hear) the prayers of the besieged city. The barrier of lawlessness, hard and as impenetrable as the iron griddle, prevents the Lord from seeing the plight of the city. And this toy-soldier-type of array is a sign for the house of Israel (v. 3). Thus, herein lies a limiting marker that excludes most of the splintered Churches of God interpretations: Jerusalem was never part of the Northern Kingdom of Samaria. Jerusalem, even during the time of exile, remained the capital of **Israel**, and of the house of Israel.

The rebellion of the ten tribes (1 Kings 12:19) following Israel's rest (1 Chron 22:9) during Solomon's forty-year reign echoes the rebellion of the ten witnesses in the wilderness of Paran (Num chaps 13 & 14), and foreshadows the Church's rebellion when again ten witnesses testify that the giant of obedience to the laws of God are too large to defeat. Only two tribes remained loyal. Only two witness, Joshua and Caleb, remained faithful. Only the endtime two witnesses will remain faithful when the Church rebels 220 days into the seven years of tribulation.

Following the ten tribes' rebellion, Jeroboam, king over these rebels, made two gold calves, and effectively cut this Northern Kingdom of Samaria off from the Lord. Although by right of birth this kingdom of Samaria used the identifying name *house of Israel*, it was no longer the *Israel* of prophecy. And with its rebellion, the Promised Land shrank in size from its promised boundaries of the Euphrates in the north to the wilderness of Paran in the south. *Israel* would shrink again when Babylon takes the house of Judah captive; it will shrink to the size of the city of Jerusalem itself. It then shrink again when Jerusalem is abandoned for seventy years—the *Israel* of prophecy will be no larger than the house of God (i.e., the temple) Cyrus, the Persian king of Babylon, commissioned the remnant to build. Disciples are today this temple of God (1 Cor 3:16-17), for *Israel* went from being a physical nation to being a spiritual nation when the mediator of the covenant went from being Moses to Christ Jesus.

Next Sabbath's reading will continue discussing the fourth chapter of Ezekiel—

Many false prophets, like Hananiah, will promise spiritual Israel that the yoke of the spiritual king of Babylon (Isa 14:4-21) has been or will be broken from off the necks of disciples if tithe moneys and offerings are given to the false prophets' ministries. They will proclaim that moneys are needed so that they can take their liberating message to the world; they will promise great blessings for those who sow into their ministries. And they are thieves who have broken into the household of God to steal as much as they can carry away. They will even steal wheelbarrows and trucks so they can carry away more.

The test the Apostle Paul established for determining genuine teachers of Israel should be reviewed.

*The reader should now read 2 Corinthians chapter 11, verses 1 through 15.*

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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