

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 remains "*knowing God,*" and *identifying the endtime nation of Israel.*

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## Weekly Reading

For the Sabbath of October 29, 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 chapter 11.*

**Commentary:** The Spirit or Breath of God lifted Ezekiel up and brought him in vision from the Chebar canal to the east gate of the house of the Lord, where Ezekiel recognized men among the twenty-five who devised iniquity and gave wicked counsel. Ezekiel was commanded to prophesy against these men. The Spirit or Breath of *YHWH* fell upon Ezekiel and said to him, *Say, Thus says YHWH: so you think, O house of Israel...YHWH, Israel's Elohim, identifies the twenty-five men at the east gate of the temple in Jerusalem as the house of Israel. The Lord [YHWH] would judge these men representing the house of Israel at the border of Israel. He would draw them out of the city of Jerusalem, and they would be slain at the border of Israel, for they had not walked in His Statutes, nor obeyed His rules, but had acted according to the customs of surrounding nations (v. 12). Their bodies and their iniquities would no longer pollute Israel.*

The task of watchman for the house of Israel, assumed by the former Radio Church of God during the first few years of World War Two and continued by that organization's derivative splinters, has seen hundreds of millions of dollars spent warning the United States and Britain to repent of wrongdoing and return to keeping the commandments of God. The Radio Church of God accepted the historical validity of British Israelism. Thus, this enthusiastic *watchman* identified the endtime house of Israel as the natural descendants of the Northern Kingdom of Samaria, taken captive by Assyria ca. 721 BCE, approximately 120 years before the prophet Ezekiel was commanded to identify the twenty-five men as the house of Israel. And in its enthusiasm, this would-be *watchman* claimed that Ezekiel's prophecies had never been delivered to their intended audience. Yet, Ezekiel wrote, "And it came to pass, while I was prophesying, that Pelatiah the son of Benaiah died. Then I fell down on my face and cried out in a loud voice and said, 'Ah, Lord God! Will you make a full end of the remnant of Israel?'" (v. 13).

Ezekiel's prophecies were mostly fulfilled in his lifetime—but the promise of one heart and a new spirit (v. 19) pertains to the Christian Church, and disciples of Christ Jesus. The majority of the natural nation of Israel has yet to receive this promise, for the fullness of the nations [Gentiles] has not come to God. The fullness of iniquity has not arrived. The seven, endtime years of tribulation are not yet upon humanity. Through observance of the commandments of God during the first 1260 days of these seven years of tribulation, natural Israel will be grafted onto the rootstock of righteousness (Rom 11:25-31). The first shall be last: the first nation to receive the commandments of God will become the second-born spiritual son of the last Eve. The firstborn son of the last Eve will be, with exceptions, counted least in the kingdom of heaven (Matt 5:19), for this firstborn son has “relaxed” the least of the commandments [the Sabbath commandment], and has taught others to do so.

The glory of the God of Israel went up from the city that is present day Jerusalem; the glory lifted and stood on the mountains. This signifying movement was the passing from physical to spiritual, from an earthly *polis* representing Israel to the heavenly city.

*The reader should now read Ezekiel chapter 12.*

**Commentary:** Ezekiel was commanded to act the part of an exile in the sight of a rebellious house, as a sign for the house of Israel (v. 6), and he did as he was commanded.

The house of Israel was the rebellious house (v. 9) for which Ezekiel was made a sign. He was told to tell the house of Israel by the Chebar canal that the oracle concerns [or is the burden of] “the prince of Jerusalem and all the house of Israel who are” (v. 10) there. He was to tell those captives by the Chebar canal that Ezekiel going in and out as a captive is a sign for Jerusalem. And there is no reason to believe that Ezekiel's oracle was not delivered to the prince of Jerusalem, for there was a regular exchange of letters between Babylon and Jerusalem.

*The reader should now read Jeremiah chapter 29.*

**Commentary:** There was somewhat regular correspondence between Jerusalem and the exiles in Babylon, enough so that Shemaiah in Babylon knew what Jeremiah in Jerusalem was prophesying, and enough so that Jeremiah knew what Ahab and Zedekiah in Babylon were prophesying. Thus, the inhabitants of Jerusalem should have heard what Ezekiel was prophesying—his message would have been delivered to the inhabitants of Jerusalem by letter.

Notice that Ahab and Zedekiah did an outrageous thing in Israel (vv.22-23), the nation then in exile in Babylon. *Israel* wasn't in Assyrian exile somewhere near the Black Sea. *Israel* wasn't in the western Mediterranean, wasn't at Carthage, wasn't on the steppes of Russia. *Israel* was at Jerusalem and in Babylon. Likewise, the spiritual nation of Israel is in the Jerusalem above, and in spiritual Babylon. The majority of this spiritual nation went into Babylon captivity by or before the 4<sup>th</sup> Century CE. The

remnant that remained in God's rest after the artisans and craftsmen were taken to spiritual Babylon were a disloyal, treacherous nation that perished in the 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> Centuries.

When the Northern Kingdom of Samaria was taken captive, it ceased being any part of the Israel of record. The house of Judah and Jerusalem retained rights to the identifying name. The Northern Kingdom was taken captive by death, and was not to again return to Judea prior to the coming of the Messiah, when both houses of the natural nation will be united under David.

Returning to Ezekiel chapter 12: concerning the lawless and faithless inhabitants remaining in Jerusalem, the Lord would again bring the Chaldeans against them, and would scatter them toward every wind, and would unsheathe the sword after them. But He would allow a few of them to escape the sword, the famine, the pestilence that they might declare all of their abominations among the nations where they were scattered, and that they might know the Lord is God (v. 16). And herein is the concept that must be remembered: prophecies are about the evil events that will befall a nation so that the nation might know the Lord. Human beings are notoriously blind, stiff-necked, and hard of hearing until some event gets their attention. And no event will get their attention like [the liberation of the body of Christ from sin and death](#).

Knowing the Lord isn't a matter of inviting Jesus into one's heart: it is understanding that the events that befell the natural nation of Israel have or will befall the spiritual nation in the heavenly realm. Out of love for His friends, Jesus has revealed all that will happen, why these events happen, and what those who love the Lord should do.

The word of the Lord came to Ezekiel: "Son of man, behold, they of the house of Israel say, "The vision that he [Ezekiel] sees is for many days from now, and he prophesies of times far off." Therefore say to them, Thus says the Lord God: None of my words will be delayed any longer, but the word that I speak will be performed" (Ezek 12:27-28). The house of Israel was receiving and ignoring Ezekiel's prophecies—Ezekiel's prophecies were delivered to an exceedingly stiff-necked nation that is directly analogous to the Christian Church in the immediate pre- and post-Nicene era. And as the remnant of the natural nation that returned to present-day Jerusalem didn't improve its behavior much despite seventy years of captivity (Neh chap 13), the remnant of the spiritual nation that returned to rebuild the temple in the Jerusalem above remains a stiff-necked, spiritually deaf and dumb people even after reentering God's rest.

*The reader should now read (or reread) Ezekiel chapter 4.*

**Commentary:** Ezekiel was commanded to lie on his left side, "and place the punishment [or iniquity] of the house of Israel upon it...for I assign to you a number of days, 390 days, equal to the number of years of their punishment. So long shall you bear the punishment of the house of Israel" (vv. 4-5). Afterwards, Ezekiel was to lie on his right side and bear the iniquity of the house of Judah forty days

(v. 6). Four hundred thirty days, four hundred thirty years—the people of Israel lived in Egypt 430 years to the very day (Exod 12:40-41). And herein lies the prophetic difficulty for making the simple assignment of the Northern Kingdom of Samaria going into punishment for 390 years, while the southern kingdom of Judah would go into punishment for forty years: the 390 days and 40 days are consecutive periods that equal the length of time Israel was in Egypt. And a pronounced break occurred in the Egyptian captivity, for Moses was forty years old when he killed the Egyptian, and then he spent another forty years in Midian, the land of Ishmael, the firstborn natural son of Abraham. Thus, when Moses killed the Egyptian, Israel had been in Egypt for 390 years.

The Northern Kingdom of Samaria had been removed for 120 years when Ezekiel lay on his left side for 390 days to bear its iniquity. This Northern Kingdom didn't emerge from captivity within the historic period covered within Scripture; thus, prophecy pundits have postulated many scenarios to explain the symbolism of Ezekiel's play-acting. Some have been very simplistic, some extremely convoluted. None have been of God. And all that can be said with certainty is that the natural nation of Israel was liberated from bondage to Pharaoh exactly 430 years after going to Egypt. The spiritual nation of Israel will be liberated from bondage to sin and death (from the prince of disobedience) in a manner and after a period of time analogous to when the natural nation was liberated. Thus, the house of Israel now pertains not to the Northern Kingdom, but to the greater Church; and the house of Judah probably pertains to the remnant that left Babylon to return to spiritual Judea

Rather than making declarative statements about these 430 symbolic years, it is probably enough to say at this time that since the 490 years of the seventy weeks prophecy has a physical as well as spiritual fulfillment, the 430 years of iniquity also has a physical as well as a spiritual fulfillment. The ending point of the natural Israel's stay in Egypt foreshadows the beginning of the [seven, endtime years of tribulation](#), when the spiritual nation will be liberated from sin through empowerment by the Holy Spirit.

When more is known about how to count the 430 years, Ezekiel's play-acting will be revisited.

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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