

May 21, 2006

"Isaiah: A Review"
Isaiah 1-66

Couples Class
Wendell Alford
Sub. Teacher

I. Practically all nonChristians and many people who profess to be Christians treat Isaiah's prophecy primarily as a report of history of the Israelites in the period around which the prophet lived. For that reason most of such people consider the sixty-six chapters to treat only events just before, during, and after the Babylonian exile of the Jews (597-537 BC). Further, many scholars of Isaiah emphasize the poetic elements in the book as a collection of poems whose literary license expose the information to a wide scope of possible interpretations. A believer in Jesus as God's Messiah (Savior) and who thereby has been born from above (John 3:3) should recognize that Isaiah as the most quoted Old Covenant Scripture in God's New Covenant, because of its references to the messianic age and to the witness, rejection, suffering, death and exaltation of the chosen Servant of the Lord, is much more than a mere recording of history. That portion of Isaiah given primarily to history, per se, is Chaps. 36-39 which many refer to as a historical interlude. One of the tests of the validity of being a true prophet of God was whether a given prophet's predictions came to pass. This historical interlude includes such tests of Isaiah's authenticity when he prophesied that, at a time when the Assyrian army was completely surrounding the city of Jerusalem, "Therefore thus saith the Lord concerning the king of Assyria, he shall not come into this city, nor shoot an arrow there, nor come before it with shields, nor cast an embankment against it," Isa. 37:33. Again, in Chap. 38:1-8 Hezekiah's coming death had been proclaimed, but Isaiah prophesied that Hezekiah's prayer to God would be heard and that he would be granted an additional fifteen years of life. God even assured Hezekiah of the reality of God's promise by reversing the sun's shadow by ten degrees! Isaiah was, and is, indeed a true prophet of God. Therefore, all who read his prophecy should know that his word regarding God's promised Savior would come to pass. We believers in that Messiah, Jesus Christ, know that Isaiah's prophecy did come true and that the other promises made by him will also come to pass.

II. The central theme of the first thirty-nine chapters of Isaiah stress the holy majesty of God Almighty, Jehovah the Holy One of Israel. God will not tolerate injustice and depravity among his people or their leaders, nor accept worship which is less than a wholehearted response to God's ethical holiness. The final chapters of the prophecy (40-66) relate Jehovah's imminent inauguration of a new relationship with his disciples, those who accept God's plan of spiritual salvation through God as a suffering servant and, eventually, God's Old Covenant people (the remnant of Jews) after a cataclysmic purging of the entire earth. Many of Isaiah's prophetic events are yet to happen (beyond 2006) as revealed in much of the New Covenant, especially God's revelation to the Apostle John on the Island of Patmos. In considering a review of the entire prophecy of Isaiah today, one should not overlook the criticism of the book in the last hundred years or so. I mentioned above the reduction of the prophecy to a simple historical summary. Partially based

upon the historical premise, others have denied the authorship of Isaiah for the entire sixty-six chapters. One evidence which aids one in reaching such a conclusion is the fact that Isaiah announces at 44:28; 45:1 the very name Cyrus whom God calls "my shepherd and he shall fulfil all my purpose." Cyrus did not appear in history until almost two hundred years after Isaiah wrote of him. Therefore, many Bible students elect to assert that Isaiah could not have written Chaps. 40-66 and refer to these latter chapters as Deutero-Isaiah. Personally, I have no problem with God's knowing such information before hand and revealing it through Isaiah to the Jews. Isaiah also revealed that our Lord Jesus would come and much more about him: his advent, 40:3-5; his virgin birth, 7:14; Galilee to be the main scene of his teaching, 9:1-2; his deity and the eternity of his throne, 9:6-7; his suffering, 53; dying with the wicked, 53:9; buried with the rich, 53:9; might and gentleness of his reign, 40:10-11; righteousness and beneficence of his reign, 32:1-8 and 61:1-3; his justice and kindness, 42:3-4,7; his rule over Gentiles, 2:2-3; 42:1,6; 49:6; 55:4-5; 56:6; 60:3-5; his vast influence, 49:7, 23; idols to disappear, 2:18; a warless world to be established, 2:4; 65:25; the earth to be reordered, 24; 26:21; 34:1-4; death to be destroyed, 25:8; 26:19; God's people to be called by a new name, 62:2; 65:15; a new heaven and new earth to be created, 65:17; 66:22; the righteous and wicked to be eternally separated, 66:15, 22-24.

III. Isaiah is the longest of the prophetic books of the Bible and contains the fullest Messianic predictions to be found in the Old Covenant. No doubt Peter had Isaiah in mind when in I Pet. 1:10-11 he wrote, "of which salvation the prophets have inquired and search diligently, who prophesied of the grace that should come to you: searching what, or what manner of time the Spirit of Christ which was in them and was indicating when it testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ, and the glory that would follow." The prophets of the Old Covenant were of supreme importance as God revealed his message to the people of Israel. Both the spiritual leaders and the political leaders of the nation turned away from God's will to either pacify the people, enhance their own advantage, or both. These wise prophets were dedicated to God's message and received insights from God to call an erring people to repentance. It became their responsibility to lay before the people not only the coming glories into which they were to enter in the Messiah's day, but also to impress upon them the necessity of preparing the way of the Lord by turning from their sins to righteousness, and from their idolatrous vanities to the eternal, living God who had so graciously and wonderfully manifested his power on their behalf throughout Israel's history. There are many predictions in Isaiah's prophecy which he did not understand, I believe, but which the New Covenant has disclosed to us who believe and trust Jesus Christ. However, there are future events mentioned in Isaiah as is true of John's Revelation which we cannot comprehend, but which will become apparent to those who trust God's plan for humanity as is necessary at the time these revelations are to take place. God has promised never to leave nor forsake those who love and trust him, Psa. 27:10; Isa. 49:15. Remember Jesus' words, "But that on good ground are they, which in an honest and good heart, having heard the word, keep it, and bring forth fruit with patience, Lk 8:15.

1 → 9th, 1/4 been about Isaiah - review fitting

my favorite study of theology is ~~prophesy~~ prophecy

& if time permits I'd like to discuss 2 end time

May 21, 2006

"Isaiah: A Review"

Isaiah 1-66

Couples Class *development*

Wendell Alford 1 - marriage

Sub. Teacher 2 - human sexuality

I. Practically all nonChristians and many people who profess to be Christians treat Isaiah's prophecy primarily as a report of history of the Israelites in the period around which the prophet lived. For that reason most of such people consider the sixty-six chapters to treat only events just before, during, and after the Babylonian exile of the Jews (597-537 BC). Further, many scholars of Isaiah emphasize the poetic elements in the book as a collection of poems whose literary license expose the information to a wide scope of possible interpretations. ~~Psa~~ A believer in Jesus as God's Messiah (Savior) and who thereby has been born from above (John 3:3) should recognize that Isaiah as the most quoted Old Covenant Scripture in God's New Covenant, because of its references to the messianic age and to the witness, rejection, suffering, death and exaltation of the chosen Servant of the Lord, is much more than a mere recording of history. That portion of Isaiah given primarily to history, per se, is Chaps. 36-39 which many refer to as a historical interlude. One of the tests of the validity of being a true prophet of God was whether a given prophet's predictions came to pass. This historical interlude includes such tests of Isaiah's authenticity when he prophesied that, at a time when the Assyrian army was completely surrounding the city of Jerusalem, "Therefore thus saith the Lord concerning the king of Assyria, he shall not come into this city, nor shoot an arrow there, nor come before it with shields, nor cast an embankment against it," Isa. 37:33. Again, in Chap. 38:1-8 Hezekiah's coming death had been proclaimed, but Isaiah prophesied that Hezekiah's prayer to God would be heard and that he would be granted an additional fifteen years of life. God even assured Hezekiah of the reality of God's promise by reversing the sun's shadow by ten degrees! Isaiah was, and is, indeed a true prophet of God. Therefore, all who read his prophecy should know that his word regarding God's promised Savior would come to pass. We believers in that Messiah, Jesus Christ, know that Isaiah's prophecy did come true and that the other promises made by him will also come to pass. *validity of Isra. prophetic mission I*

II. The central theme of the first thirty-nine chapters of Isaiah stress the holy majesty of God Almighty, Jehovah the Holy One of Israel. God will not tolerate injustice and depravity among his people or their leaders, nor accept worship which is less than a wholehearted response to God's ethical holiness. The final chapters of the prophecy (40-66) relate Jehovah's imminent inauguration of a new relationship with his disciples, those who accept God's plan of spiritual salvation through God as a suffering servant and, eventually, God's Old Covenant people (the remnant of Jews) after a cataclysmic purging of the entire earth. Many of Isaiah's prophetic events are yet to happen (beyond 2006) as revealed in much of the New Covenant, especially God's revelation to the Apostle John on the Island of Patmos. In considering a review of the entire prophecy of Isaiah today, one should not overlook the criticism of the book in the last hundred years or so. I mentioned above the reduction of the prophecy to a simple historical summary. Partially based

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Go to written portion

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Sep. 23, 2001

"The Sins of Nations"
Isaiah 1-2

Couples Class
Wendell Alford,
Teacher

I. We turn today from God's last message to his creatures, human-kind, through his Son, Jesus Christ, to Isaiah who was a prophet of God and a superior witness of God's promise of judgment and final salvation of those who will trust him, John 3:16; Heb. 1:1-3. Some have emphasized the coincidence of the fact that Isaiah's sixty-six chapters divide substantively into two divisions; the first thirty-nine chapters of God's judgment roughly parallel the thirty-nine books of the Old Covenant; and the last twenty-seven chapters, beginning with Chapter 40, project God's love and forgiveness through a Servant who must suffer in the process of bringing spiritual salvation to trusters of God's plan. The last twenty-seven chapters are representative of the number of books in the New Covenant. The Israelites through whom God chose to bring his spiritual Son to the world as a human being, were rebellious during the entire Old Covenant period. They then rejected God's Son, the Messiah (Savior), when God revealed the New Covenant, Heb. 8:7-13. There is little dispute about the authorship of the first thirty-nine chapters of Isaiah, and 1:1 states explicitly that Isaiah, the son of Amoz (not Amos), is setting forth [God's] vision concerning Jerusalem and Judah during the time of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah, kings of Judah. However, there are many Bible scholars who refute as fact that Isaiah authored Chapters 40-66, because the events related in the last section occurred after Isaiah's death. The supposition is that God would not have revealed so much information to Isaiah before the events happened. My position is that one of the elements in prophecy is foretelling events by God for the solace and enlightenment of those who trusted their Creator, Jehovah God, during the Old Covenant period and God the Father through his Son, Jesus Christ, since God's institution of the New Covenant. I believe that Isaiah wrote Chapters 1-39 during the most active period of his prophesying from about 740-700 BC and Chapters 40-66 near the end of his life, about 681 BC. That his prophecy covers events beyond his death does not negatively aggravate my sense of God's revelation to his people, for, after all, Isa. 53 foretells explicit information about God's Savior who was incarnated as a human hundreds of years later. Furthermore, John in his Gospel gives credit to Isaiah for Isa. 6:6-9 (John 12:40-41) and Isa. 53:1 (John 12:37-38). Note that here at one place in his Gospel, John credits Isaiah with having given information in the early and late portions of Isaiah's prophecy. There are other instances in the New Covenant where the entire prophecy is attributed to Isaiah also. I believe these instances to be more than just "literary licenses."

II. Prophets were of a particular calling of God which began formally during the time of Samuel, I Sam. 19:19-20; II Kings 2:3,5,7. The prophet's assignment was to speak to the people and their leaders for God. There are sixteen prophets' works given in the Old Covenant, They communicated current information relating to God's will while the priests practiced rites and ceremonies which primarily reminded and encouraged people to remember God's past blessings. Isaiah is considered by many to have been and still is the most important

prophet of the Old Covenant period. His prophecy stands at the beginning of the prophetic books although there are prophecies in Moses's Pentateuch, the historical books, and the poetic books. For instance, the Psalms are replete with some of the most beautiful and sad foresights of our Lord Jesus. Isaiah was reared in an aristocratic home and was married to a prophetess who bore him two sons, Isa. 8:3. As all prophets were, Isaiah's popularity went from up to down and vice versa, depending upon whether the people's reaction to God's message was positive or negative. (Note Heb. 11:37.)

III. Isaiah served as God's prophet while the nation was divided into two kingdoms, Israel in the north and Judah in the south. The northern area had woefully sinned against God's will including claiming other gods (idols) as their divine strength. The Northern Kingdom fell to the Assyrians during Isaiah's period of prophecy in 722 BC. The Southern Kingdom, Judah where Jerusalem was located and where Isaiah prophesied, perverted social justice especially with regard to the treatment of the poor. They also turned from God to idols and looked to heathen nations for military strength rather than national strength from their God. Although Isaiah was a prophet to Judah, his message was likewise pertinent to Israel to the north. In Isaiah "Israel" sometimes refers to both nations and at other times simply to the Northern Kingdom.

IV. Isaiah in 1:2 of his long prophecy begins at once to denounce the Israelites as children whom God has reared but who have rebelled against him. He states that the Israelites have less regard for God's leadership in their lives than do oxen for their owners or donkeys their masters. The nation is sinful, burdened with iniquity, creators of evildoers, provokers of their God to anger, and have reversed their willingness to follow God's will. What good is Godly correction? They are mentally and emotionally corrupt from head to foot with open sores, wounds, and bruises which are neither dressed nor treated with healing ointment. Strangers have pilfered their land, left it desolate, burned their cities, and now, in effect, rule their activities. Zion itself, which was once David's bastion of military might, had become like a country lodge surrounded by a vegetable garden with no ability to defend God's people. The land is rampant with idols which they had made with their hands and now worship as God. God despises their sacrifices and accounts them as the inhabitants of Sodom and Gomorrah who have ignored God's will for them as human beings (made in God's likeness). God through Isaiah pleads with the people to "come let us reason together - - - [I will cleanse your sinful natures.] - - - if you will be willing and obedient." Political leaders among them were accepting bribes and not providing justice for the fatherless and widows. In Chap. 2 Isaiah then foretells a future time of peace ("swords into plowshares") during which God will strictly "judge among the nations." God will abolish all idols, and the "day of the Lord," vs. 2:12, will come to pass when mankind's pride and haughtiness will be no more. There will be universal reverence and respect for God's will.

Rise, God, Judge thou the earth in might; this wicked earth redress.

For thou art he who shall by right the nations all possess.

Sep. 30, 2001

"Wrath, Then Grace"
Isaiah 3-4

Couples Class
Wendell Alford,
Teacher

I. An amazing wonder to me are the events of the last half of the last century, and how thereby God's plan of the ages is being developed. In the years just following WW II a very unique happening in the Dead Sea area of southern Israel unearthed many scrolls of Old Covenant Scriptures. The language of the scrolls consists of both Hebrew and Aramaic. A Bedoin's accidental discovery of a cave containing some of the scrolls between 1945 and 1947 was the first of what proved to be numerous finds. In 1947 the scrolls were taken to Jerusalem and sold, some to the Hebrew University there and some to the Syrian Orthodox Archbishop. The latter were bought in the United States and taken to Israel where they were published. In 1952 an additional ten caves were found nearby containing several complete scrolls. These caves overlooked a valley called Wadi Qumran. A large portion of the Qumran texts are manuscripts of the Old Covenant. In fact, every book of the Old Covenant except Esther is represented by at least a few fragments. Two manuscripts of Isaiah were among the scrolls found in the first cave. One of the Isaiah manuscripts is incomplete, but the other, which contains the entire book from beginning to end, is both the most complete and one of the oldest of all the manuscripts. It was made in the second century BC and very likely before the Qumran community was established. These manuscripts, though some are fragmentary, are very important, because they give communication from God of an undisputed correctness as much as 1000 years older than the best manuscripts otherwise preserved. They demonstrate a remarkable accuracy related closely to that of the Septuagint, the ancient Greek translation that was the Old Covenant used at the time our Lord was on earth in the flesh. In Jerusalem today the nation of Israel has built a rather elaborate building which is named "The Shrine of the Book." "The Book" is, of course, the Jewish Bible, the Old Covenant, and much emphasis is given to the manuscripts above discussed. My reason for emphasizing the Dead Sea scrolls is that they contain an early, undisputed copy of the complete text of Isaiah where the Messiah's coming to earth as a servant is conveyed forcefully in a dramatic way. Isaiah, as we stated last week, is a message of the need for Israel to repent and become humble before their [and our] Creator God. The discovery of the scrolls could very well be one of God's methods of directing the Jews of today to the Messiah of God, Jesus of Nazareth.

II. Other events happening now are calling attention to God's complete control (as contrasted with mankind's meager knowledge and limited control) of God's creation. On July 16, 1994 the largest planet in our solar system was to be hit by fragmented comet parts which began flying into Jupiter. The first chunk of the twenty-one fragments struck Jupiter's surface at 3:28 PM EDST on a Saturday. The fragments continued pelting Jupiter through six earth days. The impacts at 60 kilometers per second churned Jupiter's cloud bands, producing fireballs the size of Texas, and formed clouds that encircled the gaseous giant for months. A planetary scientist for NASA considered this event to be a phenomenal happening, and

the U.S.A. satellite Galileo was reprogrammed to observe the occasion. Already speeding toward Jupiter for a rendezvous the next year, Galileo had the best view of the collisions. A space scientist at the Lowell Observatory in Flagstaff, Arizona states that this happens only once in many lifetimes, and only now has mankind had the ability to observe the details, or even to know what is happening of this magnitude. The Hubble Space Telescope after being repaired, enabled scientists to learn of the Jupiter encounter. Each of the 21 chunks of the comet exploded with a force greater than all the nuclear weapons on earth, and together (all 21) they packed a million-megaton punch - 50 million times more powerful than the bomb dropped on Hiroshima. If such a comet of this size hit the earth's surface, it would explode instantaneously, altering the earth's climate and devastating human civilization (Matt. 24:21-22), because Jupiter's mass is about 320 times that of the earth. Our living quarters, earth, is indeed a fragile piece of God's property. The only refuge that is absolutely sure is faith in God's Son, Jesus Christ.

III. In Chaps. 3 and 4 Isaiah continues his scathing prophecy condemning Jerusalem and Judah. The Lord of Hosts will take the inhabitants' most basic needs, food and drink. Further, he will kill the leaders of the city and nation including the armies (army officers), judges, prophets, elders, businessmen, lawyers, magicians, and politicians. Israel's kings will exercise infantile leadership with the result being internal fightings, neighbor against neighbor, youngsters against their elders (authority), unlawful people reacting against those who honor and respect social order, II Tim. 3:1-4. When that time comes, inequity of material possessions will cause those of less means deliberately to unsettle the social order. Israel's government will be terribly ineffective, because the Jewish citizens unashamedly boast that their sins were like those of Sodom, 3:9. The catastrophic, inevitable result would be that they had literally doomed themselves. Their barns were full of stolen grain, stolen from poor peasant farmers. Their guilt was obvious simply by observing the expressions on their faces. Israel's leaders were like the women who had no training or experience in political or military affairs. Since the women had no responsibility in leadership roles, their time and efforts were used in displaying vain attitudes and actions. The Jewish women were haughty, turning their noses up in the air, wearing noisy jewelry on their ankles, and eyeing men with come-hither glances as they roved about publicly. Isaiah prophesies that their heads will receive scabs for headbands, that their total array of fine accessories will become nought, including their scarves, ankle chains, headbands, earrings, perfumes, rings, party clothes, negligees, capes, ornate combs, purses, mirrors, lingerie, and veils. They will come to shame and disgrace, and their husbands will be killed in battle. Because of the losses in battle, the male-female imbalance will be so disproportionate that seven women will compete for each man for companionship. Finally however, the Lord will save his people, Rom. 11:13-36. Jerusalem itself will be called holy, because the Lord himself will have washed away the sins of his people. God through judgment will purify his holy place, Jerusalem, so that no more will blood be spilt there.

Oct. 7, 2001

"Israel Ineffective, Isaiah Called"
Isaiah 5-6

Couples Class
Wendell Alford,
Teacher

I. Chap. 5 is a poem and, as such, is filled with figurative language. I believe the "wellbeloveds" and "beloved" in vs. 1 refer to the Lord, even Jesus Christ, God's Messiah, Savior. The "vineyard" first mentioned in vs. 1 also is the nation of Israel, including both kingdoms, Israel and Judah. Isaiah then outlines what God did with the Israelites and how they reacted to his leadership. God arranged for his dear people to be placed (planted) in a well-traveled place on the earth, "a very fruitful hill." Between three continents they were promised territory beginning with Abraham. Abraham was promised the area at age seventy-five, because he believed God and acted upon that belief, Gen. 12:1-4; 15:6; Gal. 3:6-18; Heb. 11:8-10; Jam. 2:17-24. That belief made Abraham right with God (righteous). Isaiah tells us that God prepared the place where he planted the vineyard (Israel) very well. He cleared the ground by removing the rocks and boulders, placed a fence around it, planted choice vines, and built a winepress in the vineyard. The vines were properly cultivated, fertilized, and pruned, but the harvest produced wild, unusable grapes, vs. 2. God then confronts the Israelites with the question: "As you compare my laws given to you and how you have received them, what could I have done better to have ensured a harvest of usable grapes? Because you have not followed my prescription for your own benefit, I will remove the fence, stop weeding, pruning, and cultivating the vineyard, because I sought judgment and righteousness but received oppression instead," vss. 5-7.

II. Beginning with vs. 8 Isaiah lists six woes which the Israelites have (and are) producing, and which have displeased God Almighty. 1) The well-to-do bought large estates for privacy and prestige. The punishment for such greed will be that they will not be able to maintain or even to own such palatial mansions and vast acreages. The land will fail to produce a gallon of grape juice per acre, and ten bushels of seed will yield only one bushel of grain. 2) Many of these prosperous landholders liked to party from early in the morning until late at night. They consumed alcohol all day, listened to live bands, and, in their drunken stupor, gave no thought for God's concern for the poor and less fortunate among them. Isaiah could see the political fall of the people and their being taken into exile. Hell will have to be enlarged to receive the multitude of the haughty and proud. The holy, just, and good Lord God is exalted and seeks righteousness from his people. 3) Only doom can be expected for those who are proud and boast about their disobeying God's will for them. They openly sin and dare God to do anything about their rebellion! Let us see what God can do about our doing what displeases him, they boast! 4) A sure curse is the destiny for those who reverse true moral decisions. Some declare what is evil to be good and good to be evil, and what is dark to be light, and what is light to be dark, and bitter to be sweet while sweet is bitter. 5) God is displeased with those who attempt to set themselves as right in contrast to what God has plainly communicated to humankind [through his Word], Jer. 10:14; Rom. 1:22; 12:16b.

A human being cannot within himself or herself know or decide what is right or wrong. He or she cannot manage life's affairs which are pleasing to God apart from God's supervision, Joel 2:28-29; Acts 2:16-18; I Cor. 3:16-21a. 6) Finally, Isaiah condemns those who boast about how much alcohol they can "hold," those who accept bribes instead of rendering justice, those who jail innocent ones to cover guilty friends' crimes. After pronouncing the six woes on the Israelites, Isaiah reminds them that God will allow devastation to come upon them, and Jerusalem's inhabitants will be taken from their beloved city which will be occupied by strangers along with the nation as well.

III. In Chap. 6 Isaiah gives a first person account of his being commissioned by God to prophesy to the Israelites. The commission came at a very traumatic time in Israel's history. King Uzziah's father had been murdered when Uzziah was only sixteen years of age in 810 BC. After the murder of Amaziah, Uzziah was chosen by the people to occupy the vacant throne. During most of his long reign of fifty-two years, until 758 BC, Uzziah lived in the fear of God and showed himself to be a wise, active and pious ruler. He never deserted the worship of the true God, and was much influenced by the prophet Zechariah, II Chron. 26:1-15. Isaiah was about thirty years old when Uzziah died of leprosy, and, of course, had known no one else as the supreme political leader of Judah throughout his entire thirty years. THE KING WAS DEAD! The event was so devastating to Isaiah that, in his profound sorrow, he looked to God for strength and stability. God did not disappoint the young man, for in a heavenly vision Isaiah was permitted to see the Lord of all universes sitting upon his seat of authority. God was on an exalted throne with a long robe which filled the entire dwelling place (Temple of God). God's attendants were celestial beings each with three pairs of wings. With one pair of wings they covered their faces motivated by humility; with one pair the feet were covered out of respect; and with one pair they flew about. When Isaiah observed the majesty and holiness of his Creator God, he at once recognized his own unworthiness in such an overwhelming presence. With this deep feeling of unworthiness, Isaiah saw one of the angelic seraphims take a live (hot) coal from the altar before God, touch the prophet's lips, and thereby purge Isaiah's sins making him innocent before God. The Lord asked in Isaiah's presence concerning who would be willing to represent the Lord in Israel. Isaiah volunteered immediately. "Here I am, send me," he said. God did send Isaiah to the Israelites to tell them what they must do to please the Lord. But with the commission God revealed a strange truth to him: Although Isaiah would announce God's truth to them, the Israelites would not hear and understand nor see and comprehend, Matt. 13:10-17. In other words, the people were beyond hearing and would continue to sin against God until Israel was completely destroyed (cease to be a nation). Only a remnant would survive as a stump for further growth later, Rom. 11:5-12, 33-36.

"O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out! For who hath known the mind of the Lord? Or who hath been his counsellor?

Oct. 14, 2001

"The Lord's Sign"
Isaiah 7-8

Couples Class
Wendell Alford,
Teacher

I. Please remember that we learned in Isaiah 1:1 that Isaiah's vision concerned, for an historical period, the reigns of Uzziah (who died in Chap. 6), Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah, all kings of Judah, the southern kingdom where Jerusalem was the capital. Chap. 7 begins with the events during the reign of Ahaz, son of Jotham. Jotham was the principal administrator of Judah when his father, Uzziah, was suffering his terminal illness, leprosy. He succeeded to the throne in 758 BC at the age of twenty-five and reigned for sixteen years in Jerusalem (until 742 BC). He was a contemporary of Pekah, king of the northern kingdom, Israel. Pekah ruled Israel for about thirty years from 759 to 730 BC. At age twenty Ahaz followed Jotham to the throne of Judah and reigned until 726 BC, for a total of sixteen years. Note that Ahaz in Judah and Pekah in Israel had an overlap in kingships for several years. In fact, Pekah in Israel reigned through most of the time of both Jotham and Ahaz's reigns in Judah. At this same time Rezin was king of Damascus (Syria). Rezin attacked Jotham during the latter part of his (Jotham's) reign (II Kings 15:37-38). However, his chief war was with Ahaz. Rezin collaborated with Pekah, king of Israel against Judah! When Ahaz became king of Judah, Rezin and Pekah had recently formed a league (treaty) against Judah, and they proceeded to lay siege to Jerusalem. The allies, Israel and Damascus, failed in their attack, but they did inflict a most severe injury on Judah by capturing Elath, a flourishing port on the Red Sea. Simultaneously the Philistines invaded the west and south of Judah, II Kings 16; II Chron. 28. Both Israel (Pekah) and Syria (Rezin) were angry with Judah (Ahaz), because the two former kings had requested that the latter join them in defeating Assyria (Tiglath-pileser) to the northeast. Ahaz refused to join them, and consequently Pekah and Rezin set out to take Judah, set up a puppet king, and then conquer Assyria as a combined force. Ahaz, frightened, appealed directly to Tiglath-pileser of Assyria, and Assyria won over Israel (northern kingdom) and Syria in 722 BC which was Israel's final fall as a nation. Now, even though Ahaz had won against the two enemies, Israel and Syria, he feared Assyria, his new ally. Immediately he began making gestures toward Egypt for help against Assyria. What a complicated mess! Spiritually speaking, Ahaz was the worst king that Judah ever had. He actually made molten images for Baalim, burnt incense in Hinnon Valley (on the west side of the city of Jerusalem), and even burned children in sacrifice to the fire god Molech, the god of the heathen whom the people of Israel drove from Palestine after returning back from Egypt under Moses and Joshua. He also sacrificed and burned incense on all the hills around the countryside where he had built worship places and idols identified with pagan gods, II Chron 28:1-4,19-27.

II. In vs. 3 of Chap. 7 in the midst of this political conglomerate, the Lord took the initiative through the prophet Isaiah. The Lord told Isaiah to visit with Judah's unGodly king Ahaz and to bring with him during the visit, Isaiah's son, Shearjashub (which means "has encamped in," i.e., "our present situation is only temporary.")

Isaiah was to meet with Ahaz at the end of the conduit (watermain) leading out of the upper pool (reservoir or water tank) which was reached by a road leading up to the fuller's field. (There textile workers fulled or scoured, cleaned and thickened cloth, to remove grease from it. Fuller's earth was also used in dyeing or changing tints of fabrics.) The fuller's field was chosen, because in the time of Isaiah, conversation there could be heard by many people who gathered around the elevation ringing the cavities from which fuller's earth had been mined and removed, II Kings 18:17,26. Of course, when two important people like the king (Ahaz) and the prophet (Isaiah) meet, there certainly would be a large audience to hear what was said. The Lord's message to Ahaz was, "Listen carefully and rest calmly, because though Rezin (Syrian king) and Pekah (Israel's king), "the two tails [stubs] of these smoking firebrands," vs. 4, have combined to attack you and set up a puppet king, such a puny effort will fail, vs. 6. The Lord told Ahaz to request a sign for assurance that such would happen, but Ahaz refused to ask for a sign. But the Lord gave a sign anyway, not to Ahaz, but to the entire house of David, vs. 13-14. The Lord said, "You [Ahaz], not only are you satisfied to exhaust the patience of my prophet [Isaiah], but do you think that you are enough to exhaust the Lord's patience as well?! Therefore, the Lord himself shall give you [house of David] a sign: Observe closely, a virgin shall conceive, bear a son and shall call his name Immanuel [God with us]," Matt. 1:22-25. There has been and is much controversy about vs. 14, but since Jesus the Christ is related to this vs. in Matthew's Gospel so explicitly, I have no problem in accepting as fact that the Lord through Isaiah was promising the Israelites (the offspring of Jacob, Gen. 28:13-15; 32:28) that indeed a virgin (Mary was eventually chosen.) would conceive and bear a son who would be called Joshua (Jesus, Savior), because he would be God and man (Immanuel). Without that Savior the entire world and all its inhabitants would be without any hope whatsoever.

III. In Chap. 8 the Lord instructs Isaiah to make a scroll and write in it concerning a promised second son to be born to Isaiah and his prophetic wife. This second son's name is to be Maher-shalal-hash-baz (which means "speed the spoil, hasten the booty," i.e., "the faster the successful war [turmoil] is fought, the sooner will be the receipt of what has been taken [by the winner]). The Lord continues by revealing that Assyria will be coming in war to overthrow all the Israelites all the way to the Mediterranean Sea. No matter how many surrounding nations Israel counsels with, such alliances will fail to save their beloved land. Even pronouncing that "God is with us" will not secure the future of Israel, vs. 10. A confederacy of nations is not pleasing their Lord God, but Israel's blasphemy against God is their refusal to respect the stone which God will lay as a chief cornerstone for God's spiritual salvation for all believers in his plan, vs. 14-15, Psa. 118:22-23; Matt. 21:42-46. Note carefully vs. 18, for the Lord there very plainly states that his directing the nation Israel's affairs is to be a sign for the world to know God's timetable for his plan for all humanity. Following the Lord's warning against the belief that there is safety in confederating with other nations, he warns the Israelites (and us) against putting ones trust in familiar spirits, vs. 19; Lev. 19:31; I Sam. 28:7-9. The time is coming when looking to the earth will cause Israel to curse their leader and God himself, but their vision will then look to God in truth and receive mercy!

Oct. 21, 2001

"Relief From God's Judgment"
Isaiah 9-10

Couples Class
Wendell Alford,
Teacher

I. Chap. 9 continues the theme introduced at the end of Chap. 8. The Israelites will be in despair and without earthly hope even though they declare that God is with them. At Matt. 10:31-35 Jesus made the information clear that if anyone (He was talking to the Jews, for see Matt. 10:5-6 where he began this instruction.) accepted him as the Messiah (Savior), they need not fear. Isaiah in 9:1 repeats the idea associated with the name of his first son, Shearja-shub, i.e., that Israel's time of despair will not continue forever. Their hopelessness, however, continues until even today, and will until the beginning of "that day," Isa. 2:12,17,19-21; Matt. 24:21, 29-30; I Thess. 5:2-4,11. Isaiah's prophecy abruptly changes to give a glimpse down the stream of time to the Christian Era when God brings about a drastic change in his relation with his beloved people, Israel. Matt. 4:12-17 relates this passage, vs. 1, to the beginning of Jesus' pronouncement of his service as God's Messiah to redeem those who would believe in him. He began by declaring, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near (at hand)." Isaiah states that that Good News is to begin there in Zebulun and Naphtali and then beyond Jordan to the nations (Gentiles). The entire earth will hear of God's glory, the Good News of God's spiritual salvation through his Son, Jesus Christ, Acts 1:6-11. The people who had been walking in darkness will see a great light, Rom. 16:25-26; Col. 1:25-27. Israel which has continued as a people in the earth, though scattered and without joy or spiritual satisfaction, will again rejoice and be also great. Before they accept Jesus as God, many Gentiles will have accepted God's love and forgiveness through Jesus Christ. After this "time of the Gentiles" (Rom. 11:25-32), God will break the chains of Israel's bondage (self-righteous and not depending upon God's mercy in Jesus Christ, Rom. 9:30-10:4). And who will be the one who will eventually break Israel's chains? They will finally recognize that for them [too] a child was born, a son [of God] God has given (sacrificed), and this Son God the Father has made to be Ruler over all, both Jews and Gentiles, Acts 15:9; Rom. 10:12. What a glorious day, for the nation Israel will declare that Jesus is indeed, Wonderful, Counselor, the Mighty God, the Everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace, Jn 14:5-7; Rom. 11:26. Jesus will reign forever, because God's desire (zeal, dedication) is that Jesus be so honored, respected, and worshiped, vs. 7. Israel will, however, continue to be trodden down by every people on earth until God begins "that day." God will continue his punishment of Israel for a long while, because they boast of their own righteousness apart from God's plan of redemption through his mercy and grace alone. The Jews' religious leaders take the lead in this refusal to accept God's Messiah (Savior), Jesus Christ. Their prophets lie and lead the Jews as a nation down ruinous paths. During this long period, God does not take his hand of judgment from them, because they are evil and self-destructive (eating their own flesh (children), vs. 20.

II. In Chap. 10 Isaiah returns to Israel's lack of social justice

which relate to the woes of Chap. 5. He decries the judges who do not render fairness to all citizens, to legislators who enact laws which discriminate against the poor, the widows and orphans. The prophet asks the questions: What will Israel do when God allows the severe period of desolation to subject the nation to the invasion of foreign forces? (See Matt. 24:15,21,27-31.) In this awful day, to whom will the Jews turn for help, to escape that which appears to be sudden, sure annihilation? Where will their material possessions be secure? [The events noted in this portion of Isaiah's prophecy are, in my view, to happen in the immediate future (through Assyria and Babylon) as well as at the second visit of Jesus to earth, at the beginning of "that day."] In vs. 4 Isaiah states that when the Assyrians sweep over the Palestinian area, God will not help them and relieve them from either being taken prisoners or slain in the defensive battle. Even this experience will not satisfy the Lord's anger caused by their continuing disrespect for God's will for them, and his hand of judgment is still against the nation of Israel. In fact, Assyria is to be the instrument for implementing God's anger against the Jewish nation, vs. 5. (See also a parallel situation regarding Joseph's revelation of God's intention in treatment by his envious brothers, Gen. 50:19-21.) Assyria will boast about their prowess in overtaking Israel and Judah, because the Assyrians do not realize that it is not their strength that gives them victory, but God's doing. Their victory is God's punishment for the godless Jewish nation which is hypocritical and unwilling to obey their Lord. They are to be beaten, taken as prisoners, doomed, damned, plundered, and trampled like mud in the street. Assyria will consider her victory over the Lord's people to be a stepping-stone to take over the whole world. [I believe that this attitude was not only held by the Assyrians, but will also be the motivation of the Evil One who is made known in II Thes. 2:3-8,16-17.] When God's use of Assyria is finished, God will punish them for what they have done to his people, vs. 12. The Assyrians will boast that their own power and wisdom won over God's people, broke down the strongholds, destroyed the people, and gathered for themselves Israel's and Judah's treasures. "We are great," they will say, "we are without a peer to subjugate us to their bidding!" But the Lord's position is that the Assyrians are like an axe which boasts itself as greater than the wielder of the axe itself. God promises to send a plague among the Assyrian military personnel making them weak and ineffective. In a single night their number will be so decimated that even a child will be able to count them, vs. 19; II Kings 19:32-36. Again in vs. 20 the prophet reveals that the Israelites, both of Israel and of Judah, will have a remnant who will trust the Lord, the Holy One of Israel, and who will not fear their enemies. Israel as a nation will be numerous, but only a few of them will be left and the rest integrated among those who do not claim to be associated with the Lord. Then the Lord, the Mighty One, will cut down the enemies of God's people, i.e., God's people who trust him and not their own strength. The enemies of God's people will fall as though they were axed by woodsmen in the cedars of Lebanon. As Isaac Watts puts God's reign: Jesus shall reign whe-'er the sun does his successive journeys run. His kingdom spread from shore to shore, 'till moons shall wax and wane no more.

Nov. 4, 2001

"The King and the Kingdom"
Isaiah 11-12

Couples Class
Wendell Alford,
Teacher

I. After assuring the Jewish nation that, although the Assyrians would defeat them, a remnant of the nation of Israel would thereafter return to the land promised to Abraham and his posterity. Beginning in Chap. 11 Isaiah is led of God to give attention to the one who will establish and administer the future kingdom which God will bring into being. In vs. 1 God promises through Isaiah that a "rod" or shoot will come forth from the "stem" or of the stock (lineage) of Jesse. A branch is to bear fruit (produce an offspring) out of the family of Jesse. It is interesting that Jesse is given here as the forefather of Jesus' humanity rather than the renown King David. Jesse (Heb., yishay, which means "uncertain") was the son of Obed who came from the family of Perez (also Pharez), one of Judah's twin sons by his daughter-in-law, Tamar (Thamer, KJV), Gen. 38:29. See in Matt. 1:3 where Tamar is listed in the genealogy of Jesus, the Messiah, our Lord. It is also noteworthy that Matthew begins his genealogy with Abraham rather than Jesse or even David. By doing so he includes both Rahab (the harlot) as the mother of Boaz (Booz, KJV) and Ruth (a Moabite or nonJew) as the mother of Obed who was Jesse's father and David's grandfather. Jesus was to be God's singularly chosen human being to be totally filled and completely controlled by God's Holy Spirit. Jesus is God (God was his Father), but he was altogether human, one who could be identified from a genealogical background with any human being, Acts 10:25-48. So, Isaiah's choosing Jesse rather than the great King David had, in my opinion, considerable relevance to God's New Covenant and Kingdom of God with Jesus as its King.

II. In 11:2 Isaiah stresses that the offspring of Jesse will be so permeated by God's will, the Spirit of God will control (rest upon) him that his every thought, desire and action will be those of God himself. He will be understanding, wise, able to counsel, powerful (Jesus' miraculous ability proved this to all except those who refused to make Jesus God's King rather than David, Matt. 12:22-25,42; 22:41-46.), and his fear (reverance or awe) of his Lord Father. Jesus' ability to judge will not be based upon what appears on the surface (outwardly), contrived evidence, or secondhand information. He will truly comprehend how the rich become wealthy by exploiting those who are without means to eke out even their basic needs. These wicked oppressors the new King will slay with the words of knowledge and wisdom. When this Godly King establishes his new kingdom, peace will be absolute. Wolves will lie down to sleep in the same proximity of innocent, defenseless lambs. Swift, voracious leopards will live together peaceably with the kids of goats. Old leo the lion will then not devour the delicious, fat cattle, and even the calves will comingle with the "king of beasts." Not only will there be ultimate peace among all the earth's animals (including mankind), but the carnivores such as lions will become vegetarians so that lions will munch grass like cows. Peace will be so in Jesus' Kingdom of God that infants will play with venomous snake eggs while the parent snakes observe the play without needed fear by the infants or the snakes. In fact, God's knowledge will

be so well known and practiced by all citizens and creatures that no hurt or destruction will happen to anyone or anything, Rom. 8:18-22,28,31. Keep in mind, however, that these conditions prevail only in the presence of, and because of, that offspring of Jesse, the coming King, Jesus, God's Messiah (Savior). And when is this glorious period to be experienced by those who hear and heed God's Good news? In vss. 10 and 11 Isaiah refers to that period as being "that day," the same reference mentioned previously in 2:2,12,17, (See 2:12-21 for "that day's" beginning.), 20; 3:7,18; 4:1,2; 7:18, 20,21,23; 9:14; 10:17,20,27. Please note that in 11:1 Isaiah does not refer to the coming forth of the Branch from Jesse as happening in "that day" during that reign of earth-wide peace, but that that root of Jesse will become an ensign (bearer of the standard of God's kingdom) from the Middle East to the rest of the world. During the period of the spreading of God's Good News (of the coming day of peace), the root of Jesse will take a rest, and that rest will be a glorious one, vss. 10-11. Then following that Gospel period, look at vs. 12, for there God's word to Isaiah is that the nations of the earth will take actions that will cause the "outcasts" of Israelites (all the Jews of the diaspora) to be gathered again (vs. 11, "a second time") to the land promised them (by God to Abraham). The Ephraimites (Egyptians through Joseph's two sons, Manasseh and Ephraim, who were adopted by Jacob, in effect, through his blessing Joseph in his final blessings of all his [Jacob's] twelve sons) were considered a special people by Israel. Joseph had married an Egyptian, and, therefore, Manasseh and Ephraim were one-half Egyptian. These two sons of Joseph were so highly regarded by the Israelites that two of the geographic areas were assigned to them along with the other tribes when the entire people occupied Palestine after their Egyptian slavery experience of about 430 years, Exod. 12:40; Acts 7:6; Gal. 3:17. And why am I giving so much attention to the Egyptians here? Egypt, during Jimmie Carter's presidency, was the first of the Near Eastern countries to curtail ("the envy also of Ephraim shall depart," vs. 13) its envy toward Israel under Anwar Sadat. Highways will be used to bring the Jews from every direction back to the land promised to Abraham and his descendants after him, Gen. 13:14-18.

III. In Chap. 12 Isaiah again turns to the Kingdom of God's Messiah (the Kingdom of God), and where he again labels its period as "in that day." At that time the Jews (and we believers in Jesus also) will say, "O Lord, I will praise thee: thou wast angry with me, thine anger is turned away, and thou comfortedst me," vs. 1. This the Jews will proclaim, I believe, when they at the end of the horrible tribulation recognize as a nation or people for the first time that our Lord Jesus has been their true Lord all these millennia. "Behold," they will say (as each of us did when we first recognized Jesus as the forgiver of our sins and the Lord of our lives), "God is my salvation [through Jesus]; I will trust and not be afraid: for the Lord Jehovah is my strength and my song; he also is become my [emphases mine - WA] salvation," vs. 2. "Sing unto the Lord; for he hath done excellent things: this is known in all the earth. Cry out and shout, thou inhabitant of Zion; great is the Holy One of Israel in the midst of thee," vss. 5-6.

November 11, 2001

"The Judgment of Babylon"
Isaiah 13-14

Couples Classs
Wendell Alford,
Teacher

I. Chap. 13 begins a series of judgments on nine nations which surrounded the Judah-Israel area. This series includes Isaiah's prophecy as we have it organized in Chaps. 13-23. The King James translators refer to these judgments as "burdens," and the Hebrew means literally a load heavy to be borne. Not only had these nine nations sinned against God, but a part of their sin was their sinning against his people the Jews, Gen. 12:1-4; 22:16-18. A panoramic view of Biblical history indicates that God chose Abraham and his descendants through Isaac, Jacob and Judah to be an evangelistic people to practice God's will, and, further, to influence through example and proclamation all other peoples of the earth. It is likewise apparent that the Jews failed by their own volition and actions, but instead, rebelled against God's plan for them, let alone influence others on God's behalf. But, although the Jews failed God, God has not forgotten his promise to Abraham's posterity through Judah, Deut. 7:8; 10:12-15; Rom. 11:25-32. That arrangement prevailed through God's First Covenant, and now we believers relate to God through his only begotten Son, Jesus Christ, in God's last covenant with mankind, the Second Covenant, Heb. 1:1-3; 8:7-13. However, if we as a people (believers or trusters in Jesus as Savior) do not continue to influence others for God by example and proclamation, we too will be severed from God's Second Covenant, Rom. 11:18-24. One of the mysteries of the Bible is that God not only evaluates the spiritual welfare of each individual, but he also judges the spiritual (their relationship to keeping God's will) of nations (the political and cultural groupings of the earth's peoples), Matt. 25:31-46. This phenomenon is discussed particularly by Isaiah in his prophecy in Chaps. 13-23. The prophet gave attention to Judah and Israel in Chaps. 1-12.

II. Historical records vouch for the fact that Babylon did conquer Palestine, including what had been both Israel and Judah. Of course, Israel fell to Assyria under Salmaneser in about 722 BC when Hoshea was its last king, II Kings 17:5-14. Judah remained a nation through the reign of Zedekiah in 586 BC. Judah's capital, Jerusalem, was taken and destroyed by Babylon under Nebuchanezzar at that time, and all of the leading politicians, professionals and artisans were taken as captives back to Babylon, Jer. 39:5-10. Later, when the Babylonians were defeated by the Persians under Cyrus, the Jews were permitted to return to Jerusalem in 536 BC and even to rebuild the Temple, II Chron. 36:22-23; Ezra 1:1-4; 6:16-18. It is evident from the Biblical account that the Jews underwent severe hardships under the Babylon Empire. Perhaps the most disheartening element in the captivity was the removal of the mainstream Jewish population from the seat of their religion, Jerusalem. A real concern of theirs was whether Jehovah God would be with them in Babylon, or would he remain in Jerusalem? Should they be content with their lives in Babylon and resolve to live normal lives, or should they rebel against Babylon and try to escape? Jeremiah was a prophet of God to Israel at this time, and he told them by letter to lead normal lives and feel settled, Jer. 29:4-13. In fact, God looked

upon Nebuchadnezzar as being his (God's) servant, Jer. 25:9, in placing his people in captivity.

III. Isaiah in Chap. 13 condemns Babylon for its evil and sinful ways against God's people, the Jews. However, there can be no doubt that two occurrences are intended in this Chap. Isaiah, the son of Amoz, is told to go to a high mountain to yell and motion to the multitudes to come from the whole earth to witness the Lord's coming destruction. Notify all the people that the day of the Lord is now ready and that a wide destruction is about to begin. The evidence of the coming catastrophe will cause people's knees to tremble; their hearts will melt, and fear will seize their innermost beings. They will experience physical pain as severe as that which grips an expectant mother as uterine contractions occur in the delivery of her child. Their amazement will be so pronounced that their faces will become ashen. This day of the Lord will see the Lord dispensing wrath in his fierce anger. He will make the earth desolate by destroying the sinners then living. Isaiah then (vs. 10) indicates what will happen which causes such consternation and turmoil among all the earth's inhabitants. The stars will no longer shine; the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not shine. These deviances in the activities of the natural elements are recorded elsewhere in Scripture, Joel 2:30-32; Zeph. 1:14-17; Matt. 24:24-30; Acts 2:19-20; Rev. 6:12-17. Note that in vs. 11 the Lord is saying that at this time he will "punish the world for their evil, and the wicked for their iniquity; and I will cause the arrogance of the proud to cease, and will lay low the haughtiness of the tyrants." The heavenly order will be shaken, and the earth will not follow its circumscribed orbit as the Lord demonstrates his wrath in "the day of his fierce anger," vs. 13. Then note that in vs. 17-22 the immediate historical pertinence of Isaiah's prophecy becomes evident. [I believe that, in order to understand the double meaning (to happen twice) of the message concerning the tribulation, Matthew noted at the end of 24:15, (where Jesus quoted Dan. 9:24-27), "whoso readeth, let him understand." WA]

IV. In Chap. 14 the Lord announces that eventually he will show mercy toward Israel and that strangers (Gentiles) will be joined with them, vs. 1. Then Satan who has had ambition through the ages to usurp God's power will be dethroned forever, Rev. 20:10. The people of Assyria and Babylon are easily identified with this rebellious spirit against the authority of God Almighty. Babel means "confusion" in Hebrew, and Babylon is the Greek form of the word. The city of Babylon was a very old city, and its physical destruction as promised by Isaiah was realized by Cyrus in 539 BC under Darius. Jer. 51:37 also attests to Babylon's destruction as does Isaiah at 13:22. Babylon has come to be a term referring to confusing loyalty to Jehovah God with Satanic influence. Originally called Shiner (country between the two rivers), the inhabitants there built a tower which they believed would unite them (make them equal) to God, Gen. 11:4; Rev. 16:19; 17:5; 18:10. The spiritual confusion is finally eliminated at Rev. 18:21-24. My hope is built on nothing less than Jesus' blood and righteousness; I dare not trust the sweetest frame, but wholly lean on Jesus' name.

November 18, 2001

"The Judgment of Moab"
Isaiah 15-16

Couples Class
Wendell Alford,
Teacher

I. In Chaps. 15-16 Isaiah, after shining God's light upon Israel and Babylon, now turns to another of Israel's neighbors, Moab. Geographically Moab was a rich nation in the location where the nation of Jordan is located in 2001, lying north and south from Syria down to the south end of the Dead Sea (today's Jordan also continues on farther south to the Gulf of Aqaba). The major portion of John the Immerser's teaching and proclamation took place in the area east of the Jordan River, the area of old southern Moab. The people of Moab began within a peculiar circumstance. Abraham and Lot, son of Haran (Abraham's brother) and Abraham's nephew, had been down in Egypt but had later returned to Bethel in Palestine. There the two who were rich as herdsmen were over-grazing the immediate area. Abraham told Lot that he could choose between Canaan on the west of the Jordan or the land to the east of the Jordan. Lot chose the rich plain on the east, and so, Abraham stayed in Canaan. In the area where Lot chose were located several kingdoms, including Sodom and Gomorah. Lot lived in Sodom near Gomorah. In a war between the several nations there, Lot was taken captive along with all his possessions. Abraham came over and rescued Lot and afterward the sinful Sodom and Gomorah were destroyed by God because of their sinful lifestyles (homosexuality), Gen 19:5,24. As Lot and his family were fleeing from the fire and brimstone which God used to destroy the two sinful cities, Lot's wife was killed (turned into a pillar of salt because of her reluctance to leave the area). Lot then took his two daughters and left Zoar on the plain, went up to the mountains, and lived in a cave with the two daughters for safety, Gen. 19:28-38. One of the sons whom Lot sired at that site was named Moab from whom the Moabite nation came.

II. Following the leadership of Moses and Joshua after the Egyptian slavery experience, God appointed what were known as judges among the tribes of Israel. The last judge was Samuel, last because the Jews demanded a king (like the heathen nations) rather than retain the theocracy wherein God ruled directly through the judges and priests. During the period (c. 1250 BC) of the fifth recorded judge of Israel, Gideon, there occurred a severe famine in southern Israel. Unable to feed his family a man named Elimelech who lived at Bethlehem, took his family and belongings across the Jordan River and emigrated into the land of Moab. Elimelech, along with his wife Naomi and their two sons, Mahlon and Chilion, lived in Moab for ten years. While there Elimelech and the two sons died leaving Naomi alone with her two Moabite daughters-in-law, Orpah and Ruth. Naomi learned that the drought had ended in Israel so she decided to return to her old home in Bethlehem. Naomi assumed that the two daughters-in-law would remain in Moab, but both wanted to go with her. In the process of leaving, Orpah changed her mind and stayed, but Ruth begged, "Entreat me not to leave thee, or to return from following after thee; for whither thou goest, I will go; and where thou lodgest, I will lodge: thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God," Ruth 1:14-18. They returned together to Bethlehem where Ruth married a kinsman of Naomi, Boaz. Ruth, the

Moabites delivered a son of Boaz named Obed who became the father of Jesse, the father of King David, Matt. 1:5-6. Jesus, our Lord, knew all of the above, and it is no wonder that he agreed to heal an ill Gentile, Matt. 15:21-28, and in John 4:3-26, Jesus communed with an adulterous Samaritan woman (a human mongrel according to Jewish tradition) who had sneaked to a well for needed water. Jesus was an offspring of a Moabite who had declared, "- - - and thy God [shall be] my God."

III. Isaiah in Chap. 15 portrays a vital contrast of Moab of the Old Covenant with the extended love of God through Jesus Christ, the Savior of God's New Covenant, John 3:16; Heb. 1:1-8. One of the miraculous aspects of human history is the unusual change in various of mankind's relating to their Creator. God has never nor will he ever change, but people do change in their concern for pleasing Almighty God. There was a time when God simply gave the Gentiles up because of their insistance upon doing contrary to God's plan for humanity, Rom. 1:24-32 (homosexuality, etc.). However, through Jesus Christ God demonstrated unprecedented love and grace. Through God's only begotten Son now anyone can know God's forgiveness. Isaiah stated clearly that under the Old Covenant the Moabites were to be destroyed. The land would become deserted waste and unable to support human physical life. Moab in the early biblical period was a thriving agricultural and stock supporting land. Remember that Israel had had periods of drought and a severe lack of life support. The Bible states that the Israelites during Jacob's life were required to escape to Egypt for sustenance. Also, as noted above, during the period of the judges the Bethlehem-Jerusalem area became so arid that crops would not grow, forcing the inhabitants to flee to Moab where food was plentiful. In fact, the abundance could have been one factor in the proud and haughty attitude of the Moabites, 15:5 and 16:6. In the midst of Isaiah's prediction of Moab's destruction because of its judgment by God (burden, 15:1), the prophet reveals God's future mercy through the righteous judging of an offspring of David, 16:5; Acts 15. The Moabites were a religious people as indicated in 15:2, but when they went to worship their pagan gods, there was no satisfaction in their worship. Also, in 15:2, notice is made of their having a place of worship on Mount Nebo where Moses was permitted to see the land promised to him and the Israelites by God through a covenant made with Abraham. Worshipping false gods will cause the fields to languish and their vines to wither, though they be watered with bitter tears. The summer fruits will not mature, and the normal fall harvests will not take place. The gladness and joy which accompany a plentiful field will not be experienced. When the time comes for the treading out of the grapes for wine, there will be no singing or chanting to the stomping of the feet. The Moabites' bowels will growl for lack of food therein. Again, because of this further judgment, a revival of idolatrous worship will not bring about any solution to the problem, Gen. 6:3. The Lord, through Isaiah, foretells that the remainder of the Moabites will be very meager, and even those who survive will be feeble. There is no Moabite nation, as such, in existence today, but there are many people who worship other than God the Father and Jesus His Son and expect eternal life, Matt. 7:21-23; John 14:6; Rom. 9:30-33; II Tim. 3:1-5.

I. Damascus, capital of Syria, in early biblical history was a city which later designated the entire area lying to the northeast of Palestine (Syria). The Hebrew word used for the area is "Aram" which literally means "high," and properly defined the great mass of that high tableland which, rising with sudden abruptness from the Jordan and the shore of Lake Gennesaret, stretches, at an elevation of no less than 2000 feet above sea level, to the banks of the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers. At Num. 23:7 Aram is noted as the land to which Balak, the king of Moab, sent for the seer (prophet) Balaam to curse Israel so that Moab could defeat Israel in battle. (On this occasion Balaam's donkey spoke with a human voice against the seer's attempt to contradict the Lord's will.) Mesopotamia also refers to this same general area as in Gen. 24:10 where Abraham sent his servant to bring back to Canaan a wife for Isaac. Abraham did so because it was to Haran in Mesopotamia where he and his father, Terah, had moved first from Ur where the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers join before flowing into what is now the Persian Gulf. Aram, Mesopotamia, Damascus, and Syria all name the same general geographic area at different historical periods. Today the nation which occupies most of this land is Syria, and the western most portion is the Golan Heights which was taken by Israel from Syria in 1967. However, a portion of eastern Syria in Isaiah's time could be part of what is today Iraq. The first mention of Damascus as a city in an inscription is dated in the 16th century BC, Gen. 14:14-15. It claims to be the oldest continuously occupied city site in the world (other cities make similar claims), and is now the capital of Syria. In ancient times Damascus was widely known as a caravan center. The city was captured and plundered many times, by Assyria, Babylonia, Israel under David (II Sam. 8:5-7), Rome (Pompey in 64 BC), and the Turks in 1516 AD. Remember also that our brother, Paul, was converted there and proclaimed the Gospel thereafter, Acts 9:1-25.

II. Interspersed in the judgment of Damascus is a warning to Ephraim which means many things throughout the Scriptures. Ephraim is a city (town) in II Chron. 13:19 and John 11:54; a tribe of Israel at Num. 1:33 (this tribe was named to honor Joseph's second son, Gen. 41:50-52); a person, i.e., Joseph's son; a mountain range east of the Jordan River at II Sam. 18:6 where a notable forest grew and where the fatal battle was fought between the armies of David and of his son Absalom; Ephraim is used to refer to the ten tribes of Israel (the northern kingdom), Hos. 5:9,13; and, lastly, to Israel to include all Jews in the messianic lineage from Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Judah, Jer. 31:9-10. I believe that the Ephraim in Isaiah 17 speaks of and to the northern kingdom which, at the time Isaiah wrote his prophecy, allied with other nations against their kinsmen, the nation Judah to their south.

III. In our consideration for today, another nation is judged for its sins, and especially its sin against God's people, the Jews. (Refer again to Gen. 12:1-4 where God covenanted with Abraham to

bless those who blessed Abraham and his descendants and curse those who cursed the patriarch and his descendants.) Ethiopia was condemned by Isaiah in this passage. That nation (people) is Cush in Hebrew and occupied an area primarily in northeast Africa, but secondarily a number of Cushites were integrated in northern Palestine and eastward all the way to the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers, II Sam. 18:32-33. The Cushites were so named, because they were descendants of Cush who was a son of Ham. Recall that Ham was a son of Noah and therefore a brother of Shem and Japheth, Gen. 10:1,6. (Cush also had a brother named Canaan for whom the Land of Canaan was named.) The Jews were descendants of Shem as were all the Semites.

IV. We come now to consideration of Isaiah's prophecy against Damascus (Syria) and Ephraim (Samaria or northern kingdom of Israel), as well as Ethiopia. In Chap. 17 Isaiah pronounces God's dislike for the deeds of Damascus and Samaria, and what bad things will happen to them as a result of God's displeasure. The judgment (burden) will be the destruction of the capital of the empire of Syria, Dasmascus. The capital is to be utterly destroyed, become "a ruinous heap." Also other cities of Aram will be forsaken by their inhabitants, and become as open country again where animals will graze and have no one to kill them for meat or raise them for fur. At the same time the fortress (safe place) which Ephraim has been will no longer be true. In other words, Israel's glory will be curtailed at the same time Syria falls. (Assyria accomplished this prediction in the short term.) Even Jacob's glory will be as one whose body has become ill so that severe weight loss has occurred. Grain fields will be so poor that a harvester will pick one kernal here and another kernal there by hand. The grapes will be so sparse that gleaning will not be done. Olive trees will have two or three olives on each tree at the very top of the most fruitful branches. During this catastrophic period a citizen of Israel will long for a proper relationship with Jehovah God, their Maker, but only a remnant will truly seek God rather than worship idols. The nations of the world will eventually seek to destroy Israel's land, but God will rebuke those nations for the sake of his covenant people. Those nations will fly powerless through the air like chaff during winnowing time, or like a weed tumbling across the prairie powered by a whirlwind. The final day of judgment for both Israel and the nations who have persecuted her will begin with much trouble, but the dawn will see Israel's redemption, Rom. 11:25-26.

V. Chap. 18 singles out a woe for the land beyond Ethiopia (Cush), i.e., "beyond the rivers [thereof]." These lands (nations) who send ambassadors across the waters to a nation [Israel] whose land was divided and "trodden down." I believe that, although Ethiopia is used here as an example of a nation that has exploited and mistreated the people of Israel and their land, all of the earth's peoples will be so judged. There is not only an exploitation of Israel but also other sins committed which accompany those deeds that dishonor God's will on earth. Undoubtedly, the principle which we have noted before in Isaiah is true in Chaps. 17-18, i.e., although there was an immediate fulfillment of Isaiah's prophecy, there will be a like fulfillment when such conditions prevail again.

December 2, 2001

"The Judgment of Egypt"
Isaiah 19-20

Couples Class
Wendell Alford,
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I. The people of Egypt before the Arab conquest in the 7th century AD spoke the Copt language. The word "Copt" is the westernized form of Arabic qubt and Greek aigyptios, and the Greek term signified the language and people of Egypt before the 7th century AD. The ancient people of Egypt were descendants of Noah's son, Ham. As we noted, Ham had two sons, Cush and Canaan (there were two other sons, Mizraim and P(h)ut), Gen. 10:6; I Chron. 1:8. Egypt was a nation, as such, before Israel, because Israel, in essence, became a national entity (people) while under bondage in the land of Egypt. Under Moses and Joshua the Israelites went back to the land which God promised to Abraham and his descendants. There the nation of Israel, under God's power, attained a geographic area which completed what we usually associate with a constituted nation. The Bible identifies Egypt as an area populated by Ham's descendants, Psa. 78:51; 105:23,27. Although Israel was late as compared with Egypt in becoming a full-blown nation, God's people beginning with Abraham were related in various ways with Egypt. God told Abraham that his descendants would serve and be afflicted by a people for four hundred years, Gen. 15:13-18. That people turned out to be the Egyptians. At that same time God promised Abraham that his descendants were given "this land, from the river of Egypt (Nile) unto the great river, the river Eupharates."

II. Perhaps the most intimate and close relationship between an Israelite and an Egyptian was at the request of Sarah, Abraham's wife. Sarah was barren after she and Abraham had been married for many years (c. 13), and Sarah could not stand a household without children any longer. Her solution appears very strange to us who have been born from above, led and empowered by God's Holy Spirit. Shortly after Abraham left Haran in Aram for Canaan land in the area of Bethel and Ai, his family experienced a famine which forced him to go down into Egypt for relief, Gen. 12::4,8-13:3. Abraham left Egypt very rich in cattle, silver, gold, and, apparently in servants. Among his servants was a young Egyptian maiden named Hagar who became Sarah's personal maid, Gen. 16:1. Sarah begged her husband Abraham to engage in sexual intercourse with this personal maid, Hagar, in order to bring a child to the household. Abraham complied with Sarah's wishes and a son, Ishmael, was born as a result. This episode made Abraham the father of a son who was one-half Egyptian. Well, Sarah, even before the child was born, despised the one who was carrying the child, and with whom she herself had requested her own husband to mate. Sarah's hatred caused her to "deal harshly with her (Hagar) until the personal maid fled into the wilderness toward Shur," Gen. 16:2-6. The Lord sent a messenger to tell Hagar to return to Sarah and do her bidding. The angel promised Hagar that she would have a son, and, further, he would "be a wild man; his hand will be against every man, and every man's hand against him," Gen. 16:12. The promise also indicated that Ishmael's descendants would "not be numbered for multitude," Gen. 16:7-12. Ishmael did become a hunter and fathered twelve sons with "a wife out of the land of Egypt," Gen. 20:21. Abraham was grieved

later when Sarah insisted that Hagar leave the household when Ishmael was about seventeen years old. Hagar took her son Ishmael eastward to Paran, toward Egypt, in the northern Sinai Peninsula, and found for him the Egyptian wife who bore him the twelve sons, Gen. 25:12-15. The religion of Islam founded by Mohammed (c.570-632 AD) grew primarily out of the descendants of Ishmael (Arabs).

III. With the above background in mind, we now look at Isaiah's prophecies concerning Egypt. It is well again to refer to the over 400 years which the family of Jacob and his descendants lived in Egypt to become a people of about one and one-half million strong. Also, Jesus, our Lord, was taken to Egypt for his personal safety as an infant. But during the intertestamental period between Malachi and Matthew, Israel suffered grievously at the hand of Egypt. Before Isaiah's day and just after the children of Israel had returned to the promised land, two of their kings, Ahaz and Hezekiah, made an alliance with Egypt against Assyria (Damascus) and found her to be an unreliable ally. Isaiah in Chap. 19 announces at the outset that Egypt's chief sin against God was idolatry. It was no happenstance that the plagues brought against Egypt by God to persuade the Egyptian leader to permit the Israelites to leave Egypt. The Egyptians had considered many creatures and things to be their gods, including the bull, the frog, the scarab (a bug), the fish, many varieties of birds, the sun, the River Nile, etc. Although raw idolatry is passe in Egypt, the ignorance and superstition of the Moslem religion is the dominant religious persuasion. As Isaiah prophesied, Egypt today is far less affluent than it was in Isaiah's time. The delta of the Nile afforded much rich soil for crops such as papyrus which was one of Egypt's chief exports. Today Isaiah's prophecy has obviously been mostly fulfilled. Egypt is in dire circumstance financially. In fact, beginning at 19:16 the term "in that day" appears six times in the chapter which announces the end time. At that time that glorious nation (Egypt) will be "like unto women," i.e., weak and fearful because of the Lord's shaking of the land. Many historians believe that the "alter of the Lord in the midst of the land of Egypt," is the Ark of the Covenant which has been lost for many centuries. In 19:21-25 a positive attitude by the Lord toward Egypt appears which causes me to believe that the "sign for a witness" is the symbol of Jesus' sacrifice, the cross. At Acts 2:10 when God's Holy Spirit founded the beginning of the working of believers in Jesus as God the Father's Messiah (Savior), representatives from Egypt were there to witness God's miracle through Christ. The witness for Christ began in Egypt and believers became established where such notables as Athanasius, Origen and Augustine were produced. In that day there will be open communication and trust among Egypt, Assyria, and Israel. Israel will be the throne of the Lord's authority, and even though the Lord will smite Egypt, Egypt will respond to the Lord's love and be healed, 19:22. The Egyptians and Assyrians will be blessed by the Lord. Now Chap. 20 reverts to the time of Isaiah's immediate concerns, except for reference to the three year period during which Isaiah was to walk to and fro naked as a sign and wonder to both Egypt's and Ethiopia's shame. They both (as will Israel) realize that alliances with other peoples rather than with Jehovah God are in vain. The first three years of the awful tribulation period will suffice as a wake-up signal for both countries. (Note the return to "in that day" in 20:6.)

I. Remember that Isaiah prophesied for a long time, during the reign of four kings of Judah or about sixty years (758-698 BC). It is probably for this reason that the prophet returns to the opposition to God's will by the Babylonians (note Chaps. 13-14). Although Babylon is not mentioned by name until vs. 9, the context indicates that "the desert (plain) by the sea" referred to is Babylon. The judgment coming on Babylon is promised "as whirlwinds from the south, comes from the desert [Negev], from a terrible land." The language in 21:2 is repetitive to give emphasis to the awfulness of what will happen to Babylon. The distressful vision which was declared to Isaiah was: "the treacherous dealer dealeth treacherously, and the spoiler spoileth." Then Isaiah announces who will be the spoilers, the Medes and Persia (Elam). Isaiah's reaction to the terrible-ness of what he sees in store for Babylon is a pain in his lower abdomen (like a woman in childbirth); hearing and seeing the calamity in the vision brought distress and dismay; his heart wavered; and nighttime rest and solitude became dreaded fear. God told Isaiah to warn the Babylonians to cease from their sumptuous living (banqueting) and rise up to don warring garb and instruments. Put up a watch-tower and man it with someone with keen eyesight, for the enemy is coming! The watchman was employed, but grew weary from what he thought was an unnecessary assignment. And then, suddenly, the defeating armies arrived just as God's judgment had been foretold by Isaiah, the prophet of God. This prophecy was accomplished by the founder of the Persian Empire, Cyrus, and who also beat the Medianites in 559 BC, II Chron. 36:22-23; Dan. 6:28. The livid account of the banquet (Isa. 21:5) and Belshazzar's (Babylon's) defeat are outlined in Dan. 5 where the Babylonians are referred to as Chaldeans (Cushites). Note the later date of these events as compared to Isaiah's time (Isaiah's prophecy in 758-698 BC and Belshazzar's banquet in 538 BC). [Again, let's consider the multiple application of the fall of Babylon in its historical context. Isaiah states plainly in 21:9 that, "Babylon is fallen, is fallen; and all the graven images of her gods he hath broken unto the ground." According to Dan. 5:30-31 this defeat (falling of Babylon) took place by the slaying of Belshazzar on the very night of the banquet by Darius, the Mede. Now, note at the very end of the apostolic creation of the New Covenant message from God Almighty (through Jesus Christ, God's only begotten Son) what John, the apostle as a prisoner on the Isle of Patmos, penned in Rev. 16:19; 17:5-6, 17-18; 18:7-10, 20-24; 19:2-3. I believe that the Babylon to which John (God's Word) refers to is certainly not the ancient Babylon, but the city of Rome, for it was Rome's political power that had imprisoned John on Patmos for his witness concerning Jesus as God's Savior (Rev. 1:9), who had martyred God's Apostles and many other witnesses for the same reason, and which sat upon seven hills, Rev. 17:9. The nucleus of the ancient city of Rome lay on seven hills on the left bank (west) of the Tiber River. Romans also sportily watched in glee as some of the first believers in Jesus were run out into arenas for lions to mutilate and devour while the same arenas were illumined by those "outlaw" believers who had been

clothed in inflammable garments, soaked in tar and pitch, tied to poles, and lit for the occasion! I believe that God can forget sins confessed in Jesus' name (Eph. 4:32), but the last Babylon's (Rome's) sin will be remembered by God, Gen. 18:20-21; Rev. 16:19; 18:5. Isaiah prophesies the destruction (fall) of Babylon, but God's word through John the apostle plainly tells us who are led by God's Holy Spirit that there is another Babylon, Rome, which is, just at the end time, to be completely destroyed because of her grievous sins against God. This destruction is to come in a single day by fire, Rev. 18:8. Is Rome still in existence today which has brought much and continuous reproach to God's people through the millennia since Jesus died for our sins? [I believe so, II Thes. 2:7. - WA]

II. Isaiah, beginning at 21:11 and through vs. 17, condemns Dumah and Arabia. Dumah was a son of Ishmael, Gen. 25:12-15; I Chron. 1:29-31, and therefore the name of the principal place or district inhabited by that tribe. The area is the northern portion of the Arabian Peninsula, and the Ishmaelites were later joined by the family and descendants of Esau, Jacob's twin brother. In Chap. 22 Isaiah's judgment again turns to Jerusalem. The holy city is portrayed as eating, drinking and making merriment without realizing that a most terrible time is imminent, at the very door. Vs. 22:14 is revealing in that Isaiah is told that Jerusalem (the Jews as a people, 22:22) will not be forgiven (sins purged) until they die (cease from being what they have been). Note the first vs. of this Chap. along with this vs. 14, and compare with Jesus' words at Mk 8:35 and Matt. 24:16-17. We should rejoice that this Isaiah passage is a part of God's word which the Jews respect and cherish. At the beginning of "in that day" they will understand and embrace Jesus as Lord, I believe, Rom. 11:25-36; Rev. 7:1-17.

III. [As a parenthetical in Isaiah's listing of God's judgments against Judah, Israel and their neighbors, I wonder how God views our nation, the United States of America, and its conforming to the Lord's will. Remember that at the outset of our Isaiah study, we stated that according to Matt. 25:32 nations will be judged by God. While many who helped found our nation were motivated by monetary gain, many came to this portion of the North American continent to follow their individual religious consciousness and to worship God accordingly, instead of by order of national dictates. The bulk of those who came professed Jehovah as their Lord and Jesus as their Savior. On that foundation the nation overthrew its sponsor, Great Britain, and became a nation, as our Declaration of Independence states: to assume national status "as nature's God entitles," and that all men "are created by their Creator - - ." Washington became the first president in 1789 and the first ten amendments to the new constitution were adopted in 1791. The first of these amendments prohibited the congress from establishing any national religion. Today our society has become far more pluralistic than at its beginning, and therefore many American citizens are Jewish (6,024,000), Roman Catholics (62,400,000), Bahai (786,000), Moslems (5,780,000), Buddhists(2,701,000+), Greek Catholics (6,342,000+), Baptists (40,140,000+), Lutherans (8,500,000), Mormons (4,500,

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000), Methodists (13,300,000), Pentecostals (10,200,000), et al. According to a late census only 50.8% of American children live in families where both biological parents are present and all children were born after the marriage. Census officials reflect powerful societal trends that cannot be easily reversed: gradual migration from rural to cities and suburbs, growing ranks of working mothers, declining church and community influence, expanding financial (from governmental bodies) assistance to poor households, and greater tolerance of divorce and single parenting. City living provides greater anonymity where there is less societal pressures to remain married. Beginning in the 1960's more and more women were entering the labor market, thereby leaving unwanted marriages financially possible. In 1996, U.S. expenditure for welfare was 37,810,000, and in 2000 the figure had dropped to 32,333,000. On June 4, 2001 the national debt was \$5,807,500,000,000, and each citizen's share was \$20,353. During the 12 mos. ending in March, 1998 there were 2,244,000 marriages and 1,135,000 divorces. The researcher who gave me this marriage-divorce ratio indicated that this ratio has been decreasing for the past 3½ years, but suggested that an unknown factor is "live-ins" who are not legally coveted in marriage. March 18, 1963 the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that it is unlawful to recite the Lord's Prayer or Bible verses in public schools. In March of 1984 the U.S. Senate rejected permission to have prayer in the public schools. In 1992 the next president of the U.S. was elected by 43% of the votes cast. One of his promises during the campaign was that homosexuals would be given minority status in the armed forces, i.e., their choice of sexual activity (Biblically contrary to God's will for mankind) is equivalent to the pigment differences of any person's skin. Fortunately, the new president's promise was defeated in the U.S. Legislature. In January of 1973 the U.S. Supreme Court made abortion legal (had the nation's official blessing) in this country thus overturning laws in 46 states in the union. There were 1,598,000 legal abortions in the U.S. in 1988 for 58,192,000 women ages 15-44 (latest data findable). The Housing and Urban Development personnel are threatening groups (two, 1994) of U.S. citizens with fines and jail terms for objecting to public housing being located in certain neighborhoods for homeless persons who are mentally ill, drug addicts, alcoholics, and patients with AIDS. It is HUD's position that it has the legal prerogative to apply the 1988 Fair Housing Amendments Act which prohibits housing rights to the disabled. They interpret "federally disabled persons" to include the mentally ill, alcoholics, drug addicts, and AIDS sufferers and therefore legally protected as disabled persons. When our nation was founded and for many years thereafter, God blessed it so that it became the most powerful military nation the world has until now ever known. During that early period, the majority of U.S. citizens trusted Jehovah God and his Son for strength. They had a spiritual stamina and moral drive as a nation, spiritual leadership and proudly so, and God evidently blessed the nation's efforts and aspirations. When the Russian Empire fell around 1990, the U.S. became the world's only "super power." Would Isaiah as God's prophet have a burden (judgment) for us today? I believe that he would.- WA]

Dec. 16, 2001

"Tyre and the Tribulation"
Isaiah 23-24

Couples Class
Wendell Alford,
Teacher

I. Isaiah in Chap. 23 turns from judgment against Babylon, Dumah, Arabia, and Jerusalem to the maritime area of Phoenicia on the east coast of the Mediterranean Sea, particularly the city of Tyre. That area today is in the nation of Lebanon which lies adjacent to the northern boundary of Israel. Tyre and Sidon are located in the southern half of Lebanon, and Beirut and Tripoli in the northern half. All four cities are coastal and are involved in seagoing commerce. (Jesus referred to both Tyre and Sidon at Matt. 11:21-22, indicating that the people there would have responded positively to his message if they had had the same opportunity as the people of Israel. At Mk 7:24-30 Jesus went to Tyre and healed a Greek Syrophenician (Gentile) woman's daughter who was mentally ill.) When the Israelites came from Egypt to the promised land, the various tribes were assigned geographical areas. The northwestern most area which included Tyre was assigned to the tribe of Asher, and Josh. 11:8 tells of its capture. However, during the capture and occupation of Canaan, not all of the natives were exterminated. This fact is evident when the period of judges is examined. In fact, during David's and Solomon's reigns, the people of the Tyre-Sidon area were allied with the Israelites and furnished much labor and building materials for building the Temple and houses in Jerusalem, II Sam. 5:11-12; I Kings 7:13-14; I Chron. 14:1; II Chron. 2:3, 7-18. The chief tactic of the Israelites in overpowering the Canaanites was "divide and conquer." Among peoples who were primarily clans in organization, this method of integration was most successful.

II. A word should be said about the important contribution which the ancient Tyre area people made to subsequent human civil concerns. Written language as we know it today is based on an evolutionary process of written communication to which the Phoenicians made an early and significant contribution. Most language historians agree that the Semitic (offspring of Shem) component of the Phoenicians took the Hebrew alphabet, which in the beginning did not have alphabetic representatives of the vowel sounds, and completed essentially the alphabet we have today, i.e., the Phoenicians were the originators of our modern day alphabet. That contribution to human communication is very important. This arrangement for people, not only to converse on a temporary basis (voice and gesture), but also to make permanent, ideas (in writing) for subsequent generations to know, is an earthly factor that only the Creator, Jehovah, could have brought to pass. We believers cannot overemphasize our ability to retain information in permanent form since the Good News itself in written form has been codified and made the personification of our Lord Jesus. John's Gospel begins by equating Jesus as God the Father's communication to all mankind. "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God," John 1:1. Here Jesus is equated to God, and to the Greeks unknown Divinity, the Logos. The Greeks knew about God but did not know him personally as is evident at Acts 17:16-34 when Paul witnessed in Athens on his second journey as

a missionary. Incidentally, it was at Tyre where Paul was warned by the believers there not to return to Jerusalem, Acts 21:2-6.

III. Isaiah identifies Tyre as a center of trade and commerce, for from there and to there many ships exchanged the goods and peoples from north Africa and south Europe as well as lands to the east, e.g., India and Persia. In 23:3 Isaiah refers to Tyre and Sidon as the "[Wal]l-mart of nations" with ships sailing to Tarshish and Cyprus (Chittim) like Egypt. Much grain from fertile river valleys found its way through the port of Tyre to arid lands where grain was not available, but where metal ores and other products were. At 23:13 Isaiah makes reference to a very important historical fact about Tyre. An acknowledged historical fact is that the Assyrians in their conquering probes from Assyria all the way across Israel to the shores of the great Mediterranean Sea, came to the village of Tyre and attacked it. At that time it was located on a small offshore island to which fresh water had to be brought from the mainland for human consumption. (The Hebrew name for Tyre was Tsar which means "rock.") The city is now on a rocky peninsula and also overflows onto the mainland, not as strong today as when the Assyrians under Shalmaneser besieged it and sought to make it a military stronghold. Later, the great Babylonian king, Nebuchadnezzar, swept into Tyre with an enormous military force. This overthrow is detailed in Ezek. 26 where the dust from the horses and chariots covered the people and their homes. A part of Ezek. 26 speaks of the utter destruction of Tyre as does the last chapter of Isaiah which we are considering today, Chap. 24. Tyre's destruction is given by Isaiah as a time that one can only associate with the awful beginning of "the Day of the Lord." This fact is indicated in 24:1 where Isaiah makes plain that the judgment which he is about to reiterate (for see earlier at Isa. 13 concerning the absolute destruction of Babylon during the day of the Lord, vs. 6 and 9) against Babylon (See also Rev. 18:2 which we discussed last Sunday.) is also applicable to Tyre. At this time the Lord will "make the earth empty, make it waste, turn it upside down, and scatter the [earth's] inhabitants." All people will be in the same circumstance: people-priest, slave-owner, maid-mistress, buyer-seller, lender-borrower, and creditor-debtor. The pride of the proud will be extinguished so that there will be no basis for haughtiness. The reason for this absolute and final judgment of Jehovah God is because the entire earth is defiled by all of the earth's people's ignoring God's instructions bearing God's will for them; they have broken God's eternal covenant (agreement) with mankind, vs. 5. The "city of confusion is broken down," vs. 10. Even though the whole earth has "heard songs, even [purportedly] glory to the righteous," Isaiah declares those songs to be without value, "the treacherous dealers have dealt treacherously; yea, the treacherous dealers have dealt very treacherously." [emphasis mine - WA] Those who try to flee to a place of safety and away from the destruction will find no place to hide, [but for trusters in Jesus as Savior see: Lk 21:25-28; I Thess. 5:1-11; I Cor. 15:51-58, in that order, please.]

A mighty fortress is our God, a bulwark never failing
Our helper He, amid the flood of mortal ills prevailing.
Let goods and kindred go, this mortal life also.
The body they may kill; God's truth abideth still;
His kingdom is forever, [and trusters in Jesus are citizens.]

Dec. 16, 2001
Supplement

"Tyre and the Tribulation"
Isaiah 23-24

Couples Class
Wendell Alford,
Teacher

The eleven "burdens" or judgments, of Isaiah (God's prophet) on the nations in the Middle East, Isa. 13-23; Matt. 25:31-46.

A. Babylon (Isa. 13:1) denotes false or mixed religions, idolatry. The tenth of the Ten Commandments is "Thou shalt not covet" which states that one should not want what belongs to another, or serve amassing material possessions. Materialism is idolatry, Exod. 20:17; Col. 3:5.

B. Palestine (Isa. 14:29) denotes religious faith which has been ritualized and no longer a true or vital faith, Rev. 3:14-17.

C. Moab (Isa. 15:1) denotes "formal" religion with a form of godliness but denying its real power, II Tim. 3:1-5.

D. Damascus (Isa. 17:1) denotes compromise, Col. 2:8-16.

E. Ethiopia (Isa. 18:1) denotes taking God's Word to other nations, missions, Matt. 28:18-20.

F. Egypt (Isa. 19:1) denotes the world and all of its physical attributes, Matt. 16:26; John 10:22-30; 17:9,14,20.

G. Persia, the later Babylon, (Isa. 21:1) denotes effluent wealth, abundance of property, and love of luxury, Jas. 2:1-3.

H. Edom or Duma (Isa. 21:11) denotes fleshly lust, Rom. 1:24-28; Gal. 5:19-21; I John 2:15-17.

I. Arabia (Isa. 21:13) denotes war for settling disagreements and thereby establishing peace. Real peace is through spiritual peace found in faith in God's Son, Jesus Christ, i.e., doing God's will, Jas. 4:1-5.

J. Valley of Vision, Jerusalem, (Isa. 22:1) denotes the reliance upon governmental or political power to solve the world's problems, Lk. 23:4,20-14.

K. Tyre (Isa. 23:1) denotes commercialism, corporate activities who handle massive goods and huge amounts of money, Rev. 18:2-3.

An afterthought: In examining Israel's neighbors one can see their struggle to follow the instructions of a perfect, righteous, loving Creator God. As believers in God's Son and trusting the guidance of God's Holy Spirit, we can see the wisdom of God in providing for us His marvelous, unexplainable grace, Rom. 11:25-36. The world would be a wonderful place to live if God's Good News, the Gospel, were embraced and practiced by every world citizen. But, as we know, and as Israel has experienced, such is a real struggle even for us who trust our Lord Jesus, Rom. 7:1-25. Matt. 28:18-20 is so important!!!

Dec. 30, 2001

"The Kingdom of God"
Isaiah 25-27

Couples Class
Wendell Alford,
Teacher

I. After declaring God's wrath in Chap. 24 where utter destruction of the world system is prophesied, Isaiah then, in Chaps. 25-27, gives attention to the Day of the Lord after the initial tribulation period. These three chapters correspond roughly to Rev. 19-22 whereas the first 18 chapters of Rev. are details of several passages in Isaiah such as Isaiah 24, cf. Isa. 13:6 and 24:21-23 with Rev. 6:15-17. Now compare Isa. 25:8 with Rev. 21:4, and note that the two prophecies are substantially foretelling the same period, "in that day" or "the day of the Lord." Chaps. 25-27 give evidence of God's kingship in the earth immediately following the tribulation period. There are those who define God as love alone and therefore incapable of such severe destruction as noted in Isaiah and Revelation, but they are simply discounting the awfulness of mankind's sin as they have and are disregarding the holy God's will for them. God hates what mankind's sin has done to make people miserable and unhappy. God is jealous to have people again please him by abiding completely in his instruction and will, Exod. 20:5; Deut. 4:24; Nahum 1:2-7; John 14:15-21. For the believers in and trusters of Jesus as Savior, the only way to evade God's wrath is by confessing his or her sins to God and relying completely upon God's grace through Jesus Christ, I John 1:8-2:2,12, for the forgiveness of those sins. (See also Prov. 3:11-12;13:24; I Cor. 3:15-17; Heb. 12:5-11.)

II. It appears strange after the terrible time of trouble depicted in Chap. 24 that the wonderful praise should be given in the glorious exultation of God so poetically expressed in Chap. 25 of Isaiah. Here is praise to God for deliverance, a song of sheer delight. As Isaiah viewed the majestic kingdom of God coming on earth, his heart was full to overflowing, for God is revealing to the prophet the culmination of the Creator's promise, even to Adam and Eve after they disobeyed God in the paradise of Eden, Gen. 3:15. God is hereby being praised and worshiped for his faithfulness after so many millennia, I Thes. 5:20,24. (For evidence of God's trustworthiness as compared to mankind's see Psa. 116:11; 118:7-8.) After the tribulation, all will be changed so that cities will not need walls and military protection, 25:2,12, and the entire earth's population will glorify Jehovah God, the Creator. Weeping will be very evident during God's purging of the earth, but when the morning comes, there will be joy, Psa. 30:5. God will supply every person's need with pleasant things in boundless supply, 25:6. During the long period (Rev. 20:2-5), there will be no sorrow, death, or rebuke, because the Lord himself has declared such to be truth, 25:8 and I Cor. 15:54,57-58. The earth's people will gladly, openly proclaim that the God of Abraham and Father of our Savior, God's only begotten Son, Jesus, is who they profess him to be. "This is the [true] Lord; we have waited for him, we will be glad and rejoice in his salvation," 25:9, "in that day." After thousands of years while the Jews have omitted God's Savior (God's Anointed One) from their attempt to worship Jehovah, they now sing praises to God's Christ, Jesus, 26:1. God's salvation through Jesus will be the only protection needed or available. During the long night the Jews desired

to see God's salvation, but refused to accept Jesus for who he is, 26:9,13. However, during the time of great trouble (the tribulation) Israel will be in excruciating anguish (as in childbirth) and realize that their seeking to please God through the law has been in vain, 26:18. Late in Chap. 26 God reveals a deep mystery to Isaiah in vs. 19. Dead people will "wake and sing" as though they had not been separated from others. The earth will literally "cast them out" even though they have "dwell[ed] in the dust," cf. Ezek. 37:3-14; Rom. 11:25-32. Only the eternal, wise God could reveal such!

III. While the phrase "in that day" appears only once each in Chaps. 25 and 26, it appears four times in Chap. 27 at vss. 1,2,12, and 13. To me this phrase is synonymous with "the day of the Lord" and refers to the return of Jesus Christ to earth to cleanse the planet and establish his promised kingdom of God. [John the Baptist proclaimed when Jesus came to earth the first time: "Repent ye, for the kingdom of heaven (of God) is at hand," Matt. 3:2. I believe that God could have established the kingdom that is yet to come if the Jews had accepted Jesus when he first came, but they did violence to God's plan at that time, Matt. 11:7-19.] But note in 27:1 of Isaiah, the prophet reveals that God will in that day "slay the dragon" who has enticed mankind to do contrary to God's will. This arrangement will create an absolutely new climate for the people of God. In Rev. 20:2-6 the apostle John is told by God that same message which was told to Isaiah earlier, Isa. 27:1. Satan will be bound (neutralized) so far as people's actions and attitudes are concerned for a long period (1000 years). Then before Satan's final severance from mankind's activities, he will be loosed again for a period. Following that period Satan will be "cast into the lake of fire and brimstone - - - and shall be tormented day and night for ever and ever," Rev. 20:10. The Lord himself will dwell in the very presence of his people (us and all who trust Jesus), Rev. 21:22-27; 22:3-5.

IV. In 27:2-4 Isaiah uses the figure of a vineyard to contrast with the same figure he first used in Chap. 5. Remember that there God refers to Israel as "my beloved" whom he placed in a fertile field after preparing the land for a bountiful harvest. But Israel did not respond positively to God's preparation and plan. God asked the question: "What could have been done more to my vineyard [Israel], that I have not done in it? Wherefore, when I looked that it should bring forth grapes, brought it forth wild grapes?" (Isa. 5:4) Isaiah then outlined a list of woes which indicated that Israel was untrue to the Lord's will. Jesus could very well have had these passages in Isaiah in his mind when he told the apostles the parable of the vineyard. The vineyard [now all who are led of God's Spirit] needs workers, and it makes no difference when one decides to work there. God will give eternal life to the early Israelites under the Old Covenant who had faith (in the promised Messiah) as well as those who exercise faith in Jesus as Savior during this period of grace, John 1:7; Matt. 20:1-19. No matter if the first or last (Jews or Gentiles) faith in God through Jesus makes one a citizen of God's heavenly kingdom with eternal life. In fact, the mystery of Isa. 27 is that God will bring Israel back to himself, Rom. 11:25-32. We trusters in Jesus are to remember what Jesus said, "I am the vine, ye are the branches and can do nothing apart from me."

Jan. 6, 2002

"The Future Reflected in the Past"
Isaiah 28-30

Couples Class
Wendell Alford,
Teacher

I. The astute observer who stated that "history repeats itself" could have been revealing an insight into the prophet Isaiah's message introduced in Chaps. 28-30 of his prophecy. One recurring theme in Isaiah's message is the woes of God brought about by the disobedience of his people. Chap. 28 declares a woeful disposition upon the people of the Northern Kingdom of Israel. Israel is called Ephraim in 28:1, referring to that portion of Canaan named after Joseph's second son, Gen. 41:50-52. Ephraim means "faithfulness" which Joseph felt truthfully characterized God's blessings upon him in Egypt after his having been sold as a slave by his brothers through spite and hatred. Isaiah must have used Ephraim to indicate the irony of Israel's response to God's love and grace following his delivery from Egyptian bondage. This response is pictured by Israel as a glorious, beautiful flower which had faded even though that flower was growing in a fertile valley. The Israelites were led by a proud group of leaders who were drunks, overcome with wine. The leaders in 28:8 are pictured as a group of slobbering drunks seated around conference tables too drunken to make wise, or even any, decisions to guide God's people in God's way. The wine and strong drink had them vomiting and depositing filth on the tables. The leaders act as infants, unable to render sound teaching. In 28:5 the term "in that day" gives evidence that Isaiah had in mind not only the events then taking place, but also the day of the Lord's wrath and the establishing of his kingdom on earth, the day of rest, Heb. 4:9. The beginning of the day of rest is to involve God's judgment, 28:6. But even before the beginning of that day, God will reveal precept upon precept, line upon line, here a little and there a little (God's Word), Isa. 28:13; John 1:1-5. The Jews will be given a very unusual sign, "For with stammering lips and another tongue will he (God) speak to this people," 28:11. Just after Jesus our Lord returned to our heavenly Father, the Spirit of God fulfilled that prophecy at Acts (and Joel's at 2:28-32) 2:17-18. Peter's first message after Jesus' departure continues Joel's prophecy (Acts 2:19-21) also revealing the first part of the day of the Lord even as Isaiah's message reveals. Isaiah at 28:12 states bluntly that, even though God proves the reality of his love and mercy through Jesus Christ (Acts 2:36), Israel will not listen, Acts 3:24; 4:3. I believe that God wanted the "another tongue" incident to be unique to the apostolic period for emphasis. Such activity was abused in the first years of the church, I Cor. 14:21-25.

II. Isaiah condemns Israel (the Northern Kingdom) in Chap. 28, but he tells Judah (the Southern Kingdom) that they are scorning Ephraim (28:14) while they, too, are to see God's wrath. Although God will lay in Zion (David's stronghold) a foundation, a precious corner stone, the Jews will defy God's plan by choosing death (spiritual) rather than accept God's plan of redemption, an awesome, unusual act, 28:21. Chap. 29 begins with a reinforcing of the woe due the Southern Kingdom, Ariel (Jerusalem). Ariel means literally "lion of God," and obviously here Isaiah is using the term to refer

to Jerusalem as the chief city of God's people or the "hearth of God," i.e., where burnt offerings were offered to God. Here Isaiah is revealing that God will permit the Southern Kingdom to be invaded and overthrown even as will happen to the Northern Kingdom. Israel was overcome as a nation in 721 BC by Assyria and Judah in 586 BC by Babylonia. Therefore, Jerusalem (Judah) should not be haughty. Many nations will be the enemies of Jerusalem, even as the dust surrounding her. Her destruction will be in "an instant, suddenly," 29:5. The occasion will be to the people of Jerusalem like a horrible nightmare. To the nations fighting the Jews it will be like a sleeping hungry man who dreams that he is eating voraciously only to awaken still with hunger pangs, 29:8. Even so will the Lord pour out upon the Jews a deep sleep as one unconscious through consuming too much alcohol, 29:10,13; Psa. 69:22-23; Rom. 11:8-11. Israel as a people will remain asleep even though a book (God's Word) is made available to them, 29:12-18. Note very carefully Isaiah's prophecy at 29:18 which meshes exactly with Rom. 11:25-36, but such will not happen until "in that day," 29:18! "In that day shall the deaf (Jews) hear the words of the book, and the eyes of the blind shall see out of obscurity, and out of darkness," Rev. 5:6-13. Isaiah in 29:19-24 reads like the Blessed Attitudes of Jesus at Matt. 5:3-12.

III. In Chap. 30 Isaiah begins a condemnation (woe) of God's children who are rebellious in turning to Egypt for counsel and strength instead of relying upon the Lord. They are putting their faith in plans made without regard to God's Spirit, and in so doing they add sin to sin. Depending upon the strength of Pharaoh will bring only shame and confusion. The immediate danger to Judah was the Assyrians, but the prophet states plainly that the Jews' problem was their rebelling against their God through lying and not practicing the law of the Lord. The Jews could have confessed their sins and God would have been faithful and just to forgive their sins. God was the same then as he is today, and we too have the same promise they had, I John 1:9. Our relationship with God has been even more vividly demonstrated through God's having sacrificed his own Son to redeem us. We have more than the Law, we have a full revelation of God's merciful grace, John 1:17-18; Eph. 2:4-10; Heb. 1:1-3. Nevertheless, we are prone to forget God's promise to be with us and supply our every need even as the Jews did in Isaiah's time. When these thoughts come to us, we should consider the fowls of the air and the lilies of the field, Matt. 6:24-34. In every case we are being Christlike when we depend upon God through Jesus, his Son and Savior. God is ever faithful, even when our faith in him is tested, I Cor. 1:9; II Thes. 3:3. Isaiah's pronouncement concerning Judah's reliance upon Egypt was that such was to be in vain for security. Though the Israelites should send donkeys and camels laden with what to God was contraband for bribery, the Egyptians' strength would "sit still," 30:6-7. Only God can bring genuine and lasting deliverance for his people. Only the voice of the Lord can defeat the enemies of his people, 30:30-31. And sometimes our lack of patience, waiting upon the Lord, can be a real hindrance in serving the Lord and receiving his promises. Self-effort can have dire results.

Jan. 13, 2002

"The Shadow of the Rock"
Isaiah 31-33

Couples Class
Wendell Alford,
Teacher

I. Chap. 31 continues the woe (condemnation) of God upon the Jews who, in their fear of Assyria to their east, turn to Egypt to their west for help. Isaiah's admonition was that Israel's salvation was really a spiritual problem, not physical might. Jesus said that God is Spirit, and those who worship (honor God's will) him must do so in spirit, unflinchingly, John 4:24. The Jews were, according to Isaiah, depending upon their own ingenuity for strength against Assyria. They were literally playing both ends against one another to protect the middle, themselves. God's people (us) are not to depend upon their (our) own strength even though they (we) have nuclear armament. All of the physical strength mankind can muster is less than a pittance and not to be compared with the Creator's who made them. Humanity stands completely vulnerable to the Jehovah God who made them and holds them accountable to be and function according to his own design and will, Rom. 9:6-33. This context couches Isaiah's pronouncement that "Now the Egyptians are men, and not God; and their horses flesh, and not Spirit. When the Lord shall stretch out his hand, both he that helps shall fall, and he that is helping shall fall down, and they all shall fall together," 31:3. Isaiah goes on to quote the Lord: When a lion with hungry offspring comes for a sheep for food, a host of shepherds cannot deter the beast with loud noises. If only the Jews would yield to the Lord's strength, the Lord of hosts would come down to uphold their cause, i.e., if their cause were equal to their Lord's cause, 31:4-5; Lk 11:13; John 14:13; 15:16; I John 5:14. The plea of the Lord is that his people will return to him, and thereafter he will protect them and pass over them with protection, 31:5. Then Isaiah glimpses again to "in that day" when all, every man, shall turn from idols of their own making and God's people's enemies will be brought low, 31:7-9; II Kings 19:32-37.

II. Chap. 32 presents information which contrasts with the preceding chapter as though one leaves one room furnished in one decor and enters another room in an entirely different decor. Isaiah reveals in that second room that a king will come forth who will reign with justice, who will provide a shelter from the tempest, provide life-giving water in the spiritually dry earth (John 4:14), and afford a shadow from the weariness of a hot noonday sun. That shadow will be from a Rock. Here we probably should examine some passages having to do with the Rock and Jesus, Psa. 118:22-26; Matt. 21:42-46; Eph. 2:4-20; I Pet. 2:4-10. The eyes of those who seek and find rest with this Rock will not be blurred, and their ears will receive and conform to the message they hear, 32:3. Chap. 32:5-8 in the King James translation is somewhat difficult to understand. The Living Bible makes the message clearer in the language we speak today: "In those days the ungodly, the atheists, will not be heroes! Wealthy cheaters will not be spoken of as generous, outstanding men! Everyone will recognize an evil man when he sees him, and hypocrites will fool no one at all. Their lies about God and their cheating of the hungry will be plain for all to see. The smooth tricks of evil men will be exposed, as will

all the lies they use to oppress the poor in the courts. But good men will be generous to others and will be blessed of God for all they do." Isaiah then, for the second time in his prophecy (see Isa. 3:12,16-4:1), gives special attention to the part the women played in the evil condition of the Jews in Isaiah's time. The prophet invites the women to hear and heed his message regarding God's position of woe on the Israelites. He characterizes the women as complacent and as those who do not realize that, although vines are planted, there will be no harvest. At 32:10-12 Isaiah pictures the Jewish women as candidates for fear, because they signify that all is well by their attitudes in dress and body display. (cf. vs. 12 here with the words of Jesus at Lk 11:27-28 and Lk 23:26-31, and Paul at I Tim. 2:9; and Peter at I Pet. 3:3.) But judgment will come producing righteousness, bringing peace, quietness, and assurance even in the midst of catastrophic hail (destruction from above).

III. Isaiah in Chap. 33 prophesied about the mistreatment of two of God's major concerns, people especially related to him by covenant and the land where they lived and which supported their physical well-being. God was and is concerned about his people's diet and the soil and water which support that diet. Much of the Law is devoted to the food which the Jews were to eat. In fact, the Jewish diet was interwoven with religious rituals in Hebrew worship, e.g., Lev. 7. While the diet laws had practical implications, they were to remind the Jews that Jehovah God had first priority in all they did or thought. However, these dietary laws became a spiritual diversion as is evident from Jesus' admonition at Matt. 9:10-17; 23:25-26. We believers in Jesus as the Messiah (Savior) are free from the dietary laws of the Old Covenant, Rom. 14:17; I Cor. 8:8; I Tim. 4:1-5. Concerning conserving the soil of the earth which God created, God's Word early made mankind a steward of it, Gen. 2:15. The earth also has a special affinity with human beings, because God created humankind's physical being from it, Gen. 2:7. And so, Isaiah made the eighth woe in this series of woes against those who spoil the earth, especially Jerusalem and God's covenant people there. In particular, Assyria was the people against whom the woe was directed, but the application is still applicable, I believe. My belief is based upon God's everlasting covenant with Abraham and his descendants through Isaac, Jacob, and Judah, Gen. 12:1-3. And, of course, Jesus, our Savior, came through that lineage as far as his physical, human nature was concerned. It is important to note Gen. 12:3 when God promised to bless those who give positive treatment to Abraham's posterity through Isaac and curse those who do not. God through Isaiah is saying in Chap. 33 that those who spoil his people will God destroy. (See also Lev. 19:18; Rom. 12:19-21.) Armament sometimes forces temporary peace between foes, but only God's way through Jesus Christ will ever bring permanent peace on earth. Isaiah states as much in 33:24.

O sometimes how long seems the day, and sometimes how weary my feet;
But toiling in life's dusty way, the Rock's blessed shadow,
how sweet!

Beneath the cross of Jesus I fain would take my stand,
the shadow of a mighty rock within a weary land;

would meet again until after election - Vets!
assignment today; Chaps. 31-33 + on Nov. 13 Chaps. 37-36

YA

Oct. 30, 1994

"The Shadow of the Rock"
Isaiah 31-33

Couples Class
Wendell Alford,
Teacher

I. Chap. 31 continues the woe (condemnation) of God upon the Jews who, in their fear of Assyria to their east, turn to Egypt to their west for help. Isaiah's admonition was that Israel's salvation was really a spiritual problem, not physical might. Jesus said that God is Spirit, and those who worship (honor God's will) him must do so in spirit, unflinchingly, John 4:24. The Jews were, according to Isaiah, depending upon their own ingenuity for strength against Assyria. They were literally playing both ends against one another to protect the middle, themselves. God's people (us) are not to depend upon their (our) own strength even though they (we) have nuclear armament. All of the physical strength mankind can muster is less than a pittance and not to be compared with the Creator's who made them. Humanity stands completely vulnerable to the Jehovah God who made them and holds them accountable to be and function according to his own design and will, Rom. 9:6-33. ^{v. 13-2}
This context couches Isaiah's pronouncement that "Now the Egyptians are men, and not God; and their horses flesh, and not Spirit. When the Lord shall stretch out his hand, both he that helps shall fall, and he that is helping shall fall down, and they all shall fall together," 31:3. Isaiah goes on to quote the Lord: When a lion with hungry offspring comes for a sheep for food, a host of shepherds cannot deter the beast with loud noises. If only the Jews would yield to the Lord's strength, the Lord of hosts would come down to uphold their cause, i.e., if their cause were equal to their Lord's cause, 31:4-5; Lk 11:13; John 14:13; 15:16; I John 5:14. The plea of the Lord is that his people will return to him, and thereafter he will protect them and pass over them with protection, 30:5. Then Isaiah glimpses again to "in that day" when all, every man, shall turn from idols of their own making and God's people's enemies will be brought low, 31:7-9; II Kings 19:32-37.

→ Col. 3:5

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Read 32:2

Read 32:7

Do to end
Read

they use to oppress the poor in the courts. But good men will be generous to others and will be blessed of God for all they do." Isaiah then, for the second time in his prophecy (see Isa. 3:12,16-4:1), gives special attention to the part the women played in the evil condition of the Jews in Isaiah's time. The prophet invites the women to hear and heed his message regarding God's position of woe on the Israelites. He characterizes the women as complacent and as those who do not realize that, although vines are planted, there will be no harvest. At 32:10-12 Isaiah pictures the Jewish women as candidates for fear, because they signify that all is well by their attitudes in dress and body display. (cf. vs. 12 here with the words of Jesus at Lk 11:27-28 and Lk 23:26-31, and Paul at I Tim. 2:9; and Peter at I Pet. 3:3.) But judgment will come producing righteousness, bringing peace, quietness, and assurance even in the midst of catastrophic hail (destruction from above).

III. Isaiah in Chap. 33 prophesied about the mistreatment of two of God's major concerns, people especially related to him by covenant and the land where they lived and which supported their physical well-being. God was and is concerned about his people's diet and the soil and water which support that diet. Much of the Law is devoted to the food which the Jews were to eat. In fact, the Jewish diet was interwoven with religious rituals in Hebrew worship, e.g., Lev. 7. While the diet laws had practical implications, they were to remind the Jews that Jehovah God had first priority in all they did or thought. However, these dietary laws became a spiritual diversion as is evident from Jesus' admonition at Matt. 9:10-17; 23:25-26. We believers in Jesus as the Messiah (Savior) are free from the dietary laws of the Old Covenant, Rom. 14:17; I Cor. 8:8; I Tim. 4:1-5. Concerning conserving the soil of the earth which God created, God's Word early made mankind a steward of it, Gen. 2:15. The earth also has a special affinity with human beings, because God created humankind's physical being from it, Gen. 2:7. And so, Isaiah made the eighth woe in this series of woes against those who spoil the earth, especially Jerusalem and God's covenant people there. In particular, Assyria was the people against whom the woe was directed, but the application is still applicable, I believe. My belief is based upon God's everlasting covenant with Abraham and his descendants through Isaac, Jacob, and Judah, Gen. 12:1-3. And, of course, Jesus, our Savior, came through that lineage as far as his physical, human nature was concerned. It is important to note Gen. 12:3 when God promised to bless those who give positive treatment to Abraham's posterity and curse those who do not. God through Isaiah is saying in Chap. 33 that those who spoil his people will God destroy. (See also Lev. 19:18; Rom. 12:19-21.) Armament sometimes forces temporary peace between foes, but only God's way through Jesus Christ will ever bring permanent peace on earth. Isaiah states as much in 33:24.

Isa. 5-11 and 14-25
series of
climaxes
from
smaller
from
smaller

Assyria
with
Sabbath

23:1-5

Elizabeth
Chapman
beneath the
cross of Jesus
Stanger / 43

Beneath the cross of Jesus I fain would take my stand, the shadow of a mighty rock within a weary land; a home within the wilderness, a rest upon the way, from the burning of the noon-tide heat, and the burden of the day. I take, O cross, thy shadow for my abiding place -- my glory all the cross!

O sometimes how long seems the day, and sometimes how weary my feet; But toiling in life's dusty way, the Rock's blessed shadow, how sweet!
Beneath the cross of Jesus I fain would take my stand, the shadow of a mighty rock within a weary land; a home within the wilderness, a rest upon the way, from the burning of the noon-tide heat, and the burden of the day. I take, O cross, thy shadow for my abiding place -- my glory all the cross!

Jan. 20, 2002

"All Nations Become God's Kingdom"
Isaiah 34- 36

Couples Class
Wendell Alford,
Teacher

I. Isaiah reiterates a recurring theme of his prophecy at the beginning of Chap. 34, i.e., all nations are subject to God's wrath and the indignation of the Lord. Simply put, nothing living or inanimate, will escape God's judgment. Even those who deny the very existence of God (Fools they are, one and all, Psa. 14:1; 53:1-6) are subject to his will. All of the nations' armies, navies and air forces are as naught, because the physical bodies of all military personnel are fragile and their mental and emotional determinations cannot withstand the awesome fear the Lord can instill, Rev. 6:12-17. Isaiah's language in 34:2b shifts the tense of the verbs to the past tense to indicate that God's intent and action is already as good as finished; he has utterly destroyed all of their armies, and he has delivered them to the slaughter. This cataclysmic action by God will cause the bodies of those using armaments against God's people to die, decompose and send forth an extremely offensive odor to be transmitted through the air. Their blood will cause the mountains to dissolve as the armies fall one by one, like leaves falling from trees burdened by the onslaught of winter, or figs so ripened that they no longer can cling to their mother tree. The place setting for this calamity of the Lord is given in 34:5-6. The Lord's vengeance will be expressed in Idumea or Moab, an area where Esau's descendents settled around the southern end of the Dead Sea, Gen. 32:3. There the fat of the slain armies will settle the dust of the wilderness (desert and bare mountains). In 34:8 Isaiah refers to this destruction as "the day of the Lord's vengeance, and the year of recompences for Zion (Jerusalem and the Jewish people) and for the cause of God's people." All those written in God's book (Mal. 3:16-17) will withstand God's retribution on the earth's unbelievers, Rom. 8:1,31,38-39; Rev. 20:6.

II. Having introduced God's salvation in the midst of his judgment at the end of Chap. 34, Isaiah follows in Chap. 35 with the announcement of the coming of a special kingdom honoring God's people because of their trusting him and his promise, Heb. 11:39-40. The barren wilderness will become fertile again, and from bare soil will beautiful roses spring so that the desert will rejoice with its restored ability to be like Sharon, the fertile tract of land which lies between the Jordan and the Mediterranean Sea. In 35:1 "the desert shall rejoice and blossom as the rose." Because of God's sure promise (Heb. 6:17-20), weak hands are to be strengthened and the wobbly knees are to be strong. Fearful hearts are to be assured of well-being by the fact that God will surely, as he has promised, come with vengeance against the enemies of his people and save those who are trusting him, Rom. 12:19-21; II Thes. 1:5-10. I believe that Isaiah in 35:5-6,10 is referring to the eventual recognition of Jesus as their Messiah (Savior) by the Jews as a people, [He is already ours.], Matt. 11:1-15; Rom. 11:25-36. When that kingdom of God is accepted by the entire earth, then peace will prevail. God will provide at that time abundant sustenance for everyone, even as he did for Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden at the beginning, Gen. 1:29; Rev. 22:2. God will then live with redeemed mankind

and remove all sorrow, misery and turmoil from their presence, Rev. 21:2-3. As Isaiah put it, lame men will leap like a fawn, the tongue of the dumb mute will sing a beautiful song of praise. In the middle of the desert clear, potable water will spring forth, and where the ground has been parched and dusty, a pool of life-giving water will form a lake. Through the desert will streams flow with reeds and cattails growing along their banks. Natural resources will be so abundant that everyone will have no need to practice greed and avarice at the expense of others. Their redeemed spirits will make such an existence fulfilling, enjoyable, satisfying, and pleasurable. Zion (Jerusalem) will be the seat of governing, Isa. 35:10; Rev. 21:2, 10-27.

III. As is true of much of the message of Isaiah, there are immediate, contemporary, historical significances to the people then living, but also there are interwoven into these short-term truths, prophecies foretelling God's plans for his people through the end of the ages. In Chap. 36 Isaiah returns to events which are about to take place which affect his covenant people, the Jews. They are about to suffer political and military confrontation with the powerful forces of the Assyrians. Here the prophet calls peoples, times, events and individual names specifically to mind. The events noted in Chap 36 are also chronicled in II Kings 18:13-37 and II Chron. 32:1-19. Note thereat II Kings 19:5-7 and II Chron. 32:20 also. This hostile approach of the Assyrian King Sennacherib to Judah happened when Hezekiah was king of the Southern Kingdom where Jerusalem was the capital. Hezekiah was the twelfth king of Judah and ascended to the throne at age 25 in BC 726. He was the best king of all Judah's kings, II Kings 18:1-8. When Hezekiah had been on the throne for only four years, Assyria under King Shalmaneser overran Israel (Northern Kingdom), sacked it, and carried the Israelites captives away from their homeland. Ten years later Hezekiah saw the might of Assyria under Shalmaneser's successor Sennacherib, and saved Jerusalem by stripping the Temple in Jerusalem of much of its gold, silver and treasures and giving them as homage to the Assyrian king. Shortly thereafter Sennacherib undertook to return the Assyrian armies to Palestine to take Jerusalem, because Hezekiah had made an alliance with Egypt and stopped sending a regular homage tax to Assyria. Sennacherib's field commander, Rabshakeh, was sent to Hezekiah from Lachish to lay down his proposition for Hezekiah's surrender. On the outskirts of Jerusalem, Rabshakeh received three of Hezekiah's representatives who were instructed to receive any message from Rabshakeh but to say nothing regarding Hezekiah's reaction to that message. Rabshakeh told Hezekiah's messengers that Judah was helpless, because the Assyrian forces were far superior to Judah's. Further, Egypt (They knew of the alliance!) was like a broken reed which, if leaned upon, would break and pierce the user's hand. Lastly, Rabshakeh said, "But if you say to me, 'We trust in the Lord our God' is it not he, whose high places and whose altars Hezekiah has taken away, and said to Judah and Jerusalem that you shall worship before this altar?" Rabshakeh yelled in Hebrew to those standing on the city wall, "Let not Hezekiah deceive you, for he shall not be able to deliver you!" Pay homage as before or you will be taken to the east like your kin to the north were. The three Jews said nothing, but told Hezekiah. Hezekiah tore his clothing in remorse when he received the message.

Jan. 27, 2002

"God's Way Will Win"
Isaiah 37-38

Couples Class
Wendell Alford,
Teacher

I. After Hezekiah's three representatives had heard from the Assyrian king's emissary, Rabshakeh, they tore their clothing in remorse. They then related the proposed doom of Judah to Hezekiah who not only tore his clothing but covered himself with sackcloth and went into the house of the Lord (Temple). He was well aware that King Sennacherib's armies were able to capture Jerusalem, and the Assyrian forces were standing by in nearby Lachish awaiting word from Hezekiah. Rabshakeh also knew that ten years earlier very much of Judah's wealth had been given to Assyria (II Kings 18:13-16) to prevent an invasion of Judah then. However, Hezekiah had been sending regular payments to Sennacherib since that time. Judah's standard of living had been lowered as a result of the tribute. Hezekiah's situation was desperate. He sent his chief aide, Eliakim, to see Isaiah the prophet for advice on what his political posture should be. Eliakim and his advisors outlined Hezekiah's predicament stating bluntly that annihilation was eminent. Isaiah's word to Hezekiah was that the position of the king of Assyria was blasphemy, because Rabshakeh had plainly questioned whether Judah's God, Jehovah, was able to deliver his people. In fact, Rabshakeh had claimed that the Lord was on his side, Isa. 36:10. Isaiah told Eliakim that Hezekiah need not fear the Assyrian troops, because the Lord would defeat him directly, sending him home without taking Jerusalem. At home he (Sennacherib) would be killed by the sword.

II. Rabshakeh left Hezekiah to make a decision while he returned to Sennacherib at Lachish with the Assyrian forces. To Rabshakeh's surprise he discovered that the king had left Lachish to go to Libnah to engage the Egyptian army, or so a rumor asserted, Isa. 37:7. In this interlude Sennacherib sent Hezekiah a letter stating essentially what Rabshakeh had told Eliakim: "Let not thy God, in whom you trust, deceive you, saying, 'Jerusalem shall not be given into the hand of the king of Assyria.'" Further, he stated that Judah's God is no better than the gods of all the other nations which Assyria has conquered. And what did Hezekiah do with the letter? "And Hezekiah received the letter from the hand of the messengers, read it, and went up to the house of the Lord (Temple), and spread it before the Lord," 37:14. Judah's king was in a quandry, should he believe the king of Assyria whom he knew to be militarily superior, or Isaiah who had announced that the Lord had promised deliverance? Hezekiah humbled himself and prayed directly to Jehovah God. In the prayer he recognized Jehovah as the only God and Creator of all the earth's kingdoms, and even heaven and earth also. Hezekiah referred the Lord to the reality of Sennacherib's claims about having wasted all of the other nations in the area along with their gods. "But now," Hezekiah prayed, "save us from his hand, that all the kingdoms of the earth may know that there is only one Lord, and you are the one and only true God."

III. Isaiah knew that Hezekiah had humbled himself in prayer before the Lord. The prophet, therefore, sent word to Hezekiah that the Lord had heard his prayer against the Assyrians and would perform

against Judah's foe. Through Isaiah the Lord told Hezekiah that he (the Lord) would "put my hook in your [Sennacherib's] nose" and "my bridle in your lips, and I will turn you back by the way which you came." God said that the assurance that the defeat of Assyria was the Lord's doing would be proven by the fact that three years hence his people (the Jews) would still be living around Jerusalem eating grain which they themselves had planted and enjoying the fruit from their own vineyards. Further, the Lord promised that Sennacherib would not enter Jerusalem, shoot a single arrow there, bear a shield therein, nor even build a bunker near the Holy City. Also, the Lord promised that Sennacherib's forces would not even come to Jerusalem on their way home, but return to Nineveh via the same route taken to Palestine. The Lord promised to defend Jerusalem for two reasons: for his own (the Lord's) sake and for the sake of the Lord's servant, David. Following is the method the Lord chose to fulfill his promise to Hezekiah. The Lord sent an angel (messenger or servant) into the camp of the Assyrians and killed 185,000 soldiers, practically the entire army! The next morning those who lived in the area were amazed to see those men whom they had feared and dreaded so fiercely, all dead corpses. With their spirits departed, they were no longer a threat to God's people, just as the Lord had promised Isaiah and Hezekiah. This action of the Lord sent Sennacherib back home to Nineveh to worship his false god Nisroch. While he was there worshipping, two of his own sons killed him with swords and escaped to Armenia (Ararat). Another son, Esarhaddon, succeeded Sennacherib as king, II Kings 19:32-37; II Chron. 32:9-22; Isa. 37:33-38.

IV. Chap. 38 is devoted to a deathly sickness which Hezekiah experienced. He was taken with an illness which was terminal in nature. Isaiah came to him with the word from the Lord that the king should put his house in order, for his time for physical death had come. In bed and in sorrow Hezekiah turned his face to the wall and again prayed to the Lord. Hezekiah confessed to the Lord that he had lived a life loyal to Jehovah God and according to the Lord's precepts. After pouring out his heart to the Lord, he wept with loud sobs. As before, Isaiah received a message from God concerning Hezekiah's condition and sorrow. Isaiah was to return to the king immediately and inform him that the Lord had heard his prayer and seen his tears. As a consequence, the Lord promised the king that his life would be lengthened for another fifteen years. Also, the Lord would protect Jerusalem from Assyria. The sign which the Lord gave to signify that the healing was the Lord's doing was to turn the sun back ten degrees. Although Isaiah had prescribed a medicinal cure for the king's physical condition (a life-threatening boil somewhere on his body), evidence was necessary to ascertain that the healing was, in fact, a special healing by the Lord, II Kings 20:1-11; Isa. 38:21. At any rate, Hezekiah was extremely pleased with the extension of his life. Chap. 38:9-20 relates a song which Hezekiah composed and had sung in the Temple during the remainder of his life. The song contrasts one's ability to praise and serve God while still in the flesh over against the lack of such ability after physical death. Praise God from whom all blessings flow! Let all the earth keep silence before him!

Feb. 3, 2002

"Man's Weakness And God's Strength"
Isaiah 39-40

Couples Class
Wendell Alford,
Teacher

I. Hezekiah was a great man in human affairs. After ascending to Judah's throne in BC 726 at the age of 25, he immediately exercised his kingly authority to turn the nation back to God. At II Kings 18:5 we have already learned that he trusted the Lord God of Israel and was above all other kings of Judah in demonstrating that trust, II Chron. 31:20-21. His first act was to purge, repair and reopen the Temple of God with splendid sacrifices. He even destroyed the brazen serpent used by Moses, because the people had made an idol of it to worship rather than worship God himself, Num. 21:9; II Kings 18:4. Because the Northern Kingdom had fallen, Hezekiah invited citizens from there to come and worship, II Chron. 29:30-31; 31:6. He reestablished Levites to the priestly offices thereby bringing back legitimate worship. He fought and was victorious over most of the Philistines (except Gaza), II Kings 18:8. Remember last Lord's Day we thought about the security of having water available within fortified city walls. Hezekiah made a wise decision to tunnel through solid stone to bring a stream (Gihon) on the northwest side of Jerusalem under the city wall to the area just south of the Temple, II Chron. 32:27-30. Even though Hezekiah had given much riches to the Assyrian king not to take Jerusalem, Judah's king had accumulated considerable wealth. During this latter period of Hezekiah's life after God's twenty-five year extension, the forces to the east were reshaping and changing leaderships. Assyria was losing its power and prestige to a rapidly rising Babylon.

II. As upright and strong as Hezekiah was, he still was a human with frailties. As Paul told the early believers at Rome, Rom. 3:23, "all have sinned and come short of the glory of God." In Chap. 39 Isaiah reveals one of Hezekiah's weaknesses. The Word makes clear that the king was devoted to the will of God, but here and at II Chron. 32:31 we are told that Hezekiah appreciated his own importance and was given in this instance to boast about his accomplishments. The king of Babylon had heard about the defeat of the Assyrian forces down near Jerusalem and how Hezekiah had been healed of the death threatening malignant boil. Baladan's son, Berodachbaladan (worshipper of Baal), king of Babylon, sent letters and a present to Hezekiah. The letters were purportedly courteous, belated get-well cards, because he had heard that the good king of Judah had recently recovered from a serious illness. The king of Babylon's feigned graciousness so favorably affected Hezekiah that he showed Babylon's emissaries all of Judah's treasures and armaments; the gold, the silver, spices, precious ointments, and even the entire armoury. He bragged about everything he had, to the last detail. The visit of the Babylonians came to the attention of Isaiah who confronted Hezekiah about them. The king, of course, told the prophet exactly who they were, why they had come, and his own response to their "evidence of friendship." Isaiah understood precisely what was happening and gave Hezekiah the Lord's assessment of the visit. As a result of the interchange with the Babylonians, Judah would be captured and all of the riches of God's

people would be carried to Babylon, nothing would be left. Hezekiah's sons after his generation would be made eunuchs to serve the king of Babylon in his palace. Hezekiah then told Isaiah, "At least there shall be peace and rest for me as long as I live." His son, Manasseh led the Jews away from God and proved to be the most wicked king who ever sat on the throne of Judah, II Kings 21:1-7.

III. Beginning with Chap. 40 God reveals through Isaiah the profundity of the Lord's mercy, grace, and love. In the remaining prophecy God reveals that his love will be expressed in a way that is alien to mankind's banal judgment. Humility will be God's method of revealing himself finally to humankind. Even in view of all the evil which mankind had, was and is exerting in defiance of God's Fatherly instructions, the Lord told Isaiah to, "Comfort ye, comfort ye my people, saith your God. Speak ye comfortably to Jerusalem, and cry unto her, that her warfare is ended, that her iniquity is pardoned: for she hath received of the Lord's hand double for all her sins." That Isaiah is having revealed to him, the Jews and to us evidence of the coming second and last Covenant of God with mankind is made clear by 40:3, for at Matt. 3:1-3 the Gospel declares that John the Baptist is the one who will be, "The voice of one crying in the wilderness." (See also Mal. 4:5-6; Matt. 11:11-15.) The contrast with this evidence of God's mercy and forgiveness with what we have been studying in Chaps. 1-39 leads some to disbelieve that the latter part of Isaiah's prophecy could possibly have been written at the same time and by the same person. However, there are sixty-six direct quotations from Isaiah in the New Covenant, with twenty-seven books having those direct quotations. Early in Jesus' public service he stood in a synagogue in Nazareth, his home town, and read publicly from Isa. 49:8-9; 61:1-2. Luke (God's Word) states that Jesus was reading from "the book of the prophet Isaiah." Others may not, but I believe that Isaiah wrote the entire book. Jesus knew the book intimately and realized that in it Isaiah knew of Jesus' first and second comings to earth. The glory of the Lord will be revealed in due time in a way not revealed before, John 1:17; Heb. 1:1-2; 8:7-13. God will bring this New Covenant of grace into being, because he is able to do so without consulting with anyone else. When he created the heaven and earth, he did not need to consult with others, because he is alone so qualified. With whom could he have consulted? He has no equal! All of the nations of the earth are like a drop of water in a whole bucket full, like fine dust on objects to be weighed on a scale, or all the land between the oceans of the entire earth when compared with the mightiness of God Almighty. Men are like the lower animals when they carve wood or melt metal into what they consider to be gods and then worship those idols. Men like to compare themselves to the Creator God by "creating" gods worthy of worship. How vain can people choose to become! And yet, from the beginning God has shown himself through his creative abilities and made his wishes known for all mankind to understand. God is God alone, and his creation including mankind are many. Earthly judges can only be vain (imperfect) at their very best. Men have no excuse, because God has not been weary nor has he fainted so that mankind should not know his will for them, Isa. 40:27,31; Rom. 1:20.

Feb. 17, 2002

"God's Promise of Comfort Continues"
Isaiah 41-42

Couples Class
Wendell Alford,
Teacher

I. Isaiah in Chap. 41 continues to reveal the comfort which God wants his people (those who trust him) to realize and rejoice in. The chapter admonishes his people to keep silence (Psa. 46:4-11), even those beyond Israel's borders, and be gathered together with Abraham's descendants. God promises to raise up a righteous man not of Abraham's offspring, but a Gentile who will do God's bidding. This man will come from the east and destroy those who are the enemies of God's people, the Jews. Since the man referred to in 41:2 is specifically named in next Sunday's lesson at Isa. 44:28, we give more attention to him later. The reason he is mentioned here in Chap. 41 is to note that, although God loves the Jews, his called people, he is in control of all people and all nations, Exod. 19:5; Psa. 50:10-12. In 41:4 Isaiah proclaims that from the beginning of mankind's creation God has been in control of creation's destiny, because the Lord was before his creation and will be there as it continues forever. Further, all people (isles) know of the Lord's existence and have used God's creation approvingly, i.e., the righteous person mentioned above in vs. 2. Turning away from the Gentiles Isaiah now turns the spotlight of the Lord on the Jews, Jacob. They are the servant of God to represent the Creator to all peoples, chosen because of Abraham's faith in God's promise, Gen. 12:1-4; 15:6; Rom. 4:3,9. The highest spiritual compliment that can be given to a person is attributed to Abraham in Isa. 41:8. Abraham was chosen by God to be the Lord's friend. Isaiah stresses that the reason God chose Abraham was that Abraham, through his faith in God's promise, should be a servant of God throughout Abraham's posterity. They were to represent God by their attitudes and actions and thereby win the hearts and minds of all of the earth's peoples. Nothing should have caused the Jews to fear as they carried out God's mission. They were to rely upon God's promise to strengthen and uphold them with his right hand of his righteousness [emphasis mine - WA]. The Jews were not to rely upon their own righteousness, but God's alone, Rom. 9:30-33. Their fear was to be quelled by God alone, not by things, by other people, or even by themselves. To emphasize the truth of this declaration, Isaiah states bluntly that, compared to God's strength, the Jews are as a worm, 41:14. (Remember when we Baptists used to sing Isaac Watt's (1674-1748) hymn, "At the Cross," Verse 1, "Alas, and did my Saviour bleed, and did my Sovereign die? Would he devote that sacred head for such a worm as I?" It was later changed to "- - for sinners such as I?" This comparison of a person's strength as compared to God's is noted elsewhere in Scripture at Job 25:4-6.) God promises through Isaiah that he will make a new "threshing instrument" with sharp teeth that will sift (separate) the good from the bad with a scope that covers the entire earth. Those who recognize how badly their spirits need to be renewed (water for their spiritual thirst, Matt. 5:3,6; John 4:10-26), will be supplied ample water. Their every need will be met by God. People should believe that God has provided their needs, for God knows what has happened, is happening, and will happen. God's knowledge of a thousand years from now is as vivid as a human being's of five minutes ago. In 41:3 the Lord

tells us that those who consult idols (false gods) are to be left without proper guidance whether the idols indicate that the one who is depending upon them is doing right or wrong.

II. At 41:25 Isaiah again mentioned the forthcoming historical incidence regarding the "righteous man from the east" of vs. 2. "From the rising of the sun" he will come with a host of help for Judah even though the Jews have been without hope for many years. This immediate historical promise is the basis of another promise far into the future. Chap. 42 brings a promise of a permanent Servant who is identified as universal in that he will relate to all people giving justice to include even the Gentiles. That Servant will come [the first time] quietly, or as we would say today, in a low key. He will not seek to force himself upon the consciousnesses of individuals, for he will be God in human flesh, Immanuel, John 1:14; Rom. 8:3. Just as God permitted Adam and Eve and every human since, the free choice to choose or not to choose God's promise and way of life, so will this Servant of God relate to every person who hears the Good News, the New Covenant, and accepts God's plan for people's spiritual salvation. One of the unusual qualities of God's prophet Isaiah was that he had the ability to see the distant future through God's view as well as the current events in the affairs of mankind. Isaiah could talk of peace during the Messianic reign to come, and suddenly burst into a scorching condemnation of the wickedly immoral activities and unfaithfulness of those around him. The evidence is that Isaiah had an integrated personality that could brave the storms of a hectic age and remain unaffected by the evils of those about him. Remember in Chap. 6 we learned that Isaiah "saw the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up," but he admitted that, "I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips." This information reveals the condition under which Isaiah prophesied during his long life, (ninety years?). The prophet in Chap. 42 looks at the idolatry of the Gentiles in vs. 8, how they are blind and should have been warned by his chosen missionary people, the Jews. Because they (the Jews) have failed as God's representatives on earth, the Lord will stir the Jews to jealousy, vs. 13 and Rom. 10:18-21. When our Lord Jesus was here in the flesh, he was threatened by the Jewish leaders with physical death before he had completed the Father's work assignment. Matthew in his Gospel at 12:14-21 quoted from this chapter of Isaiah to make this truth known. In that passage the evidence is made plain that while the Jews first reject God's Messiah (Savior), the Gentiles will accept him with their trust. Clearly 42:19-25 reveals that the Lord gave Israel and Jacob up for plunder and spoil, because they had sinned against God's will for them. They had ignored God's Law and failed to walk in God's ways. Therefore, "God will pour upon them the fury of his anger, and the strength of battle." Still the Jews refuse to accept the Lord's Lord, Psa. 110:1; Matt. 22:41-46. We Gentiles need to heed God's word at Rom. 11:11-24 regarding our period of God's grace and our attention to that grace.

Amazing grace! how sweet the sound, that saved a wretch like me!
I once was lost, but now am found, was blind but now I see.
'Twas grace that taught my heart to fear, and grace my fears
relieved;
How precious did that grace appear the hour I first believed!

February 24, 2002

"Israel Will Be Restored"
Isaiah 43-44

Couples Class
Wendell Alford,
Teacher

I. Following the comfort pronounced in Chap. 41 because of the greatness of God's stability and further comfort because of God's promise to send a unique Servant in Chap. 42, God proclaims through Isaiah that Israel as a people will be restored following times of dire circumstance. That national redemption is promised because God states plainly that he created the Jews, both Israel and Jacob (Judah), and gave them a special name which related them to their Creator, Jehovah. Therefore, God states that they are his. God had brought them through the water (the Red Sea), had brought them through the fire (God's awful presence at Mt. Sinai), and had been their Saviour as the Holy One of Israel. [This very concept aggravated the Apostle Paul's thoughts as God directed him to write the letter to the small band of believers in Rome while he (Paul) was at Corinth in about 55-56 AD. Remember that Paul wrote the Roman believers, because he knew that in that assembly were both Jews and Gentiles and that he also would be visiting them later. I introduce these facts into the prophecy of Isaiah, because it is through Paul's Roman letter that God makes known how we believers (trusters) in God's Messiah (Jesus of Nazareth) fit into God's future plans for Israel and how that plan relates to the future of us believers. Romans (God's Word) relates considerable details to the "Gentile interlude" in Chaps. 9-11. There in 11:25 God's Word uses the clause "until the fulness of the Gentiles be come in." In Rom. 11:25-32 God tells us again of God's promise to restore Israel.] Back to Isaiah 43: God had sacrificed Egypt, Ethiopia, and Seba (area occupied by descendants of Cush, Ham's son) for the sake of Israel. God's loved ones (precious to him), the Jews, were not to fear, because in due time God would reconvene the seed (nation) of Israel from the east, west, north, and south, all of God's sons and daughters "from the ends of the earth," 43:5-6. All peoples (nations) are to recognize that Israel is the Creator's special people, that the only Lord has declared such to be truth. Such testimony is the absolute witness of Israel's Holy One, the Creator of Israel, the King of Israel. Even at the very time Isaiah was prophesying these words, God was preparing the situation in Babylon and Chaldea for the benefit of his chosen people, the Israelites. The alien armies will be brought low, because God is to do a new thing. The wild beasts of the forests will appreciate God's provisions, but Israel will be reluctant to do God's will (bring fitting sacrifices according to God's Law). Only God can blot out Israel's sins (as a nation) against him, and that he will do in a time chosen by God himself, Isa. 43:25; 44:22; Acts 1:6-7; Rom. 11:25-32.

II. In Chap. 44 Isaiah outlines a further strong argument against those who will build and worship the products of their own hands. God begins by referring to the people of Israel as his servant whom he has chosen as his own. God developed Israel from a small embryonic beginning and calls them in vs. 2 "Jeshurum." Jeshurum is a poetic or pet name found here and at three other places in the Old Covenant, Deut. 32:15; 33:5,26. It means literally (yashar-El), God's "righteous little people." Vss. 3-8 are highly significant,

I believe, because they give information concerning God's "pouring out his [Holy] Spirit" upon the Jews in a way that he had not done before. As believers in Jesus as God's Messiah (Saviour), we immediately think of Jesus' promise in John 15:26-16:15 and the special coming of God's Holy Spirit at Acts 2:1-21. Note especially Peter's explanation of the outpouring of God's Holy Spirit at the beginning of the church (those to be called out by God's Holy Spirit until the time when "the fullness of the Gentiles be come in," Rom. 11:25 as noted above). Peter stated that this event is like the prophecy of Joel 2:28-32 in which God is to pour out his Holy Spirit. [Emphasis mine - WA] Rightly dividing the timing of Joel's prophecy and Peter's application of that prophecy on the day of Pentecost is of critical importance, I believe. The context of Joel's Chap. 2 which begins by stating "the day of the Lord cometh" and which we have learned earlier in Isaiah, especially in Chap. 2, to be a final physical and spiritual purging of the entire earth by God before God's special One (Jesus the Messiah, Saviour) comes to reign in person and thereby bring peace to the whole world. Peter's quote includes events which have not happened yet. Jesus at Matt. 24:27-31 reveals that when "the tribulation of those days" comes, then will the "sun be darkened, the moon shall not give her light, and the stars shall fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens shall be shaken. And there shall appear the sign of the Son of man in heaven; and then shall all the tribes of the earth mourn, and they shall see the Son of man in the clouds of heaven (Acts 1:11) with power and great glory." It is evident that Peter's quote from Joel included events (the catastrophic cosmic upheaval) which are even yet to come in 2002 or later. It is, no doubt, at the end of the age just before Jesus returns that God will pour his Spirit upon all flesh. On the first special pouring out of God's Spirit, many scoffed and assigned the unusual speaking of the believers and other unusual phenomena to alcohol consumption, but, nevertheless, about 3,000 did believe and were added to God's chosen group. It is no wonder that Isaiah declares that "the Lord of Israel" is the first, the last (Rev. 1:7-8)," and "beside me there is no God." In 44:8 God's proclamation appears comical when he says, "Is there a God beside me? well, there is no other Rock (God); I know not any," that is to say, [If there is another, I certainly don't know it!] But there are those who make graven images which are nothing and call them precious, even their gods! Their so-called gods are not alive; they can neither see nor know anything. When someone fashions an idol and considers it to be alive, there is no profit whatsoever, in fact, his or her friends will be ashamed to be called an associate. For example, a blacksmith will work hard ('til he faints) with his tools around a forge and receive a product (an idol) which he considers precious and calls it his god. Likewise, a carpenter will go to the forest and meticulously measure, plane, and lay out a manly figure to be carved from a cedar, cypress, oak, or ash. The finished figure he calls god to be worshiped, but really the only real use the carpenter receives from his efforts is the warmth he gets from the leftovers for cooking and/or warming himself by a fire. These idols cannot forgive the sins of anyone nor restore anyones soul. God, on the other hand, can forgive transgressions and make one who trusts him whole. Vs. 28 of Chap. 44 where Cyrus is named is best left for Chap. 45.

Mar. 3, 2002

"Gentiles Will Also Honor God"
Isaiah 45 - 46

Couples Class
Wendell Alford,
Teacher

I. We had reference at Isa. 41:2,25 and at Isa. 44:28 to a man whom God "will raise up in righteousness" and who will come "from the rising of the sun (east)." At the latter reference Isaiah calls this unusual person by name, Cyrus. [The person who divided the Old Covenant into chapters and verses should have, in my opinion, made 44:28 the first verse of Chap. 45. The problem for not having done so was probably created by the fact that the role of Cyrus is begun up in 44:26 where Cyrus is referred to as "my servant" and designated as one who will do God's will, i.e., "perform all my pleasure" as told in 44:28. The present division of the whole Bible into chapters was first made by Hugo de St. Cher about AD 1250. The present division into verses was introduced by Robert Stephens in his Greek Testament, published in AD 1551, and in his edition of the Vulgate, in AD 1555. The first English Bible printed with these chapters and verses was the Geneva Bible of AD 1560, which was the first English Bible to omit the Apocrypha (hidden secret). The Apocryphal books of the Old Testament were added to the Roman Catholic version of the Bible known as the Vulgate, a translation of the entire Bible into Latin by Jerome in AD 385-405. The present English version of the entire Bible officially approved by the Roman Catholic hierarchy is the Rheims-Douay version done by English Roman Catholic refugees who settled in Rheims, France (N.T., 1582) and in Douay, France (O.T., 1609). The Rheims-Douay version does include most of the O.T. Apocrypha. Since the Apocryphal books were not in the Hebrew Canon, Jerome omitted these books from his Latin translation from the Greek. However, the Roman Catholic Council of Trent, April 15, 1546, publicly set its seal of authority on eleven of the sixteen O.T. Apocryphal writings. I do not consider these books to be Holy Spirit inspired, nor are some similar N.T. Apocryphal writings. These N.T. spurious writings are a collection of legendary Gospels, Acts of the Apostles, and Epistles. They are entirely inferior to the truly inspired books and are full of nonsensical and unworthy stories of Jesus and the apostles. It is said that Mohamed obtained his ideas of Christ entirely from these spurious "gospels." He did not believe that Jesus was the Son of God, nor, of course, do his followers, the Muslims (most Arabs, descendants of Abraham and his Egyptian maid, Hagar - Ishmaelites) of today.]

II. In Chap. 45 Isaiah continues his words of comfort begun in Chap. 40. The reason for comfort here in Chap. 45 relates to events which are to happen about 200 years after Isaiah wrote about them. The Jews were to spend about 70 years in Babylon as captives, Jer. 25:12, and then, as we noted in the last two lessons, be released back to Jerusalem. To outline the events and even to name explicitly the ruler from the east who will save the Jews, is much too much for many Bible scholars of today. For many Jews today, belief in the miraculous saving of the Jewish nation by a benevolent Gentile must be difficult to accept. Nevertheless, that is exactly what Isaiah prophesied and precisely what happened about two centuries after Isaiah's day. Cyrus (the sun) was the founder of the Persian

Empire, II Chron. 36:22-23; Dan. 6:28; 10:1,13, and the son of Cambyses who was of the royal family of Achaemenidae. Cyrus' courage and genius became evident as he grew up, and he was early placed at the head of the Persian military forces. His conquests were many and brilliant. He defeated and captured the Median king in BC 559, and in BC 546(?) he defeated Croesus making the kingdom of Lydia his. Then Babylon fell before his army along with Assyria in BC 538. The prophet Daniel's home was for a time in his court, Dan. 6:28. The edict of Cyrus for the rebuilding of the Temple at Jerusalem was, in effect, the beginning of Judaism, i.e., the great changes by which the nation was transformed into a religious assembly (with coherence) are clearly noticeable beyond that time, II Chron. 36:22-23; Ezra 1:1-4; Jer. 29:4-13.

III. The words which Isaiah chooses to refer to Cyrus, as God sees the coming king of Persia give evidence that Cyrus' power and compassion for the Jews made him a symbol of Christ. In Chap. 44:25 God declares through Isaiah that Cyrus will be "my shepherd and perform my pleasure: even saying to Jerusalem, 'Thou shalt be built;' and to the Temple, 'Thy foundation shall be laid.'" Note that in Rev. 21 God through Jesus Christ will build a new tabernacle in a new Jerusalem where all trusters in Jesus Christ will dwell in contentment and peace as his (the Lamb's) wife. Again, Cyrus is to be known as God's anointed and whose right hand will be empowered by God to subdue the nations which will come against him. Those contrary nations will be made to open their doors (to their fortresses) and permit the Jews to return to Jerusalem. Cyrus' favor to the Jews will come from that king's recognition that Israel's God is protecting him and giving him strength to overcome his enemies. Cyrus had not known that Israel's God is unique, the only true God, Jehovah, but now this Persian king realizes that Israel's God is the only real Lord, Ezra 1:3. There is no other God but Jehovah. Since the Lord created the earth, all mankind is to work for and with the only Lord and not "strive with his Maker." Rather than question ones father or mother about the whys of mankind's existence, one should trust God for his or her welfare. One should seek God's guidance, because the Lord is the Maker of every person. Just as a pot cannot question its maker as to why the pot is fashioned this or that way, Jer. 18:6-8; Rom. 9:18-24, neither can mankind question their Creator's judgment regarding his (the Creator's) creation of which mankind is a part.

IV. The sovereignty and complete freedom of God to choose the outcome of the climax of his creation is probably stated more numerously in Isa. Chaps. 40-48 than anywhere else in Scriptures. To lay a firm foundation for genuine and permanent comfort, the Lord, through Isaiah, felt it necessary to make the truth indelibly clear that God's promises are surer than any material mankind experiences in his or her physical life, surer than gold, silver, platinum or anything else. When the Lord through John on Patmos described the glories of heaven which Jesus promised that God is preparing for believers (trusters) in Jesus as God's Messiah (Savior), he used precious metals and precious jewels for substances, because those were the most enduring substances then known to people even though we are told that no one can know heaven's splendor, I Cor. 2:9, except through God's Holy Spirit. Faith in Jesus is more precious than anything humanly imaginable!

Mar. 10, 2002 "Babylon Destroyed And Judah Chastened" Couples Class
Isaiah 47-48
Wendell Alford,
Teacher

I. In this class we once discussed the part that rivers played in the affluence of early civilizations, and how the standard of living available to the peoples on rich river basins was enhanced. The Nile River in Egypt is an example. In Isa. 47 Babylon is described as "The Lady of Kingdoms," for she was rich in goods with ample food and circumstance. She was the envy of the desert nations surrounding her and was emulated in religion by those neighbors. The human tendency to become self-reliant with affluence has been universal among peoples throughout the earth's history. Perpetually riches cause kingdoms to rise and fall. Babylon as a nation occupied the rich land lying between two rivers, the Tigris and the Euphrates. Babylon the city and capital of the nation was situated on the east bank of the Euphrates at a place where the Tigris was only a short distance to the east. The prophet Isaiah with God's guidance could predict absolutely that Babylon would be defeated with the prosperity she enjoyed. In her sense of self-worth, she made and worshipped her own gods, idols. Back in Chap. 46 Isaiah noted that Babylonian idols were fabricated and dedicated to Bel and Nebo. Bel is the shortened form of Beelzebub which is one of Satan's names, Matt. 10:25; 12:22-30. Nebo means "speaker or prophet," and when Paul and Barnabas went to Lystra at Acts 14:6-18, the people thought Barnabas was Bel or Jupiter and Paul was Nebo or Mercury as the talker of the two. Satanic worship which is being practiced in our country today is an example of the idolatry promoted by and practiced in the rich nation of Babylon, I believe. Babylon is, in the Bible, often designated as the seat of idolatry. The prophet Isaiah at Chaps. 13,14,21, and now here in Chap. 47, tells us of the ultimate and final fall of Babylon and her idolatry. John, the apostle of our Lord, foretells of the last and forever elimination of the effort to replace the one and only Jehovah God with a man-made god, Rev. 18. God will eliminate Babylonian idolatry through Jesus, God's Messiah (Savior) and God's only begotten Son. God through Isaiah tells Babylon to "sit in the dust" much like one would command a trained dog, "Sit, fido," 47:1. The time will come when Babylon will no more be pampered and spoiled with riches. Their nakedness will be displayed revealing their deplorable trust of idols (false gods) rather than the God and Savior of Israel. Vengeance will be meted upon Babylon with no man as a mediator, but the Lord himself will deal directly with Babylon. No more will she be known as "The Lady of Kingdoms." While she was enjoying power and prosperity, Babylon looked upon herself as eternal. Never would her children be destitute, because she said, "I am, and [there is] none else beside me," vs. 8, and, "I will be a lady forever," vs. 7. Finally, two things will happen to Babylon, widowhood and loss of children. This happening will come to her "in a moment, in one day," because of "the multitude of thy sorceries, and for the great abundance of thine enchantments," vs. 9; I Thes. 5:2-6; Rev. 18:8,10. The final Babylon (to be expressed in world government) will be headed by the very epitome of evil, the son of perdition as indicated in II Thes. 2:3-12; Rev. 13:8; 17:7-9. Note especially in II Thes. 2:7 that the iniquitous activities which

will ultimately produce the idolatrous man of sin were already underway at the time Paul wrote this letter to the Thessalonians, about AD 53 or 54. Evidently this element of error was being introduced and mixed with the true Gospel, and bogus letters were being circulated with forged signatures of Paul affixed to give his credence to the mixed errors, II Thes. 2:2. I believe that the error was mixing the truth of spiritual grace as a gift from God with the "self-earned spiritual salvation" through ones own merit and efforts. Paul stated (God's Word) the same concern also at Gal. 1:6-9; 2:4,11-21; 3:11-14; Col. 2:16-23. Being fooled by believing that one can earn ones favor with God is, in my opinion, the Babylonian idolatry of the Christian Era. Such idolatry promotes Materialism, greed and egoism (self-centeredness). In our time what makes one justified before and pleasing to Jehovah God (the God of the Jews and Father of Jesus the Messiah, Savior) is to honor, praise, worship, trust, and recognize Jesus as God's only begotten Son whom the Lord raised from death. Nothing should be taken from nor added to God's grace which comes only through faith in Jesus Christ. Eventually Babylonian idolatry will cease to aggravate God's people. At Isa 47:10-12 the prophet condemns Babylon as one naked but unaware that others can see her nakedness, "none seeth me." Babylon has established what it considers to be "wisdom" and "knowledge," but that very supposed wisdom and knowledge have perverted (led) thee to believe in thine heart, "I am, and none else beside me," a repetition of the same false proclamation made by Babylon in 47:8. Because of this false feeling of safety, evil will come upon them. The destruction will come so suddenly that Babylon will not realize what is happening. None shall save her.

II. In Chap. 48 Isaiah turns from the destruction of Babylon to declare that the Jews will not be destroyed but punished for swearing by the Lord's name and talking about the God of Israel. Their recognition of their Lord was not sincere and in truth, nor in righteousness, vs. 1. The Israelites identify themselves as citizens of the land which was given to their forefathers (Jerusalem) and that they are relying upon the God of Israel. Their profession of trusting God is a continuation of the same such profession of their forefathers. However, God knew that they were like the Jews before them, obstinate and with a neck sinew like iron, and a brow of bronze. God had forever pointed out this stubbornness of the Jews throughout their history in order to keep them from creating idols. The Lord did not want them to fashion idols (false gods) and then blame these graven, molten images as scapegoats for their sins and their idolatry, Exod. 32:1-10; Deut. 31:27. In Isa. 48:6-7 the Lord tells the Jews what he has done (prewarned them) and now asks them to admit their errors. God promises that he will defer his anger, restrain for the Jews sake, and not cut them off, all because the Lord desires for the Jews to glorify his own name. God repeats in vs. 11 concern for his own reputation as mankind views him to be. "For mine own sake, even for mine own sake, will I do it: for how should my name be polluted? And I will not give my glory to another." He then asks the Jews to pay attention to what he is asking them to do, reminding them that he is the Creator, that he was first (before his creation, mankind included), and that he alone will continue to be, even if his creation no longer exists. The Lord encourages the Jews not to imitate the Babylonians, because there will be no peace for the wicked in their idolatry and evilness.

Jan. 15, 1995

"God's Messiah Is Proclaimed"
Isaiah 49-50

Couples Class
Wendell Alford,
Teacher

I. After declaring that Israel will be chastened for their stubbornness, Isa. 48:4, (See also John 8:13,44-51) God through Isaiah reveals the Lord's future plan to send a Savior for all people including nonJews, i.e., Gentiles as well. God's prophet, Isaiah, announces to those beyond the coastlines (the Gentiles) that the Lord is to bring about the birth of a special person, commissioned from conception in his mother's womb, to have a special relation with Jehovah (only begotten Son). Before birth, that Anointed One demonstrated that relationship by bringing joy to another, also awaiting prenatal development and birth, Lk 1:39-56. (For further Scriptural revelations concerning Mary, see also Matt. 12:46-50; Lk 2:19,34-35,51; John 2:1-5; 19:25-28; Acts 1:12-14) That Anointed One (Messiah, Savior) will speak with God's authority and represent the Lord's very shadow. Humanly he will be a product of the Israelites, and in this regard the Lord will be identified with Abraham who, because of Abraham's faith in Jehovah, received God's first Covenant of faith. That Covenant was to be honored by the keeping of God's Law as given to the Jews by Moses. The Second Covenant will be manifest by the sending of God's only Son, a Jew by human progeny (Mary), and will make Israel thereby a servant of God, 49:3,6 and bring glory to Jehovah God. This latter Covenant will be made before Israel as a nation will see the culmination of God's promise to Abraham and the Jewish people as a nation, Isa. 49:5-6; Heb. 11:39-40. During the period, the Christian Era, God will not forget the Israelites but will remain faithful to gather Jewish individuals also to himself who have the childlike faith in the Messiah to be sent as God's Son to the earth, Rom. 9:30-33; Philip. 3:1-9. No, God will not forget the seeds of Abraham during the time of the Second and last Covenant with mankind. All of the earth's land, Isa. 49:11-12, will hear of God's mercy before the Messiah comes to fulfil God's promise to Abraham and the nation of Israel, Matt. 24:14-15.

II. While many of the earth's peoples are rejoicing because of God's Covenant through Jesus Christ, Zion (Jerusalem, the Jewish people) will be saying, "The Lord hath forsaken me, and my Lord hath forgotten me," vs.14. The Lord replies, "Can a woman forget her sucking child, that she should not have compassion on the son of her womb? Yea, they may forget, yet will I not forget thee," vs. 15. "See, I have inscribed thee upon the palms of my hands; your walls (protection) are never out of my vision," vs. 16, and also Psa. 22:16. "Your posterity (children) will [experience a time] when they will make haste [to do God's will, i.e., acknowledge Jesus as the Messiah], for those who destroy you will no longer be effective," vs. 17. The Gentiles will take up my (God's) cause as follows: "Thus saith the Lord God, 'Behold, I will lift up my hand (swear) to the Gentiles and set up my standard to the people: and they shall bring thy sons in their bosoms [love the Jews] and thy daughters shall be carried upon their shoulders,'" vs.22, Gen. 12:1-3. And how would God bring about this historical miracle among the earth's people? The activities of the world's nations will

nurse God's will throughout history. Much patience must be exercised beyond Isaiah's day, but the kings and queens (the world's political leaders) will nourish God's will throughout history [whether or not those political leaders realize that they are performing their duties according to God's command], vs. 23. Isaiah's brash statement concerning God's climax of human history in which the Jewish nation will be restored to God's will (accepting Jesus as God's only Son and Savior) is, "I will feed them that oppress thee with their own flesh; and they shall be drunken with their own blood, as with sweet wine: and all flesh (all the people of the entire earth) shall know that I the Lord am thy Savior and thy redeemer, the mighty One of Jacob," vs. 26. In Chap. 49 God through Isaiah makes clear to those of faith that God's Messiah will have a cosmic mission to lay the foundation for Israel as a nation finally to know God in all God's glory through Jesus as God. In addition to the final restoration of the Jews, we Gentiles will have the glorious privilege of knowing the Lord of the Jews as Savior and Lord. Paul in his letter to the Roman believers in Chap. 11, spells out explicitly the final creative, historical activities of God in caring for his people. The apostle has a particular caution for us Gentile believers, especially at Rom. 11:11-32. "O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out!"

III. In Chap. 50 the Lord says, through Isaiah, that he (God) is not divorcing Israel. [The Jews knew how easy their law (See John 10:34 where Jesus referred to the law as your, the Jews', law.) permitted the husbands to divorce their wives.] God states clearly in vs. 1 that he did not separate himself from Israel, but rather Israel by sinning had severed their relationship with Jehovah. The wife, Israel, was not sold in bondage, but God's spouse (Israel) was only put away because of her transgressions against God. Vs. 2 states, "Wherefore, when I came, was there no man? When I called, was there none to answer? - - - behold, at my rebuke I dry up the sea, I make the rivers a wilderness (desert) - - -" The Israelites have been stubborn against God throughout their history, and when the most crucial time of all came when the Lord sent his only begotten Son to earth to establish the Kingdom of God and to become its Lord and King, God's people, the Jews, reacted as follows: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. All things were made by him [Jesus Christ]: and without him was not anything made that was made. In him was life; and the life was the light of men. And the light shineth in darkness and the darkness comprehended it not. That was the true light, which lighteth every man that cometh into the world. He came unto his own, and his own received him not. But as many as received him, to them gave he the power to become the children of God, even to them who believe on his name; who are born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God, John 1:1-5,9-13.

"For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life."

Mar. 24, 2002

"Israel Is Promised a Kingdom"
Isaiah 51 - 52

Couples Class
Wendell Alford,
Teacher

I. In Chaps. 49-50 God makes the idea clear that before Israel receives the ultimate blessings promised to Abraham and his descendants, considerable patience must be exercised. Beginning in Chap. 51 Isaiah cautions the Israelites to pay close attention to the history of their people. Be constantly aware of what aroused God's pleasure in the very first person of God's covenant with the Israeli nation. God's delight was the faith Abraham placed in God's promise, Gen. 12:1-4; Heb. 11:8-10. In 51:1 note that God's Word refers to Abraham's faith in God as a rock. The Israelites are to continue to secure their future upon that rock, faith in God. Vs. 2 restates the same feature of the future hope of Israel. In that vs. 2 Isaiah repeats his admonition to "look unto Abraham" as the exercise of faith that honored God's will. This "rock of faith" did not change in the New Covenant ushered in by God's only begotten Son, Jesus Christ. That continuum of relating properly to ones Creator through faith is reinstated in the New Covenant. In Matthew's Gospel where Jesus had finished his extensive teaching (the Sermon on the Mount), he cautioned against false teachers, 7:15-23, and then gave a parable concerning two home builders. One of the builders built his home on a rock where it was safe, but the second builder built upon sand which foundation caused the home to fall and no longer afford sound lodging. Accepting Jesus as Lord causes one to love him and follow his teachings. But how does one enter into that proper relationship with Jesus as Christ (Savior)? By resting solidly upon the rock of faith as related in Matt. 16:13-20. To the questions of Jesus, "Whom do men say that I the Son of man (a human being as the Son of Mary) am?" and, "Whom do ye (plural, or you all) say that I am?" Peter, answering for the group of apostles, said, "Thou (singular, alone) art the Christ [Messiah, Savior], the [only begotten] Son of the living God." Jesus commended Peter for having listened to and believed God's Holy Spirit regarding Jesus' person and position, and said to Peter that his (Peter's) name could be translated "a pebble" which is symbolic of the big [important] rock [of faith] upon which Jesus would build with individuals whom Jesus would assemble from the earth's people to become his own bride, the ecclesia or church, Acts 2:39. Maintaining faith in God's promise was a problem for the Jews (still is, Rom. 9:30-33), and seeking to become members of Jesus' ecclesia has also been a problem for many in the Christian Era because of false teaching. False teachers have insisted upon the necessity of believers' having to add to God's sacrifice (Jesus' death and resurrection) by earning something additional, but Jesus paid it all! We are to follow Jesus' teachings, because we are his children through faith and love, not in order to become or maintain an offspring relationship. Once we become a child of God through faith in Jesus Christ, we are his children forever!

II. At 51:3 after having stressed relying upon the faith which Abraham displayed and acted upon, Isaiah offers comfort to Israel. "The Lord shall comfort Zion (symbol of the Jews) and make Jerusalem and its environs to produce joy, gladness, thanksgiving and harmony."

God tells his nation to pay close attention to what he is saying to them. He says that he will send forth a message of my will for you and that message will be a light of my people, the Jews. That message should be looked upon as direct from heaven to earth, as final, as just and more permanent than the heavens and the earth itself. Again God says, "Listen, do my will, and do not fear what others will say about your Godlike conduct. Those who judge you for being mine will be devoured like an old garment eaten by moths or worms." God's arm of strength will not cease to uphold Israel, and if you will have faith in my promise, you will be comfortable even if nonbelievers consider you to be only mortal, Eze. 37:9-14; John 11:25-27. Things that are impossible for mankind can be natural for God (God is the Creator of nature), e.g., God's strong arm brought the Jews from Egypt, parted the Red Sea, and brought God's people safely across the sea floor as dry land. Therefore, it is no difficult thing for God to redeem those whom he loves. Why should a person fear anything, even mortal death, if his or her God is one of such ability, even the one and only Creator himself, the Almighty, Matt. 10:28,31. There is nothing more comforting than to be in the good grace of the Creator, Isa. 51:16; Rom. 8:1.

III. After calling Israel "his people" in vs. 16, God now again, as at vss. 4,7, and 9, asks them to cease sleeping, awake, and stand up, vs. 17. The prompting of God, Isaiah prophecies, will not be heeded by his people. Rather, the Jewish people evidently need someone special to guide them, to lead them to the forgiveness of God, to satisfy God's wrath aroused by their continual sinning against (displeasing) God's will for them. One could interpret vss. 17-23 as a burden of Israel which will be lifted after their return from Babylonian captivity, but the history of the Jews from that day even until now, proves that they are still seeking the peace which we know can come only through faith in Jesus, God's only Messiah, Savior, John 14:1-3; Phili. 4:4-7. Eventually, I believe, the Jews will accept Jesus for who he is, God's Messiah. What a day of rejoicing that will be for all of God's people, including us! They so need to know God's forgiving, loving grace through God's only plan for spiritual salvation, John 1:17; 14:6. When Jesus first visited the earth as a man, the Jews were blind to him as we noted last week, but the day will come (in that day, the Day of the Lord) when, in a time of one-of-a-kind destruction of the earth, these stray people of God, the Jews, will turn to Jesus for forgiveness and spiritual salvation, Matt. 24:21-22; Rom. 11:26.

IV. Chap. 52 begins with another alert to be strong during their period of captivity. The Jews are reminded that they have sold themselves with no promise of payment for their value. God gave them a chance to do his pleasure after delivering them from Egyptian bondage. Because God's name is associated with the Jews, God's reputation is called to question. In fact, God's name is blasphemed continually, daily. God promises that "in that day," vs. 6, the Jews will know God's plan of salvation [through Jesus Christ]. Paul in his letter to the Roman believers at 10:15 quoted Isa. 52:7 to make the point that Israel did, in fact, reject God's Messiah when he came the first time. In Isa. 52:10 God tells us that, over time, he (God) will show "all the ends of the earth the salvation of the Lord."

Mar. 31, 2002

"God As Mankind: Humble"
Isaiah 53-54

Couples Class
Wendell Alford,
Teacher

I. Chap. 53 should begin with vs. 13 of Chap. 52, I believe, for it is there that the "my servant" is introduced with the third person personal pronoun "he." Note that the introduction is of an individual, not a nation or group of people, and an individual is discussed throughout Chap. 53. Only God's Holy Spirit could have inspired Isaiah to reveal God's plan to send his Son with such minute detail some seven hundred years before our Lord was born in Bethlehem. That this passage is foretelling the person of Jesus Christ is declared at Matt. 8:17 where Isa. 53:4 is quoted by the apostle Matthew. Further, the evangelist and recently ordained deacon Philip, declared Jesus to be the person referred to at Isa. 53:7-8 when he was invited by the Ethiopian Treasurer to explain the passage at Acts 8:26-40. When the Ethiopian believed Jesus to be his Messiah (Savior), Philip immersed him in a nearby stream, and the new child of God went on his way rejoicing. Again, Peter, at I Peter 2:18-25 (vs. 22) quoted Isa. 53:9 likening Jesus to a servant who is at the same time also the Shepherd and Keeper of every person who trusts Jesus for eternal life.

II. At Isa. 52:13 God declares that the Messiah (Jesus Christ) will be wise, exalted, lifted above, and uniquely, singularly important (one of a kind). Note carefully the context of 52:14 where we are told that many will be astonished at Jesus [as an humble, suffering Servant], so much so that he will be, by them, considered to be ugly, i.e., not comely as they expected [not a Savior as the world believes he should be]. Also, note the word "sprinkle" in 52:15 which does not mean (as some Biblical literalists believe) to baptize by sprinkling. Although the King James uses "sprinkle," the word today means the same as "astonished" in the preceding verse, i.e., surprised, filled with wonder, amazed, perplexed, disturbed, bewildered, or dumbfounded. In other words, how can God's anointed be so humble and unpretentious, Phili. 2:5-11. This idea of amazement is the basis for the first vs. of Chap. 53, "Who has believed our report that such an humble Servant can be the embodiment of and exert the very power of the Lord God Almighty?" At John 12:37-43 the apostle applies this passage to what was happening to Jesus when the Lord came to earth. Isa. 53:2 repeats the same idea as that in 52:14, that the Savior will grow up, not as a royal person but as an ordinary commoner and without kingly appearance, John 18:36. Jesus was (and is) despised and forsaken by mankind generally even though he was pierced through (slain) for our sins (that which separates one from God). Our spiritual peace rests entirely upon his shoulders, for it is by his suffering and death alone that individuals can be reconciled to the Holy God who created them (atonement). Not one person can claim to be reconciled to his or her Maker except through the Messiah's being "struck down" and "afflicted" by God himself, vss. 4,6. During the human life of the Messiah (Jesus Christ) when he was oppressed, afflicted, and brought as an innocent lamb to be slaughtered, he remained mute regarding his own danger - as quiet as a sheep being undressed by a shearer. He was buried as all mortal, sinful people are who have died from

the results of sin, yet without one sin, Heb. 4:15. The burial site chosen by others for his resting place was furnished by a rich man, Joseph of Arimathaea and a member of the Jewish Sanhedrin, who begged the Roman official, Pilate, for the body of Jesus, Matt. 27:57-60; Mk 15:42-46. Again, in vs. 10 as in vs. 4 the statement is made that "yet it pleased the Lord to sacrifice (crush) the Messiah, put him to grief, make his life (soul) an offering for sin, see his seed [for a generation, a New Covenant], sustain his [physical] life [until his mission was finished], and the Lord's will to be accomplished through the Messiah." I believe in order to understand better the terms "generation" in vs. 8 and "seed" in vs. 10, one should examine other Scriptural passages. For example, in Psa. 22 God's Holy Spirit relayed much of the same information regarding the coming of God's Messiah as the Spirit gave to Isa. in Chap. 53. Jesus, while on the cross suffering for our sins, quoted this Psalm. He said in Aramaic, "Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani?" which in English is the first vs. of Psa 22, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" Many have problems with this statement of Jesus (How could The Father have forsaken his Son?!), but I believe that Jesus quoted, not only this initial part of the Messianic Psalm, but most, if not all, of it. If one reads the entire Psalm 22 meditatively, he or she will realize that the question asked in vs. 1 is answered by reassuring the Lord Jesus that his suffering was special, because, "I will declare thy name unto my brethern; in the midst of the congregation will I praise thee. Ye that fear the Lord, praise him; all ye the seed of Jacob, glorify him; and hold him in awesome reverence; all ye the seed of Israel. For he [God] hath not despised nor abhorred the affliction of the afflicted; neither hath he hid his face from him; but when he [God's Messiah] cried unto him [God], he heard," Psa. 22:22-25. Now, relate together Psa. 22:30; Isa. 53:8,10; Lk 21:31-32; Gal. 3:16; Gen. 22:18, and you can better understand the overall role that the Lord Jesus has played, is playing, and will play in mankind's redemption, John 1:17.

III. Isa. 54 is devoted entirely to the fact that the Lord will ultimately restore Israel to his (God's) favor. Paul quotes vs. 1 in his letter to the Galatian believers at Gal. 4:27 to prove that favor with God is due solely to God's grace. We believers, even as Isaac was, are God's "children of promise." Isa. 54:2 indicates that God's plan is to enlarge his family of faith by, "stretch(ing) his dwellings (I Cor. 3:16) by lengthening the cords and strengthening the stakes." God's seed, Jesus (God's Messiah, Savior), will inherit the Gentiles and make the desolate cities to be inhabited, vs. 3. Israel "shalt forget the shame of thy youth (former time) and shalt not remember the reproach of thy widowhood any more," vs. 4. The time will come when, "No weapon that is formed against thee shall prosper - - - their righteousness is from me, saith the Lord," vs. 17.

I will sing the wondrous story of the Christ who died for me,
How he left his home in glory for the cross of Calvary
He will keep me till the river rolls its waters at my feet.
Then he'll bear me safely over, where the loved ones I shall meet.

Apr. 7, 2002

"God's Universal Invitation to Life"
Isaiah 55-56

Couples Class
Wendell Alford,
Teeacher

I. In Chap. 53 Isaiah relates the astounding proposition that God stresses and approves the importance of humility and complete self-control if one is to please the Creator, Jehovah God. In Chap. 54 the prophet extends to the nation of Israel God's invitation to conform to the wishes of God by trusting in his promise for spiritual reclamation and thereby sharing God's plan with others as demonstrated by their attitudes, witness and actions. Now we discover in Chap. 55 that God's Word goes beyond the nation of Israel with his invitation to share God's mercy and grace. In this wide and open calling forth of all people on earth to share God's love and grace, the Almighty makes his proposition indelibly clear that becoming reconciled to himself is a gift, not something available by earning that reconciliation. "Ho, (pay close attention) every one that thirsteth, come ye (all of you) to the waters, and eat; yea, come, buy wine and milk without money and without price," vs. 1. We should note again, as we did in earlier passages in Isaiah (and elsewhere), that pleasing God is accomplished through faith in his promise. We do good things because God has accepted us through our faith in his promise, which made us his children. We cannot be made his children by doing good. In other words, our faith in Jesus Christ makes us one with God (atonement), and we desire to do good things to please God because of that relationship which was made fact through our faith. Jesus explained spiritual salvation as God's free gift while he was talking to one of the Jewish leaders (a Pharisee) one night in Israel. Nicodemus approached Jesus seeking to understand Jesus' position regarding a person's relationship with God. Nicodemus began the discussion by admitting that the miracles (signs) which Jesus was performing was a clear indication that God was with Jesus. The Lord told Nicodemus that a person must be made alive spiritually (spiritually quickened) by God (from above) before he or she could have God as his or her Lord (King, enter the Kingdom of God). The Jewish leader understood Jesus' proposition as a physical happening, not spiritual. Jesus knew that Nicodemus was well acquainted with the Old Testament so he used an occurrence from there to illustrate what is involved for one to become reborn, i.e., be born spiritually. Jesus said, "As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, Num. 21:4-9, even so must the Son of man be lifted up (crucified, sacrificed) that whosoever (anyone) believeth (trusts) in him should not perish (remain separated from God spiritually), but have everlasting (spiritual) life (together with God, the Creator of all things, even ones spirit)," John 3:1-15. In John 3:16 Jesus revealed why God's gift of grace is free, because God loves his creation. But one must exercise faith in God's promise to receive that eternal, spiritual life.

II. Isaiah in 55:2 asked the question, "Wherefore (why) do ye spend money (results of your own efforts) for that which is not bread? and your labor for that which satisfieth not? Listen to me carefully, and eat ye that which is good, and let your soul delight itself in abundance," (See also John 4:13-14, 24-26.) Then in Isa. 55:3

the spiritual nature is made clear, "Listen to me, come closer, and your soul shall live; and I will make an everlasting (eternal) covenant (binding agreement) with you, even the sure mercies of David." In vs. 3b-5 God, through Isaiah, tells those who read that he (God) will call forth a nation (nonJews) who will heed his gift of free grace and heed the Holy One of Israel [David's successor by lineage, Jesus the Christ]. The poetic beauty of Isa. 55:6-13 is exceeded only by the truth of its content: "Seek ye the Lord while he is near: Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts: and let him return unto the Lord, and he will have mercy upon him; and to our God for he will abundantly pardon. For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the Lord. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts. So shall my word be that goeth forth out of my mouth: it shall not return unto me void (empty, without fruit), but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper in the thing whereto I sent it. For ye shall go out with joy, and be led forth with peace: The mountains and the hills shall break forth before you into singing, and all the trees of the field shall clap their hands," Isa. 55:6-9, 11-12. The above reference to God's Word making a difference in the history of mankind was given only after the revelation in Chap. 53 of God's sending to earth his Suffering Servant, Jesus Christ. The Jews did receive the Good News (Gospel of Jesus Christ), but it was given also to the Gentiles (people of the isles) only after the Jews (as a nation) had rejected it. During the current period of human history (the Christian Era) any individual can accept God's offer of eternal life through faith (trust) in God's Messiah (Savior). This offer is to every individual without regard to race, color, nationality, social rank, material possessions, religious group, or denominational affiliation, Isa. 45:23; Rom. 14:7-12; Phil. 2:5-11.

III. Chap. 56 continues the idea of God's enlarging his grace to all people, but he asks that he be worshiped by those who profess him to be their God to live righteous lives, to exercise justice, and to remember the sabbath (that day, The Day of the Lord). A special consideration is given to foreigners (nonJews) beginning in vs. 3. Even those who are sexually impotent (eunuchs) are to know that they can also be included among those who have a proper faith in God. (Remember the eunuch in Acts 8:27 whom we discussed last Sunday, and see also Deut. 23:1-2.) They are to be included in God's family as they honor and accept God's Covenant. They too will be members of those acceptable in God's place of worship, "for mine house shall be called an house of prayer for all people," Mk 11:15-18. In Isa. 56:8 Isaiah mentions the "outcasts of Israel" who are to be gathered to the Lord God, but, "Yet will I gather others (nonJews) to him, beside those (Jews) that are gathered unto him."

My hope is built on nothing less than Jesus' blood and righteousness
I dare not trust the sweetest frame, but wholly lean on Jesus' name
When darkness seems to hide his face, I rest on his unchanging grace
When he shall come with trumpet sound, O may I then in him be found.
Dressed in his righteousness alone, faultless to stand before the
throne.

Apr. 14, 2002

"Right, Wrong, and Mercy"
Isaiah 57-58

Couples Class
Wendell Alford,
Teacher

I. As we noted that the end of Isa. Chap. 52 should have been the beginning of Chap 53, so should the last five vss. of 56 have been made the beginning of Chap. 57, I believe. The Lord invites the carnivorous beasts of the forest to devour those who refuse to listen to God's will and do his bidding. One of the reasons that the people (Jews) are not heeding God's warnings is because of the shortcomings of the religious leaders of the people. Isaiah's castigation of those leaders (priests), Mal. 2:1-3; Matt. 15:7-20, is devastating: these watchmen are blind, ignorant, mute as dogs [regarding spiritual discernment, they cannot bark], asleep and dreaming unreal suppositions, lying down on (not performing) their responsibilities and even enjoying their laziness, greedy and insatiable in their materialistic appetites, and they occupy the shepherd positions but turn those positions into their own personal gain, Matt. 23:14. These [false] shepherds tell the people to become drunk with wine and strong drink, because nothing will change except that tomorrow will be even more abundant than today, II Pet. 3:3-4. [Our world will get better and better, so don't fret.]

II. As a result of the lack of spiritual leadership, "the righteous perisheth and no one cares." The persons who live in awe of God and who walk humbly with him are belittled, made fun of, and chided for their disciplined living. [Those poor, ignorant dummies never, ever have any fun. They are living "sacrificial" lives for nothing. Oh well, some people just believe that they have to be "goody-goodies."] Isa. 57:1b-3 makes the situation clear by contrasting those who live lives with regard to God's claims, the upright, with those who "are offspring of whores," the wicked. The upright who discipline (today's disciples of Jesus Christ) their lives according to God's will, live in peace and are able to sleep (relax), but in vss. 3 ff anxiety is promised to those who are "offspring of falsehood," John 8:13, 31-51. The Prophet Isaiah noted some of the evils which the people were committing. They set up idols to worship under trees, came to them, and worked themselves into an ecstatic frenzy, "inflaming yourselves," and in that state of ecstasy sacrificed (killed) their infants to the false gods down in valleys between cracks in the rocks. Indulging in such activities is devoting oneself completely to self-gratification without regard to coming judgment against such selfishness. Today mankind practices those activities (sins) through devoting their lives to covetousness (materialism), Isa. 57:17; Col. 3:5, including the unwillingness to be encumbered with parenting the coming generation. The danger of bearing and caring for children will become an especially acute problem just before the Day of the Lord begins, Lk 23:26-31; Matt. 24:19. Note the reference to self-righteousness in Isa. 57:12, "For I will declare thy righteousness, and thy works; for they shall not profit thee," Rom. 9:31-32. The Lord at 57:15 alludes back to the spirit of the Lord Jesus in Chap. 53 and states that what pleases the "high and lofty One that inhabits eternity, whose name is Holy; I dwell in the high and holy place, with him also that is of a contrite (subordinate) and humble (not proud, haughty, arrogant, assertive)

spirit, to revive the spirit (make alive spiritually) of the humble, and to revive the heart (attitude) of the contrite ones." (Note again Jesus' admonition at Matt. 15:18.). God states, "For the iniquity of his (Israel's) coveteousness was I angry, and struck (punished) him. I hid myself and continued angry, but Israel continued on his way and turned away from me and went the way of his [own] heart, [did his own thing], vs. 17. Although this alienation exists, note that in vs. 16 God states that he will not continue indefinitely to tolerate Israel's rebellion, nor will God remain angry forever, Rom. 11:25-32. Israel's (and all believers') hearts will fall (become broken and contrite) before God, Rom. 14:8-12. Eventually, after the great tribulation, Israel will be healed, be led of God, and God will restore his comfort (peace), vss. 16, 18. In vs. 19 God says that he is in control of those who are near (Jews) and far (Gentiles) and will finally bring genuine and lasting peace to those with faith [in God through Jesus Christ]. However, the wicked (unfaithful) are like the troubled sea, when it cannot rest, whose waters casts up mire and dirt. There is no peace, saith my God, to the wicked," Rev. 20:11-15; Philip. 4:3. The chief reason that there is no peace for the wicked (unbelievers) today, I believe, is that their whole "comfort" and "satisfaction" is dependent upon the world order continuing as it is today. The Word of God is explicit that the current system will come to an end, II Pet. 3:8-18, and the only hope lies in him (God) who is eternal. The problem of a growing sentiment in today's world is that more people are denying the very existence of their Creator, Psa. 14:1, and, consequently, they are relying upon themselves, nature, false prophets (soothsayers), etc. They have no fear (awe) of God and no shame for practices which are contrary to God's holy will as given in his Word. For instance, adultery, fornication, self-abuse (drug use), homosexuality, pedophilia, false testimony, killing, stealing, coveting (idolatry), using God's holy name in a vain way, and not remembering God's special day as holy (Sabbath or Sunday), etc., are in this country and abroad considered acceptable by a large and growing number, I believe.

III. Chap. 58 is a revelation of how God views hypocritical practice of ones religious faith. How does God feel about the persons who, individually or collectively, profess to know and serve their Creator, but whose life witness is, in fact, self-serving, hypocritical? These people fast and practice rites which appear to respect God's seventh day, the Sabbath or Sunday, but God knows their hearts. God anticipates that portion of eternity in which he will bring about a peaceful kingdom on earth, but he wants such a Kingdom of God (Heaven) to be accepted volitionally by humankind both Jews and Gentiles, all mankind, II Pet. 3:9. "Yell loudly, hold nothing back, cry out like a trumpet, tell my people of their transgression, and the house of Jacob their sins," 58:1. The vss. which follow tell of how the Jews exercised fake fasts and abused the Sabbath, especially vs. 13, i.e., recognizing God's creative acts and prerogative to direct the affairs of mankind. Their attention to the Law of God involved interpreting that Law to further their own selfish goals. For a better understanding of the letter vs the spirit of the Law, note Matt. 5:20-22, 27-28, 31-32, 33-34, 38-39, 43-44; 6:1,3-4, 5-8, 16-18, 19-20; 7:1-2, 12, 21-23; 8:11-12; 9:11-13. Honor God and "I will cause you to ride upon the high hills - - for the mouth of the Lord hath spoken it," Isa. 58:14.

Apr. 21, 2002

"Israel's Sins and Restoration"
Isaiah 59-60

Couples Class
Wendell Alford,
Teacher

I. A recurring theme in Isaiah's prophecy is the fact that God will not turn away from those whom he covenants to guide and protect. Remember, however, that a covenant involves no less than two parties. God's covenant was with Abraham and his descendants through Isaac and Jacob, and the provisions of that covenant were provided by God through messengers. Mankind was not permitted to set the parameters or conditions of their relating to their Creator, because at the beginning, with Adam and Eve, people demonstrated that with absolute freedom of choice, they would not always choose what was best for them. So, over time, God gave his people (the Israelites) a set of rules to guide them and messengers to pronounce those guidelines and encourage the people to honor God by worshiping him and living lives according to the laws God gave them. This covenant continued between God and his people for thousands of years, and during the entire period God's people cycled far and near to keeping their part of the covenant. Mostly, the people fell short of God's requirements of the agreement. The refusing to keep God's covenant, the Bible (God's Word to mankind) calls sin, staying away from God's will and way, John 14:6-7. One overwhelming fact that is established beyond any doubt whatsoever is that God did not turn away from (forget) his people because of their sinning against him and his will. This tenacity of God in relentlessly keeping his children in his consciousness even though they disobey him is poetically expressed in a poem by the English poet Francis Thompson (1859-1907). The poem entitled "The Hound of Heaven" stresses the central truth of Jonah's prophecy, no matter the site a person chooses, no matter the illicit attitude one assumes, once God's covenant is engaged, God will never forsake the object of his love, a believer and truster of that covenant. As a hound follows the tracks of his prey, so does the Lord follow and care for those who are his, Deut. 31:6; Isa. 41:17. Today we believers and trusters in God's only begotten Son, Jesus Christ, are watched over by that "Hound of Heaven," God the Father, Heb. 13:5-6; Rom. 11:1-18. And, according to the truth found in that Rom. 11 passage, God has not forgotten the nation of Israel with whom he made the Old Covenant. Nor will he ever forget those of us who have covenanted with him by trusting Jesus Christ (God's New Covenant), because the Old Covenant which was based upon the Law has been suspended, Heb. 8:7-13.

II. I believe that the above preliminary information is helpful in understanding the prophecy of Isaiah in his Chaps. 59 and 60. In Chap. 59 Isaiah proclaims that "the Lord's hand is not shortened that it cannot save; neither his ear heavy, that it cannot hear." God is steadfast in his concern and love for Israel, but in 59:2, "your iniquities have separated between you and your God, and your sins have hid his face from you, that he will not hear." Note that what blinded God and made him deaf to their voices was the Jews' sins, not the lack of God's desire to fellowship with them. The list of Israel's sins follow God's stating that he will remain faithful to his agreement in his covenant even though his people were

not true to their part of the covenant. They were practicing murdering those whom they hated and taking their possessions with their guilty hands. Their words did not reflect the truth and their actions were unjust while grumbling that "justice should be done." Injustice was so rampant, "None calleth for justice nor any pleadeth for truth: they trust in empty words, and speak lies; they conceive evil, and bring forth iniquity." Then notice the picturesque language in 59:5-6 where Isaiah likens the Jews' activities as the hatching of venomous snake eggs, i.e., their actions bring forth that which applies venom that kills. People eat the snake eggs as one would chicken eggs for food, but instead of nutrition, they produce sins (other poisonous snakes) which separate the people from God. The spider web is used also as that which appears to be substantive, positive, and good, but that web is made of a foam which is not stable and decomposes readily. It is not usable for making cloth for clothing. The people were living lifestyles which ignored God's will for them. It is no mystery why God would not, could not, see or hear them lest he became unwilling to relate to them at all. Such a period is demonstrated during the intertestamental period between Malachi and Matthew (hundreds of years) when God through Malachi told the Israelites that they were plagued with corrupt priests (spiritual leaders), wicked practices, and a false sense of security supposedly based upon their "privileged" relationship with God. Malachi, as Isaiah did before him, told the people that they were practicing hypocrisy, infidelity, religiously mixed marriages, divorce, false worship, and arrogance. God promised the Israelites through Malachi that he would send a messenger "before the great and dreadful day of the Lord" to them. God did send John the Immerser as he had promised through Malachi, but the Jews would not hear him either, Matt. 11:11-15. The first person of the pronouns in 59:9-13 indicate that they did recognize their sins against God, and therefore "the Lord saw it" and "wondered that there was no intercessor," vss. 15-16. The Lord then promised that "the Redeemer shall come to Zion; and this is my covenant with them, saith the Lord," vss. 20-21; Rom. 11:26.

III. Immediately following the promise to send a Redeemer in Chap. 59, Chap. 60 reveals the coming of the "glory of the Lord" which will "rise upon thee," Chap. 60:1. However, there will be a period of darkness for Israel during which "the Gentiles shall come to the light, and kings to the brightness of thy rising," vs. 3. The events prophesied by Isaiah in 60:4-10 appear to be so contemporary to our day. In 1948 Israel was reconstituted as a nation due, primarily, to the political activities of Great Britain and the United States from the human viewpoint. We believers, on the other hand, know that all ultimate decisions are due to the Creator. The current period of history presents an interlude which has some of the elements, to a much lesser degree, that will prevail during the period of the glorious kingdom which Jesus the Christ will rule on earth following the severe destruction noted in Matt. 24:21. In vs. 12 the Word again states candidly that "the nation and kingdom that will not serve thee (God's people) shall perish; yea, those nations shall be utterly ruined." The earth will have undergone a tremendous transformation as indicated in vss. 19-20. The Lord will be the earth's (habitat of God's faithful ones) direct source of needed energy. See also Rev. 21:1; 22:5.

I. Jesus, our Lord, was born in Bethlehem just south of Jerusalem in Judea but grew up in Nazareth up north in Galilee. After Jesus had taught and performed many miracles around Galilee, many people believed him to be "the Prophet" [Messiah], John 7:40, but others questioned whether the Messiah could come out of Galilee according to Scripture (Old Covenant). They were, of course, unaware that Jesus was, in fact, born in Bethlehem as the prophet Micah (5:2) had prophesied, John 7:42. The Jewish police were divided about whether Jesus should be seized and delivered to the ruling body of Jewish leaders, the Sanhedrin. The Sanhedrin considered Jesus' status, and Nicodemus spoke up and suggested they not condemn Jesus before he had been heard. This outspoken Nicodemus was the same one who had come to Jesus for a one-on-one lesson from the Lord at night in John 3. The Sanhedrin accused Nicodemus of being an ally of Jesus by questioning whether both were from Galilee, John 7:43-53. At any rate, Jesus' public appearances had made him a popular and respected person whom the Jewish leaders by now hated, despised, and wanted dead. One of the reasons the Jewish leaders disliked Jesus was because of his condemnation of their religious positions, e.g., his Sermon on the Mount, which we mentioned at the end of last week's outline, and in the assertion claimed early in his public service at Lk 4:16-22 when he read from Isaiah at 61:1-2. Jesus in a synagogue on the Sabbath in Nazareth, read, "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath anointed me to proclaim the Good News to the poor [in spirit]; he hath sent me to heal the brokenhearted, to proclaim deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are oppressed. To proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord. [emphasis mine-WA] Jesus had stood to read from the scroll, and after he had read this portion of Isaiah's prophecy, he rerolled the scroll and handed it back to the attendant. You could have heard a pin drop as every eye in the synagogue was fixed steadily upon Jesus. How Jesus interpreted this passage from Isaiah was even more earthshaking than the Scripture itself. "This day," Jesus said, "is this Scripture fulfilled in your hearing." Since he was back in his home town, some of the synagogue attenders later asked, "Is not this Joseph's Son?" As usual, Jesus' teaching enraged his home town people also, and they tried to kill him by throwing him over a cliff. Nevertheless, he escaped their wrath. To understand what Jesus was telling his neighbors in Nazareth that Sabbath, one must notice not just what he read, but what he did not read. In fact, he stopped reading after the first clause of a compound sentence. If he had read the full sentence, he would have continued with, "and the day of vengeance of our God; to comfort all that mourn." This same concept was prophesied by Joel at Chap. 2:28-32. This Joel passage was Peter's text in the first formal message pronounced after Jesus returned back to his heavenly Father, and God had answered Jesus' prayer (John 14:16) of sending his Holy Spirit. Notice, however, that now that God's plan of salvation through the death and resurrection of his only begotten Son had been completed, God allowed Peter to announce the continuation

of the intent of God, "to show wonders in heaven above, and signs in the earth beneath; blood, and fire, and vapour of smoke: The sun shall be turned into darkness, and the moon into blood, before the Lord come." It is also significant that in this same message Peter accused the Jewish leaders directly of crucifying the Lord Jesus, vss. 2:23,26. He likewise made the same accusation shortly thereafter at Acts 3:15. To summarize the message of Isa. 61:1-2; Joel 2:28-32; Lk 4:16-19; Acts 2:14-21: Jesus was to come to earth in humility (Isa. 53) first, followed by an "acceptable year of the Lord," afterwards to be followed by "the day of vengeance" when Jesus will come a second time to mete God's justice upon the whole earth, to be followed finally by a time when all the faithful (in Jesus as the Messiah, Savior) will enjoy a blessed period of wonderful peace. Jesus said that the length of time between these periods is entirely the prerogative of God the Father himself, Acts 1:6-8. I have spent much time here on this aspect of Isa. 61, because I believe understanding much of Biblical prophecy is so dependent upon "rightly dividing" (II Tim. 2:15) these Scriptural passages.

II. Although Jesus' activities are not given in the Bible from about age twelve through thirty, we do learn from Lk 4:16-22 that he was a regular attendant at the synagogue at the Sabbath meetings while he was growing up in Nazareth. Had this not been true, he would not have been honored by having received the holy scroll of Isaiah and allowed to read publicly and comment on its contents. Also, it is noteworthy that Jesus found the text which fitted the occasion and his part in the circumstance immediately. On that day in the synagogue at Nazareth, he chided his home town people for not accepting his Messiahship and quoted from I Kings 17:1-16 and II Kings 5:1-14. In these passages Jesus pointed out that God had been selective in meeting the needs of certain individuals rather than meeting the needs of everyone with the same needs. Jesus' knowledge of the Scriptures (O.T.) was natural since he created the world and maintains it, John 1:1-3; Col. 1:15-18; Heb. 1:1-3.

III. God revealed to Isaiah, and thereby to us who are enlightened by his Holy Spirit, that during this "acceptable year of the Lord" we can be made right with our Creator as individuals by accepting God's plan, namely, by trusting Jesus as God's Savior. God's love is incomprehensible in all its dimensions without the aid of faith and the leadership of God through his Holy Spirit, John 14:26; Eph. 2:18; 3:17-21; Col. 1:26-27. But Isaiah warns all mankind that following this "acceptable year of the Lord" there will come a time of that terrible "day of vengeance" when God will defeat all opposition to God's will on earth. There will be no place to hide in that day anywhere on the earth from God's vengeance, Deut. 32:35; Rom. 12:19; Rev. 6:12-17. Out of this time of ultimate trouble will come a period of peace, joy, and contentment for the people of God, those who have placed their faith in Jesus Christ. The Jewish nation will relate their continued prayer for the peace of Jerusalem (Psa. 122:6) to trusting Jesus as their Messiah which will come to them during the severe tribulation of God. Isaiah is telling the Jews this truth today in his Chaps. 53, 61-62. In 62:1-4 God states that, following the coming of the Humble One [Jesus and the "acceptable year of the Lord"], "the day of vengeance" will follow, and God will not rest until he is reconciled to Jerusalem (no more forsaken) and married (Beulah) to Jerusalem (the Jews)!

I. The beginning of Chap. 63 has a significant reference to the historical setting of Isaiah's time as well as a portrayal of future event. Nations to the east were growing in strength, and the Palestine area was the perpetual target of both Syria and Assyria. Israel was a prime area because of its military and commercial strategical relationship to the Mediterranean Sea, Europe and Africa. Only during one relatively short period was Israel able to take advantage of the strategic geographic position, during the military expertise of David and his son, Solomon. David's exploits and Solomon's political and executive abilities carried Israel to its zenith of national importance. God's commission for the Israelites was to convey to the other peoples of the world his (God's) desire for living lives that would honor their Creator and also be safest and most satisfactory for themselves. This commission was, as history relates, sorely abused by the Israelites. Even David and Solomon were far short in their moral activities of God's perfect will for them. Solomon himself was David's second son by Bathsheba who became David's wife only after committing adultery with her and then having her husband murdered while serving his country in battle. Solomon was noted for his profound wisdom by Israel and other nations, but late in his life he lost or ignored his spiritual discernment. For the sake of political advantage and voluptuous living, he later succumbed to utter apostasy, i.e., turned away from God's law and will. His policies of oppression and luxury brought the last period of a united kingdom to the verge of dissolution, and when his son Rehoboam came to the throne, the actual split of the kingdom occurred. In spite of this unGodliness practiced by Israel's leaders, God still loved his people and watched over them. This faithfulness of God was the emphasis of our lesson Sunday before last. The message of Chaps. 63 and 64 introduces the element of the judgment of God.

II. Chap. 63 begins with a gory picture of Israel's enemies slain with their blood staining the clothing of Israel's Redeemer. Assyria was about to come from the east through Moab and Edom, and Isaiah depicts that attack as one which the Redeemer (Messiah) will take vengeance on Israel's adversaries to redeem his people (those who trust God's plan of redemption). Remember that God has already revealed to Isaiah (and now to us who believe) in Chap. 53 that when the Messiah comes [the first time], he will be as a Lamb, meek and humble "with no beauty that we should desire him." However, at the outset of Chap. 63 God portrays that same Redeemer as treading upon Israel's enemies until there is no life left in them, with their life blood flowing like grape juice in a wine press. Since this will be the action of God's Redeemer [Jesus Christ], it is obvious that Jesus' first coming could not be the reference in Chap. 63:1-6. Further, recall our last week's lesson how Jesus early in his ministry at Nazareth in quoting from Isa. 61 made a distinction between "the acceptable year of the Lord" and (by omission) "the day of vengeance of our God." Surely the "day of vengeance" is the time of the "winepress" judgment made known in

Chap. 63:4 with a parallel announcement in Rev. 14:15-20. In Isa. 63:5-6 God says, "And I looked, and there was none to help: and I wondered that there was none to uphold: therefore mine own arm brought salvation to me [God in the person of his only begotten Son, Jesus the Messiah]; and my fury, it upheld me. And I will tread down the people (enemies of God's faithful ones) in mine anger, and make them drunk in my fury, and I will bring down their strength to the earth," Deut. 32:35-36; Rom. 12:19-21; Rev. 14:7; 16:4-7. God was in Jesus Christ [the first time he came] reconciling the world (all who will trust him) unto himself, II Cor. 5:17-21, and when Jesus comes the second time, he will come with sure and final judgment on the entire earth, II Thes. 1:5-10.

III. With vs. 7 of Chap. 63 a reader is immediately struck with the contrast of the ideas there and those given before in vss. 1-6. "I will mention the lovingkindness of the Lord, and the praises of the Lord, according to all the Lord hath bestowed on us, and the great goodness toward the house of Israel, which he hath bestowed on them according to his mercies - -." He goes on to declare the Jews to be his people, and that their affliction causes the Lord also to be concerned. Moses had been endowed with God's Spirit to enable Moses to shepherd (lead) his people. Although the Jews can claim that God is their Father through his creative action, they no longer exercise the faith of Abraham, 63:16.

IV. Chap. 64 relates end-time relationships between God and his people, and while some reference applies to those who become trusters (believers) in God's Son, Jesus Christ, the main context relates to the end time when the Jews as a people will turn to Jesus Christ for becoming right with God, the Father. There is to be a time of peace following this reconciliation of the nation of Israel by God. Isaiah talks about these calamitous events in vss. 1-3, and in vs. 4 states that following those calamities, a glorious period for God's people will begin. At the time Isaiah recorded this information, he did not, I believe, understand the implications of what he wrote. Later, during the time of God's New Covenant with mankind, the Lord revealed what was meant in Isa. 64:4ff. The reason for the understanding later came about, because God poured out his Spirit on all believers in Jesus as the Messiah (Savior). Paul, led by God's Holy Spirit, revealed this to believers in God's Christ in his first letter to the Corinthians. At I Cor. 2:9 Paul quotes Isa. 64:4 and indicates in the context of I Cor. 2:1-3:4 that only God's Holy Spirit can reveal the glory that is to be available to all who trust Jesus Christ, who rely upon God's promise. This goodness and blessing will be available, because the Lord will become the Father of believers through remolding individuals as a potter fashions clay into something very valuable, 64:8. These individuals are not worth remaking. They are as worthless as a filthy rag, 64:6. [The Hebrew translates literally: "filthy as a menstruating woman's rag."] However, after we are "the work of his hand" (born from above, reborn) through faith, 64:8b, we are promised untold blessings, "what he (God) hath prepared for those who wait for him," 64:4b! We will be clothed in white robes of God's righteousness because of our faith in Jesus' righteousness, Rev. 7:14-17. God's unquestionable judgment is noted in Rom. 11:33-36.

May 12, 2002

"The Consummation of History"
Isaiah 65-66

Couples Class
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I. Week before last we saw in Chaps. 61 and 62 how Jesus came to fulfill that part of Isaiah's prophecy first in 62:1-2a. Then last week in Chaps. 63-64 Isaiah prophesied that the Lord can and will exercise judgment or mercy according to his good pleasure. No one can question that prerogative of God, because all have sinned and fall short of the Creator's glory, i.e., God's will for everyone, Rom. 3:23; Gal. 3:22. We come today to God's revelation in Chaps. 65-66 which concludes God's projection of the lot of mankind even to the occasion of the provision of a new heaven and a new earth. This completely new arrangement will be so "brand-new" different that the former times will not even be remembered. At the beginning of Chap. 65 in vs. 1, Isaiah relates God's confirming that he will be desired by those (the Gentiles) who in the time of Isaiah wanted nothing to do with God's ways, Rom. 1:18-32. Those very Godless people would turn to the eternal Lord God of heaven and trust him, even a people (nation) who had not been called God's people but had openly served idols, Rom. 10:20-21. However, God's own people whom he had herded and cared for especially through the centuries, had refused his outstretched arms. They, the Jews, were rebellious and, as such, did not walk according to God's way's but "walked in a way that was not good, after their own desires." In such activities God's people provoked the Almighty to anger blatantly (to my face) and continually. They practiced idolatry by sacrificing in gardens (on their own, away from God's designated holy places) and burned incense upon self-made brick altars. They defied God's Law by associating with the dead (among the graves), bowed before monuments while eating forbidden food (swine meat and the broth of other forbidden food), and, finally, practicing a religious caste system that, by their own assessment, made them better than others religiously. They were evil before God and proud of it, which blasphemed the Holy One of Israel.

II. After announcing that the Gentiles are coming to God and enumerating Israel's sins in 65:1-7, the Prophet proclaims that the Lord will not turn away from the Jews entirely. Vs. 8 states that God will honor those individual Jews who are faithful to him even though the majority and leaders are not faithful. As Isaiah puts it, "as the new wine is found in the cluster, and one saith, 'Destroy it not; for a blessing is in it:' so will I do for my servants' sakes, that I may not destroy them all." This determination of God to recognize a faithful remnant is noted in I Kings 19:14-18, and that reference is quoted by Paul at Rom. 11:1-12 to give the idea a proper perspective during "the acceptable year of the Lord." At 65:17 God's Word declares that a period will come when God will "create new heavens and a new earth: and the former shall not be remembered, nor come to mind." This new creation is repeated at 66:22 in connection with the restoration of Israel. A major center of activity for God's relating to his people in that period will be Jerusalem. The same facet of God's creating all things new is divulged also at Rev. 21:1-5. An unusual circumstance which is related in 65:20 is that people will not age as we do today.

as we do today. The longevity of the life of humankind in the early days of God's creation (Remember Methuselah lived for 969 years.) will prevail again on God's new earth. Those whom God has elected to enjoy this new creation will not have to move from here to there to have all needs met, for "as the days of a tree are the days of my people, and mine elect shall enjoy the work of their hands." In fact, "it shall come to pass, that before they call, I will answer; and while they are yet speaking, I will hear. The wolf and the lamb shall feed together, and the lion shall eat straw like an ox; and dust shall be the serpent's food. They shall not hurt nor destroy in all my holy mountain," saith the Lord, 65:24-25.

III. Beginning in Chap. 66 the Lord reminded Isaiah (and us) that God is headquartered in heaven and that the earth is merely a part of God's creation. In fact, the earth can be likened to a footstool upon which God rests his feet! Remember in Chap. 6 when King Uzziah died how Isaiah "saw the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up, and the train of his robe filled the temple." God declares that all mankind knows he (God) made everything that exists (including mankind). Those that recognize this fact and humble themselves as a result, God will claim as his own (to him or her "will I look"). In I Kings 8:27 when Solomon was considering the Temple which he had built at the request of his father David, the Ark of the Covenant had been brought for placing in the new Temple. In Solomon's dedicatory prayer he asked the questions: "Will God indeed dwell on the earth? Behold, the heaven and the heaven of heavens cannot contain thee; how much less the house that I have built?" The answer is, of course, that God is infinitely more glorious than all of his creation. He can bring to pass any activity which is pleasing to him. This reiteration of God's ability Isaiah uses to introduce the fact that God will bring shame to Israel's enemies by reestablishing Israel so suddenly that the happening will be as though a woman were giving birth, even before labor pains came. "Before she travailed, she brought forth; before her pain came, she was delivered of a man child - - Shall the earth be made to give birth in one day? or shall a nation be born at once? for as soon as Zion travailed, she brought forth her children." When Zion (the Jews) see this happening "your heart will rejoice, and your bones shall flourish like grass," Ezek. 37:1-14. The Lord will come with fire and slay hordes of people, II Pet. 3:8-10. He will plead with all people before the great slaughter and gather all nations together to see God's glory. Israel will be gathered from the whole earth to God's holy mountain in Jerusalem. There they will honor Jesus as God's Messiah, Savior. The Jews will be inhabitants of the new heavens and new earth and will be identified again as the people of God. Note the common denominator in 65:9 and 66:22 where the word "seed" is used, in the first instance to identify a seed out of Jacob and in the latter instance, the seed is identified with the people of Israel, the Jews. Humanly, Jesus was a Jew (the son of Mary) and divinely he was (and is) the Son of God, i.e., God in human form. Those who have believed and trusted God and waited for his salvation, will worship the Lord forever, but those who have rejected God's offer will remain forever separated from God (spiritually dead), 66:23-24.