

## Commentary — From the Margins

### *The Journey Not Begun*

In America, physical dislocation serves as a symbol of social and psychological movement. When our immigrant ancestors arrived on America's shores they hit the ground running, some to homestead on the Great Plains, others to claw their way up the socioeconomic ladder in coastal ghettos. Upward mobility, westward migration, Sunbelt relocation—the wisdom in America is that people don't, can't, mustn't end up where they begin. This belief has the moral force of religious doctrine. Thus the American identity is ordered around the psychological experience of forsaking or losing the past for the opportunity of reinventing oneself in the future. This makes the orphan a potent symbol of the American character. Orphans aren't merely free to reinvent themselves. They are obliged to do so.

— Gary Engle (in “What Makes Superman So Darned American”)

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#### 1.

The cultural obligation to not conclude life where one began (i.e., to leave the landscape of one's nativity) is the descriptive characteristic of Christianity, with each Christian a would-be orphan without Christ Jesus (John 14:18); for the touchstone of living Christian belief is to walk in the footsteps of faith that the patriarch Abraham had before he was circumcised (Rom 4:12). His journey began with his father Terah in Ur of the Chaldeas, then one of the young world's most important cities. It began when “Terah took Abram his son and Lot the son of Haran, his grandson, and Sarai his daughter-in-law, his son Abram's wife, and they went forth ... to go into the land of Canaan” (Gen 11:31). However, arriving in the land of Haran, believed to be in Assyria and only part way to Canaan, Terah settled there and died. He had set out for Canaan, but he never arrived. He stopped along the way—and while Terah still lived, the Lord said to Abram, “Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you. And I will make of you a great nation, and will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing” (Gen 12:1-2). Thus, the journey Terah began was completed by the son that had left Ur with him. And this is the model for every disciple: the old man or self begins the journey that will be completed by the new man or self born of Spirit into the same tent of flesh, a journey from Babylon to Judea.

Starting the journey from Ur of the Chaldeas to Canaan wasn't enough, for it is not Terah's name that is great, but Abraham's. Starting the journey from

spiritual Babylon to the heavenly city of Jerusalem is not enough, for it will not be the names of those who left Babylon that will be great in the kingdom of God, but the names of those who keep the commandments and teach others to do likewise (Matt 5:19). So it will not be the names of today's Amish or Mennonite or Old German Baptist Brethren that will be great in the kingdom of heaven, but the names of those disciples who by faith leave behind the theologies where their physical and spiritual fathers settled short of spiritual Judea [Canaan]. These disciples that continue on will make the journey across the River Jordan and into God's rest (Heb 3:16-4:11; Ps 95:10-11; Num 14), where these disciples are symbolically baptized with Spirit by entering into Sabbath observance [instead of 8<sup>th</sup>-day observance]. Their hearts will then be spiritually circumcised. The laws of God will be written on their hearts and minds (Deu 30:1-2, 6, 10). They will want to do those things that please God. The enthusiasm of 16<sup>th</sup>-century Radical Reformers will return and will again cause them to bring many to God. But this won't happen as long as they remain in mental landscapes symbolized by the land of Haran. This won't happen as long as they remain in the houses and communities of faith of their fathers'.

If the American experience has psychologically predisposed each citizen to making a mental journey symbolized by the physical dislocation of immigration, then disciples should expect the endtime enthusiasm of faith that appeared in 16<sup>th</sup>-Century Swiss cantons to reappear in 21<sup>st</sup>-Century America, with this endtime enthusiasm causing literally millions of Americans to leave the mental topography of their nativity and emigrate away from churches that are organizations of this world. This emigration away from traditional religion and thousands of denominations is the ripening of the fields of faith planted on the shores of New England and Pennsylvania in the 17<sup>th</sup>-Century, a ripening that doesn't see increased attendance in the churches of this world but in no-church attendance today as humanism, materialism, and secularism seem to have left God dead. But the deity that will die is the prince of this world, disguised as an angel of light, with servants disguised as ministers of righteousness (2 Cor 11:14-15), not the Most High or His Christ, who take from the old serpent, Satan the devil, the kingdom of this world halfway through seven endtime years of tribulation (Rev 11:15; Dan 7:9-14) ... the generation to be harvested by God as firstfruits shall not be tainted by the mildew of Protestantism or the rust of Catholicism or the blight of Islam, but shall journey from believing nothing, a previously unimaginable possibility, to keeping by faith the precepts of the law while professing that Jesus is Lord.

If visible physical dislocation precedes and reveals invisible spiritual dislocation (1 Cor 15:46 & Rom 1:20), and if the visible dislocation of European Anabaptists is from German-speaking lands to Holland and on to America, then the invisible spiritual dislocation that follows this visible dislocation is from Sunday observing fellowships with love-feasts at every other time of year except Passover to Sabbath observing fellowships that keep the Passover sacraments as Jesus set the example. The endtime disciples who will harvest the firstfruits are born of Spirit in the mental landscapes of the fellowships of faith that began in Swiss cantons, or in Bavaria, or in Moravia, or along the Rhine—visible emigration was away from these physical landscapes. These endtime harvesters

today still linger in the mental landscapes of their nativity. With but a few exceptions, they have not yet begun their trek away from the beliefs of their fathers.

The spiritual landscape to which endtime disciples will immigrate is the new world fellowships that keep the commandments and hold the testimony of Jesus (Rev 12:17). The testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy (Rev 19:10). Thus, endtime disciples who help harvest humanity will leave belief paradigms that began in 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> Century Europe. They will immigrate psychologically and theologically to Sabbatarian Christendom—and all would be well if this were the end of their journey. But except for the named remnant, all of Sabbatarian Christendom will physically perish during the first 1260 days of the seven endtime years. [The 144,000 are not today Christians, but part of Observant Judaism.] Christ Jesus will cease endtime false teachings within Sabbatarian Christendom by sending the false teachers and their disciples to their graves if they love Christ enough to give their lives for Him. There, in death, they will await in a place of safety their resurrections to glory. So dying in martyrdom during the first 1260 days of the Tribulation does not commend the person's teachings to the endtime harvest, but does disclose to men and angels the love the disciple has for God. Likewise, the martyrdom of Polycarp or of Andreas Fischer does not commend all of either martyr's teachings to endtime disciples, but does reveal the love each had for God as each was slain by the prince of this world.

The dislocation of immigration will cause many disciples who leave 8<sup>th</sup>-day fellowships to cleave to culturally visible Sabbatarian fellowships. Their journey of faith will be far enough to cleanse hearts, but not far enough for them to become teachers of the third part of humankind (Zech 13:9), the great endtime harvest of firstfruits. Thus, they will give their physical lives as testimonies of their faith during the first 1260 days of the seven endtime years.

When interrogated by Pilate, Jesus said His kingdom was not of this world or from this world (John 19:36). And this simple statement, not hard to understand, is what separates those disciples who have left Babylon from those who remain within the single kingdom of this world.

Any church [group of *called out* ones] that joins itself to secular authorities has voluntarily made itself part of this world. This is especially true for physical and spiritual descendants of the patriarch Abraham, who by faith “obeyed when he was called to go out to a place that he was to receive as an inheritance” (Heb 11:8). But the place he would inherit was not a city of this world (*v.* 10): Abraham did not look for the coming of a kingdom of this world, but for the coming of heavenly Jerusalem. He did not look for a city that would rule by human conquest, or be ruled by conquest. No, he chose to live as a sojourner in the land promised to him, deeming it better to wait for the arrival of the city of God than to swear allegiance to a kingdom of this world, even to the Hittite kingdom that then reigned over the land he and his descendants would inherit. His transactions with the Hittites—these Hittites recognized Abraham as a mighty prince, or a prince of God (Gen 23:6)—were limited to purchasing the field and cave in which Sarah was buried. Even though these Hittites offered to first bury Sarah in their choicest tombs, then to give the field and cave in which Sarah was buried to Abraham, the patriarch paid the asking price for the field in the sight of these

people. So once he returned from Egypt, Abraham received nothing from this world, not even the spoils of his victory over Chedorlaomer and the kings with him (Gen 14:22-24); Abraham received nothing except the land he purchased to bury the flesh that is also of this world.

Again, the touchstone for Christian faith is the faith of Abraham before he was circumcised—and this touchstone has Abraham living as a sojourner by the oaks of Mamre the Amorite, living in tents with Isaac and Jacob (Heb 11:9), joint heirs to the promise of being a great nation, a blessing to all the world, but a nation not of this world nor from this world. Therefore, ancient and modern descendants of Abraham who have reigned and do reign today over peoples and geographical landscapes through conjoined secular and theological authority bound themselves of old and are now bound to the prince of this world, something that Abraham refused to do even upon the death of Sarah. These descendants of the patriarch made themselves bondservants to Satan when they accepted membership in the world community. And while their intentions were honorable, they brought spiritual Babylon to Judea, where the early Christian Church quickly found itself entangled by sin.

Scholars specializing in the history of Christianity discuss the evolution of Christendom over the 2<sup>nd</sup>, 3<sup>rd</sup>, 4<sup>th</sup>, 5<sup>th</sup> Centuries CE without realizing that they have chronicled Christendom's spiritual journey from the heavenly city of Jerusalem to Babylon, where the prince of this world reigned over the Church.

Neither Roman nor temple authorities had a legitimate reason to fear Jesus, who was born to be a king over a heavenly nation that would rule the kingdom of this world by reigning over the mental topography of humanity. But the Bishop of Rome and his theocratic thugs have forever damaged Christendom by allowing Christianity to become the official religion of the Roman Empire. A succession of false bishops coveted the power and authority of civil legitimacy. They sought freedom from persecution brought upon Christians by separation from the prince of this world and his broadcast of disobedience (Eph 2:2-3); they sought freedom from liberation, this liberation the liberty of Christ that finally allowed called human beings to keep the laws of God. They apparently believed it was more important to spread the gospel [good news] about Christ Jesus than to obey God, and the Bishop of Rome [with the help of other bishops] led Christendom into its Babylonian captivity, where most of Christianity remains to this day.

Although Roman governing authorities received their authority from God who had consigned all of humanity to the disobedience (Rom 11:32) and to servitude to the prince of this world, these Roman civil officials were merely instruments of God to carry out the wrath of God on the wrongdoer (Rom 13:1, 4) as the nation of Babylon was an instrument God used to punish Israel (*cf.* Isa 47:6; Jer 25:8-9) and as the Apostle Paul instructed the saints at Corinth to turn the man who knew his stepmother over to Satan for the destruction of the flesh (1 Cor 5:5). Because of its lawlessness of a type not even named among pagans, Christendom was delivered into the hand of the spiritual King of Babylon for the destruction of the flesh. Yes, it was. God did to the Church the same thing that the Apostle Paul had instructed the saints at Corinth to do to the sexually immoral man who had his father's wife. And when God delivered Christendom to Satan, the Roman Church with its Inquisitions became the instrument God used to keep disciples

imprisoned in spiritual Babylon for twelve centuries as the physical house of Judah was fully imprisoned in physical Babylon for seventy years.

When moving from physical to spiritual, the human Nebuchadnezzar, king of physical Babylon, corresponds to the fallen Day Star, son of Dawn (Isa 14:12), king of spiritual Babylon; Nebuchadnezzar's Babylon that ruled the children of men wherever they dwelt (Dan 2:38) corresponds to the single kingdom of the world that will become the kingdom of the Father and His Son (Rev 11:15) halfway through seven endtime years of tribulation. Thus, when Michael and his angels cast Satan and his angels from heaven and into time here on the earth (Rev 12:7-10)—this occurring on the same day that, standing on the split Mount of Olives, Christ fights here on earth (Zech 14:3-4)—the kingdom of the world will be given to one like the Son of Man (Dan 7:13-14). Christ Jesus will be the Head of this Son of Man; His loyal disciples will form its Body. But on this double day 1260, a day like that on which Joshua slew the kings of Canaan, few loyal disciples will remain physically alive to harvest the third part of humanity, born empowered of spirit when the Holy Spirit, the divine Breath of God [*Pneuma 'Agion*] is poured out on all flesh (Joel 2:28).

During the seven endtime years, humanity will be divided into three parts, each part foreshadowed by a son of the first Adam. God will turn His hand against two parts, striking them by delivering them into the hand of the man of perdition (Dan 7:25) as Jesus was struck (Zech 13:7-8). They will be as Cain and Abel were, with lawless disciples slaying their righteous brethren and taking upon themselves the mark of death. Then, when the two witnesses are resurrected on day 1260, the kingdom of the world will become the kingdom of the Father and His Christ—and the third part of humankind will be born of Spirit as Seth was born to the first Eve. This third part will form the great endtime harvest of firstfruits, and this third part is today neither Christian nor Jew.

Cast into time on day 1260, Satan will no longer be able to rule as the prince of the power of the air; he will no longer be able to reign over the mental topography of humankind through his broadcast of disobedience. As a fallen anointed cherub who has been given the mind of a man [as Nebuchadnezzar was given the mind of an ox], Satan will have to use physical force and the power of this world to recover his former bondservants—he will require all who would buy and sell to take the mark of the beast, the tattoo of the Cross [*Chi xi stigma*] (Rev 13:18 — read this in its Greek original). But he will be defeated by saints enduring by faith to the end of the age, a long three and a half years away. And the [good news](#) that must be proclaimed to the world as a witness to all nations before the end comes is that [all who endure to the end shall be saved](#) (Matt 24:13-14); for all of humankind will be born of Spirit and will be liberated from indwelling sin and death. All of humanity not previously born of Spirit will form the great endtime harvest. Thus, the young person who does not today have any interest in God or in Christianity exists as a blank slate upon which God can write His laws without concern that a Lutheran pastor or a Catholic priest will attempt to erase them, thereby sending this young person into the lake of fire.

When liberated from indwelling sin (Rom 7:21-25) by being filled with the Holy Spirit, the mantle of Grace, natural (Rom 5:13) and spiritual (Rom 6:12-16), will be stripped from humankind.

The person who previously was not of natural Israel and who had not been drawn by the Father from the world had no sin reckoned against the person, a form of natural grace resulting from the person being consigned by God to disobedience—because the person was the unwilling bondservant of the prince of this world, the person’s lawlessness was covered by the prince of this world. However, when the person is born anew, or born of Spirit, this new inner self is not born into bondage, but is born free (Rom 8:2) from disobedience even though the tent of flesh in which this new self resides remains consigned to disobedience. Thus, this new creature in Christ needs covered by the righteousness of Christ, and this new creature daily puts on Christ’s righteousness as if it were a garment. This garment of righteousness is Grace.

If, then, when sin has no dominion over the new creature who should present its members to God as instruments for righteousness, this new creature instead presents its members to sin as instruments for unrighteousness, this new creature has not put on the garment of Grace, but remains naked before God and condemned by its disobedience. The disciple has made Grace of no effect by presenting him or herself as the willing and obedient servant of sin, which is nothing more than lawlessness (1 John 3:4). And the disciple who attempts to cover him or herself with anything other than obedience to God does not love either the Father or the Son, regardless of words uttered (John 14:21). The disciple who says that he or she knows God but who doesn’t keep the commandments is a liar (1 John 2:3-4). The love of God is not in this disciple. Rather, the disciple who loves God will walk in the same way as Jesus walked. And not once did Jesus attempt to enter into God’s rest on the 8<sup>th</sup>-day. Nor did Jesus live as a Gentile.

The scribes and Pharisees of 1<sup>st</sup>-Century Judea participated in the civil governance of Jerusalem: they had made themselves agents of the prince of this world by doing so. Figuratively, their father was the prince of this world, for it was from this prince that they derived their authority in and out of the Temple. Scribes and Pharisees were not confined to being either Levites or to being the sons of Aaron. And when in 70 CE these scribes and Pharisees participated in rebellion against Roman authorities, agents of God to punish evildoers, these rebelling Israelites that survived were sent into slavery throughout the eastern Mediterranean region. They were delivered into the hand of the Roman Emperor for the destruction of their flesh as a type of what will occur when empowered disciples rebel against God during the seven endtime years of tribulation.

Note the above: the Israelites who rebelled in 70 CE had no life but that which came from the first Adam; they had no life but that which comes from shallow physical breath [*psuche*]. Disciples, however, have life from both the first Adam, a type of the one to come (Rom 5:14), and from the last Adam (1 Cor 15:45). They are first human beings, then sons of God. They have been twice born. Their flesh receives life from the cellular oxidation of sugars, and the new creature born of Spirit receives life from the divine Breath of the Father. With birth from above, they have become flesh [*soma*], natural breath [*psuche*], and spiritual breath [*pneuma*] (1 Thess 5:23). Thus, when disciples are delivered into the hand of the man of perdition (Dan 7:25) following liberation from indwelling sin and death—delivered for the destruction of the flesh so that the spirit might be

saved—the man of perdition functions as an agent of God even though this lawless one will speak blasphemies against God. This man of perdition will function as Roman emperors did and as the Secretary General of the United Nations presently does: he will be the prince of this world's primary representative here on earth, and he will also be an agent of God to punish wrongdoers.

God is not the author of evil. He is not responsible for evil. He is not responsible for Christendom transgressing His commandments (or for the evolution of Christendom). He is not responsible for the vast majority of Christians rebelling against Him after He liberated them from bondage to disobedience thereby giving to called human beings the freedom to keep the commandments ... what has Christendom done with its freedom from bondage to disobedience? It has, with very few exceptions, voluntarily returned to disobedience through interpreting its freedom to obey God as freedom from having to obey. Christendom is now so attached to this world that even when free to separate itself from this world, it returns to sin in a vain attempt to improve the general conditions of enslavement for those who have not yet been liberated from disobedience.

In the above is the dilemma of every disciple: does the disciple flee spiritual fornication with the prince of this world? Or should the disciple succumb to the blandishments of the prince of this world and help this fallen cherub make conditions better here on earth? Should the disciple make getting to the world the good news that Jesus condemned sin in the flesh (Rom 8:7) of more importance than obeying God? Or should the disciple actually condemn sin in the disciple's flesh so that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in the disciple, who walks not according to the flesh [the ways of this world] but according to Spirit (*v.* 8)? Should the disciple show his or her love for this world and the things of this world by helping to make this world a better place for both Christians and non-Christians to live—the Apostle John wrote, “If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him” (1 John 2:15).

What is the value of a disciple presenting his or her members to sin as instruments for unrighteousness when “the world is passing away along with its desires” (1 John 2:17). It is the person who does the will of God that will abide forever. Thus, when the seven endtime years begin and God delivers liberated disciples into the hand of the man of perdition for the destruction of their flesh, He does so because of their wrongdoing. He does so because they have accommodated the prince of this world; because they have helped this fallen cherub make this world a kinder, gentler place; because they have invested in the agencies of this world, thereby taking its sins and its destruction onto themselves; because they have committed spiritual adultery with the prince of this world in a similar manner as how the natural descendants of both Ishmael and Isaac have committed fornication with the prince of this world ... no kingdom of this world is a kingdom of God. Every kingdom is today part of the kingdom of the fallen prince of this world, the old dragon, Satan the devil.

When Israel rejected God as the nation's sovereign in the days of the prophet Samuel, God chose for Israel three successive kings that would serve as the shadow and type of the princes who would rule over spiritual Israel once this holy

nation of God was liberated from bondage to indwelling sin and death. The first was Saul, a man head and shoulders taller than others of his generation, but a man who had an evil spirit with him ... Saul serves as a type of the man of perdition, who comes by the workings of Satan (2 Thess 2:9), the spiritual reality of the evil spirit with Saul. And this man of perdition will lead Christendom into war against its neighbors. He will appear as an instrument of righteousness (2 Cor 11:15), not like an insidiously evil being. He will encourage disciples to become involved with governance of this world, and he will slay and cause to be slain those disciples who keep the commandments of God, especially the Sabbath commandment.

The man of perdition will espouse the beliefs and concepts of traditional 8<sup>th</sup>-day Christendom.

All of physical and spiritual Israel will be delivered into the hand of the man of perdition when the seven endtime years begin, but as God humiliated physical Babylon because it showed no mercy to Israel when God delivered His heritage into king Nebuchadnezzar's hand, God will topple spiritual Babylon, taking from it dominion (Dan 7:11-12) to reign over the mental topography of humankind in a day. God will crush the feet of Babylon when it sends its armies into the rift created by the split Mount of Olives, a stone cut without the help of human hands (Dan 2:45). The earth will swallow these armies of the man of perdition as the Sea of Reeds swallowed Pharaoh and his army (Exod 15:12; Rev 12:16; Dan 9:26). And Babylon will be no more, forever.

But the holy nation of natural Israel, like the selected Passover lamb chosen on the 10<sup>th</sup> day of the first month (*cf.* Exod 12:3; Josh 4:19), will be utterly slain by the armies of the man of perdition, the instrument of God's wrath. Except for the 144,000 Observant Jews who profess that Jesus is Lord and believe that the Father raised Jesus from the grave and who flee through the split Mount of Olives, all of the natural nation of Israel, penned in Judea, will be sacrificed as the natural body of the sin offering for humankind as the man Jesus was the sacrificed natural head so that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in the 144,000 who follow Jesus wherever He leads (Rev 14:1-5). Yes, natural Israel will perish. The man of perdition will make a concerted effort to slay every person who keeps the Sabbath. But the 144,000 will escape from his hand as will the remnant of Sabbatarian Christianity.

The holy nation of spiritually circumcised Israel (1 Pet 2:9), with the exception of the remnant, will be either physically or spiritually slain by the portion of Christendom that has attached itself to the prince of this world. Those disciples who keep the commandments but who do not have the spirit of prophecy, which is almost all of Sabbatarian Christianity, will be physically slain as Jesus was (the disciple is not above his or her Teacher, nor is the servant above his or her Master; it is enough for the disciple and the servant to be slain as Jesus was [Matt 10:24-25]). Those disciples who rebel against God in the great falling away—as many as were the natural Israelites who wanted a king over them like other nations had—will spiritually slay themselves by taking sin back into them when no sacrifice for sin remains.

Therefore, halfway through the seven endtime years when the prince of this world is cast into time and comes as a roaring lion seeking to devour whom he



can, all of natural and spiritual Israel—except for the Woman who consists of the 144,000 spiritual virgins, and the remnant that keeps the commandments and holds the testimony of Jesus—will be dead. But the remainder of humankind will be liberated from indwelling sin and death, will be born of Spirit, and will be as disciples were in the first half of the Tribulation. And as the glorified Jesus leads the 144,000 virgins, the remnant will lead the third part of humanity to victory over Satan through enduring in faith to the end. This victory will not be won with military might, but through simply enduring as Abraham endured by the oaks of Mamre while he waited for the coming of the city of God. It will be won by non-participation in the affairs of this world. And those who will lead this third part of humanity will have journeyed from mental landscapes formed by early Anabaptists to spiritual Judea and the heavenly city of Jerusalem.

2.

The prophet Jeremiah wrote,

For twenty-three years ... the word of the Lord has come to me, and I have spoken persistently to you [the people of Judah], but you have not listened. You have neither listened nor inclined your ears to hear, although the Lord persistently sent to you all his servants the prophets, saying, “Turn now, every one of you, from his evil way and evil deeds, and dwell upon the land that the Lord has given to you and your fathers from of old and forever. Do not go after other gods to serve and worship them, or provoke me to anger with the work of your hands. Then I will do you no harm.” Yet you have not listened to me, declares the Lord, that you might provoke me to anger with the work of your hands to your own harm. (Jer 25:3-7)

The physical land that *YHWH* gave to the people of Judah and to the people of Israel the Psalmist identified as His rest (Ps 95:11). In addition, *YHWH* gave rest to the people of Judah and Israel at various times when the then conjoined nation of Israel eschewed evil and faithfully served the Lord, with the reign of Solomon to specifically be a period of God-given rest (1 Chron 22:9). But Solomon sinned when he took his first wife, the daughter of Pharaoh. Then Solomon provoked God by building for himself and his many wives a larger house than was built for the Lord. So the “rest of God” given to Israel as the peace and prosperity of Solomon was revoked after his forty year reign. War again overtook and consumed both the people of Judah and Israel.

The rest of God began with the seventh day of creation (Gen 2:1-3), and became represented by the geographical landscape of the Judean hills and valleys upon which Israel dwelt, physically resting on the seventh day of a weekly cycle that remains unbroken. Thus, for the people of Judah and Israel, God’s rest was a geographical and psychological landscape that the nation which left Egypt could not enter because of that’s nation’s unbelief. This rest represented both Christ Jesus’ millennial reign over the mental topography of humanity and heaven itself. So entry into Judea symbolized entry into heaven, with the weekly Sabbath representing heaven on earth, a time when no physical work is done.

Jesus' resurrection and Ascension to the Father as the reality of the Wave Sheaf Offering, the first of the firstfruits to be offered to and accepted by God on the day following the weekly Sabbath during the Feast of Unleavened Bread, did not change or alter the weekly cycle or when an Israelite was to keep the Sabbath. No command to observe when Jesus was resurrected exists beyond the command Moses gave to Israel: "And the Lord spoke to Moses, saying, 'Speak to the people of Israel and say to them, When you come into the land that I give you and reap its harvest, you shall bring the sheaf of the firstfruits of your harvest to the priest, and he shall wave the sheaf before the Lord, so that you may be accepted. On the day after the Sabbath the priest shall wave it'" (Lev 23:9-11). Israel crossed the Jordan on the 10<sup>th</sup> day of the first month, a Sabbath, thus both entering into Canaan as if entering into heaven, with the Ark of the Covenant passing before the people. The priest bearing the Ark stood firmly on dry ground in the midst of the Jordan while all Israel passed over the Jordan on dry ground (Josh 3:17), with the waters of the Jordan being a representation of the fire that separates this physical realm from the supra-dimensional heavenly realm (Isa 43:2 — the juxtaposition of water and fire is that of physical versus spiritual).

Whereas the nation that left Egypt could have entered into God's rest but did not because of unbelief (Num 14:11; Heb 3:19), the nation that entered was the nation born into the tents of Israel when Israel traversed the Wilderness of Sin/Zin. And in crossing the Sea of Reeds and the Jordan, visible shadows of receiving spiritual life, receiving first spiritual life from the Father and then from the Son (John 5:21) are modeled. Thus, Israel's unbelief is the unbelief of the old self [the Apostle Paul's old man] that is crucified with Christ Jesus when the Father draws a person from the world (John 6:44, 65) by causing an infant son of God to be born of Spirit into the tent of flesh of the old self. This drawing from the world and receiving the Spirit of God is represented by Israel crossing the Sea of Reeds—and thirty days later, Israel began to receive bread from heaven [manna], thereby revealing to Israel which day was the weekly Sabbath by when the manna didn't appear (Exod 16:22-30). So before Israel entered into God's rest as represented by Judea, Israel began to keep the Sabbath in anticipation of crossing the Jordan, the representation of glorification or receiving spiritual life from the Son. Except for the first month into the nation's journey, Israel kept the weekly Sabbath as a sign between *YHWH* and Israel that Israel might know that God sanctified the nation, and that He rested on the seventh day (Exod 31:13, 17). No other sign exists today.

But the unbelief of the men numbered in the census taken one year later (taken the first day of the second month of the second year — Num 1:1) caused all of these men, except Joshua son of Nun and Caleb of Esau, to perish in the wilderness. Having the Sabbath as a sign that Israel might know that God had sanctified the nation was not enough; seeing the destruction of Egypt wasn't enough; seeing the miracles in the wilderness wasn't enough to cause belief which comes only from faith.

The unbelief of spiritually circumcised Israel (Rom 2:26-29) or of Christendom from its beginning is as great as the unbelief of the men who left Egypt; for few are those Christians who accept the Sabbath as the sign that God has sanctified Israel. Most of Christendom accepts the Cross as the sign of

sanctification, not the Sabbath. But the Cross is the mark of Death. It is the means by which the Romans slew the man Jesus of Nazareth. And it is the shape and form of the demonic prince that now specifically reigns over Christendom—and has reigned since God delivered the Church into the hands of the prince of this world, the spiritual king of Babylon.

The prophet Jeremiah continued delivering the words of *YHWH* to the people of Judah:

Therefore thus says the Lord of hosts: Because you have not obeyed my words, behold, I will send for all the tribes of the north, declares the Lord, and for Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon, my servant, and I will bring them against this land and its inhabitants, and against all these surrounding nations. I will devote them to destruction, and make them a horror, a hissing, and an everlasting desolation. ... This whole land shall become a ruin and a waste, and these nations shall serve the king of Babylon seventy years. (Jer 25:8-11)

God delivered spiritually circumcised Israel into the hand of the spiritual king of Babylon (Isa 14:4-21) at the Council of Nicea (ca 325 CE). The seventy years that all of the physically circumcised Israelites formerly in Jerusalem served the physical king of Babylon became the twelve hundred years that all of spiritual Israel served the spiritual king of Babylon—God made the Christian Church a horror to the world, not the blessing promised to the patriarch Abraham. And He did so because Christendom would not obey His words, but became entangled in worldly affairs and ensnared by disobedience.

In the wilderness of Sin, Israel grumbled against Moses three days after crossing the Sea of Reeds; three days after seeing Pharaoh's army swallowed by the same water that had parted for the nation (Exod 15:24). In the mental wilderness of Sin, spiritual Israel grumbled and grumbles against Moses, refusing to believe that his writings pertain to disciples of Christ Jesus. But Jesus said, "If you believed Moses, you would believe me; for he wrote of me. But if you do not believe his writings, how will you believe my words" (John 5:46-47). The evidence of history is that Hellenist converts and their theological descendants would not and will not believe either Moses or Jesus. And this brings Christendom to where it is today, a religion of this world through which spiritually circumcised Israelites are dispersed as physically circumcised Israelites were dispersed throughout the nations and cities of Asia Minor and the Mediterranean region in the 1<sup>st</sup>-Century CE. The spiritual Diaspora of Israel isn't into geographical lands, but into the spiritual landscapes of denominationalism.

Christianity, as visibly perceived today, is a Greek belief paradigm, mostly pagan in origin; openly hostile to the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob; and inwardly a death cult that spiritually slays infant sons of God through teaching them to return to disobedience. This is the Christianity that evolved in the centuries following the death of the early Apostles. It does not represent the beliefs and practices of the Apostles Matthew, John, Peter, or Paul. It does not conform to the observations of Luke or Mark.

Why do so many would-be disciples cling to visible Christendom? Why profess belief in Christ Jesus without believing either Moses or Jesus? Is it

because of Christianity's claim of exclusivity (there is no other name but that of Jesus by which a person can come to God)? Or is it because it has become one of three or four dominant religions of this world? Certainly, Jesus did not walk as a Gentile—and His disciples should walk as He did (1 John 2:6), which was as an Observant Jew.

During the seven endtime years of tribulation, disciples will be outwardly and individually marked by either Sabbath observance, or by the tattoo of the Cross. Today, disciples are inwardly marked by these same two symbols: those disciples who keep the commandments and have the testimony of Jesus observe the weekly Sabbath, part of the very definition of keeping the commandments. But the vast majority of Christendom is marked by the Cross, either on church marquees or inner walls or in front of pulpits, or on the person in the form of pendants or earrings or articles of adornment.

A few denominations hedge their bets, observing both the Sabbath and worshipping the Cross, again the visible representation of Death, the fourth beast of Daniel chapter seven as well as the fourth horseman of the Apocalypse. And when the seven endtime years begin, disciples in these denominations that have hedged their bets will die without ever really knowing why God has delivered them into the hand of the man of perdition, the little horn on the head of Death. They will not today believe God will make them a hissing in the world to come; thus, little can be done to warn them of their impending slaughter.

The two witnesses prophesy for 1260 days in sackcloth or mourning garb, for they know how many around them will die during the days of their ministry. Today, the death of two parts (i.e., two-thirds) of humanity remains on the near horizon—and doesn't seem real or even possible. But the two witnesses' ministry begins the morning after the Second Passover, when the firstborns not covered by the blood of the Lamb of God perish. God will give the lives of men as the ransom for Israel's liberation from indwelling sin and death as He gave the lives of Egyptians for natural Israel's ransom from bondage to Pharaoh (Isa 43:3-4). However, another third of humankind will die during the 1260 days of the two witnesses, a fact they know, but a fact that Christendom will not want to believe.

For twenty-three years, the people of Judah did not heed the warnings of the prophet Jeremiah, but believed instead false prophets and falsity of all types. Little had changed over the following twenty-three hundred years. The 18<sup>th</sup>-Century CE still saw the majority of spiritually circumcised Israelites believing false prophets and false teachers. Only a few, most of whom were followers of Menno Simon, had left spiritual Babylon, where God had exiled Israel.

### 3.

Separation from the world while still living in the world is never an easy task; yet, separation remains the essence of true Christianity, with this separation beginning by keeping the precepts of the law (Rom 2:26), all of them, not eight or nine or however many precepts the disciple finds agreeable.

When Anabaptists left spiritual Babylon in the 16<sup>th</sup>-Century through their non-participation in the affairs of state, thereby alienating the Roman Church and the Reformed Church, these Anabaptists sought a return to the precepts of

the law, sans Sabbath observance, and they sought to separate themselves from their worldly neighbors through plain dress. The Anabaptists, though, were never unified in theology or in customs. They were, in a practical sense, an unorganized *rush* of disciples out of spiritual Babylon, all headed in the general direction of Jerusalem, all leaving as soon as they could get out, with Andreas Fischer among the first to wade the waters separating Judea from the western deserts of Babylon. But few disciples followed Fischer; few entered into keeping the Sabbath. It wasn't then time.

The largest number of Anabaptists congregated around Menno Simon, and formed themselves into the Mennonite Church in 1632. My paternal ancestors left Bavaria to join with Menno Simon then left Amsterdam for the new world a generation later. But it was in Amenthal, Switzerland, a generation and a half after the founding of the Mennonite Church where dissatisfied members felt that already the teachings of Menno Simon were not being followed closely enough. Jacob Amen was the acknowledged popular leader of these Swiss members, who became known as the Amish. And there began perhaps the most outwardly successful of the separatists groups that sought to live in the world without becoming a part of it, without serving the prince of this world.

The Separatists forming the Plymouth Colony (ca 1620 CE) from which my maternal ancestors come quickly became entangled by the worldly responsibility of governing themselves. From this band of Separatists come numerous Presidents and much of East Coast blueblood society. As disciples seeking to separatists themselves from the world, the Plymouth Colony was a failure.

A high price has been paid by the Amish for their mostly successful separation from the world, with this price not measured in dollars or by worldly success, but in the stagnation of their spiritual growth: whereas, beginning in 1525 CE, the Anabaptists formed the *rush* of disciples headed for heavenly Jerusalem, the spiritual growth of this rush had stalled by the first of the 17<sup>th</sup>-Century. Menno Simon helped revitalize the rush, but in every generation, only a remnant of the remnant forming the previous generation continued on toward the heavenly city. The Amish were not part of the remnant that continued on to grow in grace and knowledge. By the time Jacob Amen was teaching his followers to return to a stricter application of what Menno Simon wrote, the leading edge of the Anabaptist *rush* had begun to keep the Sabbath in England, Europe, and America, thereby following the trail blazed by Fischer. The Amish were but another remnant marked by plainness and continuation.

It is unlikely that the Amish will notice or accept the spiritual growth that has brought to the heavenly city of Jerusalem a remnant of a remnant four, five, six times removed from the rush of Anabaptists that fled spiritual Babylon in and after 1525 CE. This latter remnant now builds on the foundation the Apostle Paul laid (1 Cor 3:10-11), and in building on this foundation, problems encountered and addressed by earlier Anabaptists offer insights to neglected aspects of discipleship. And the success of Amish continued separation from the world contains such insights.

The Amish are somewhat satisfied with the knowledge they have; thus, they are not inclined to repent of their remaining lawlessness even though James says that to break one of the commandments [the Sabbath commandment] is to be

accountable for breaking the law (Jas 2:10). Therefore, without copying that which produced spiritual stagnation (if this can be determined) in the Amish, endtime disciples can learn from the Amish's plainness and determination to survive as disciples of Christ Jesus.

It is too bad, though, that the learning cannot go the other way also; for in the beginning, the Anabaptist movement was extremely evangelical in a world then Catholic and staid. But this enthusiasm produced much persecution, and the persecution produced its desired effect. To survive, Anabaptists of all flavors, including Mennonites and Amish, became content to dwell quietly in a world they could not change (the Plymouth Colony attempted to change the world). So quiet that unless a person notices their plain clothing, the person will not know that they exist—and this has become the story of the Sabbatarian churches of God that do not mark their separation from the world through outer apparel but through observing the Sabbath, now as inconspicuously as possible. There is no Superman in bright primary colors here, but rather, a parade of Clark Kents, outwardly invisible through their exceptional *ordinariness*. It seems that the churches of God, because of their small sizes, have become ashamed of being made special by God.

Psychological separation from the world begins with spiritual birth. It cannot be otherwise; for until liberated from bondage to disobedience through being born of Spirit, the person is mentally the bondservant to the prince of this world. The person cannot keep the laws of God, and is actually hostile to God (Rom 8:7). Although a person can appear odd to the world at large, the person will remain part of this world, and will remain a bondservant to disobedience.

When the former Worldwide Church of God mended its separatist ways and rejoined the world, thereby drawing sixty or more percent of its membership back into bondage to disobedience, the absence of psychological separation became apparent—merely observing the Sabbath and high days did not cause members of this fellowship to accept the condition of having been made special by being drawn from this world by the Father. Too many members were too eager to rejoin the world either they or their parents left. Too many members almost ran into the open arms of the prince of this world. Too many members had been scared by prophetic horror stories into attending the almost cult-like fellowship. Thus, these too many members were not interested in plainness. Keeping the weekly Sabbath and annual high Sabbaths was enough separation—and the former WCG administration had accommodated these tithe paying members who really wanted to return to the world but were fearful of doing so in the event that Armstrong's prophetic understandings were correct by outwardly discouraging beards and long hair on men, and head-coverings on women. In other words, administration of the WCG tried hard to have its members appear as part of this world, albeit an odd part.

Just as Mennonites and Amish accommodate the world by now living quietly, keeping their beliefs to themselves, the former WCG administration accommodated the world by discouraging individual evangelism. Therefore WCG lay members did not have to disclose to the world around them anything more about their beliefs than was necessary to abstain from working on the Sabbath and to get children out of school for the Feast of Tabernacles. They did not have

to psychologically separate themselves from the world in the way that wearing plain apparel causes psychological separation. Former WCG members could remain comfortably anonymous in a world too busy to notice them although there was something almost comical in seeing obviously poor farmers, loggers, and fishermen, each carrying a briefcase and wearing an ill-fitting suit, attending Saturday services in rented halls, theaters, or school gyms.

Without persecution, without any overt outside pressure, the majority of baptized WCG members ceased observing the weekly Sabbath within a decade of when a new administration said that the Sabbath was part of an abolished Law of Moses. Without the legal obligation of Sabbath observance, WCG members were no longer compelled to live separately from the world—and too many members would not by faith continue to keep the precepts of the law, and continue to even partially separate themselves from the surrounding world. And here is where the Amish have maintained their separateness: the authority of the Amish Church doesn't rest with one man as authority did in the former WCG, but in a tradition handed down from the earliest rush of Anabaptists out of spiritual Babylon. Thus, change cannot come from one man, or even from many men, but can only come when there is a general agreement to change traditional beliefs and practices. Nevertheless, change from one man here, and one there has occurred. As a result, a multitude of theological schisms have divided the Amish into ideological clans in a manner similar to how Scots were physically divided into clans. But the formation of these schisms has not caused the outer belief paradigms to collapse as occurred in the Worldwide Church of God.

The plain living and plain apparel of Mennonites, Amish, and Old German Baptist Brethren inevitably produce psychological separation that transcends minor schisms, and even some major disagreements. The plainness of life style marks each as a philosophical descendant of 16<sup>th</sup>-Century Anabaptists. It is unfortunate that this plainness doesn't also disclose genuineness in these disciples.

#### 4.

The two identities of Superman are necessary for the myth of incorruptible and unlimited power to work. His appearance attracts so much attention that he can easily become a caricature of himself, an icon larger than the myth. Thus, he needs visible invisibility, the ability to disappear into a crowd, to prevent his continued appearance from transforming everyone's daily routine into dramatic performance, phony to its core ... one of the truisms discovered by the visual news media is that people play to a camera. When people think they are being watched or filmed, their behavior changes. The weak pretend they are strong. The mild mannered become aggressive. The thief becomes pious. And so it is with disciples, who smile when the minister is present and scowl at their mates.

Disciples need to understand that they are, today, like infant Supermen. In the heavenly realm, they are the sons of God who will become like Christ Jesus when glorified; they are special. They are a purchased people. But here on earth, they are the dispossessed, visible in their ordinariness. And too often, they do not realize that with possessing life in that invisible heavenly realm, they are unlike their neighbors who await spiritual birth.

Disciples cannot be like their uncalled neighbors: God has made a distinction between the disciple and his or her neighbor, an invisible distinction that makes all the difference in the world. And the disciple who is ashamed of God, of being called by God, of being made special—well, this disciple is not psychologically prepared to separate him or herself from the world, an inescapable reality for which being of this world does not prepare the disciple. Thus, parents rearing children in a lifestyle of plainness prior to when the grown children are born of Spirit might have better prepared the grown child to be different from his or her neighbors. And without being different, the disciple will return to being a son of disobedience in the manner and after the example of today's lawless Christian Church.

Oh, it is easy to be a *Christian* when the newly born of Spirit son of God chooses not to keep the laws of God. Continuing to live as a Gentile isn't tough. But the disciple's choice of death when the promise of entering into God's rest stood before the disciple causes Christ Jesus to form the disciple into a vessel of wrath, endured for a season, but destined for destruction. All Scripture must be fulfilled, and God will draw disciples from the world for the purpose of fulfilling Scripture (John 17:12). And Scripture has many disciples falling away, betraying brethren, hating one another (Matt 24:10). Scripture has many false prophets arising, leading many astray (*v.* 11) ... someone has to be drawn from the world to fall away, to betray fellow disciples, to hate fellow disciples, to be false prophets, and to be led astray. Yes, born of Spirit disciples will do all of these things and much more. They will slay their righteous brethren as Cain slew Abel.

*Easy salvation and cheap grace* will not get a disciple into the kingdom of heaven.

Perhaps the disciple who trades some of his or her visible invisibility in this world for visible plainness will begin to feel special, not for his or her plain apparel, but because of being drawn from this world by the Father. However, the disciple will know that all eyes are on him or her, and that his or her behavior will bring honor or dishonor to God. Maybe this lever of a cultural expectation of good behavior will be enough to remind the disciple of just how special he or she is in a world consigned to disobedience. Maybe Sabbatarian Christianity should borrow visible plainness from those disciples who remain in the theological landscapes of these Sabbatarians' ancestors.

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