

Feb. 11, 2001

"God Keeps His Promise"
Matt. 1

Couples Class
Wendell Alford,
Teacher

I. "And the Lord God said unto the serpent, 'Because thou hast done this [deceived Adam and Eve], thou [Satan] art cursed above all cattle, and above every beast of the field; upon thy belly shalt thou go, and dust shall thou eat all the days of thy life: And I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed,'" Gen. 3:14-15. We learn in Rev. 20:10 that "all the days of thy [Satan's] life" does come to a final end as God promised in Gen. 3:15. But oh what it cost our heavenly Father to defeat that old deceiver, Satan! The cost has involved thousands of years and the shedding of God's own Son's blood (life) upon a rough Roman cross. The problem of God's righteousness relating to Satan's rebellion has not been a minor element in mankind's history. God chose the female of the human species to produce the Seed who would ultimately effect the final elimination of Satan's influence over God's own people. Gen. 3:15 states plainly that the woman's Seed will be triumphant over Satan's seed (italics mine). We have been told through God's Word who the "her (woman's) Seed" is: Jesus Christ, God's Savior of all who will trust God's Word, Psa. 22:30; Isa. 53:8; Acts 8:32-35; Rom. 9:6-12; Gal. 3:16-22; 4:4-6. But who are the ones referred to in Gen. 3:15 as "thy (Satan's) seed?" For an answer we should examine other scriptures. The Jewish leaders are identified in John's Gospel in Chap. 8, especially vss.37-47, as offspring (seeds) of Satan. Jesus in this confrontation with the Pharisees made a clear distinction between the children of God and the children of Satan. John again makes a division in I John 3:10, "In this the children of God are manifest, and the children of the devil: whosoever doeth not righteousness is not of God, neither he that loveth not his brother." The righteousness of God comes to those who trust Jesus Christ for eternal life.

II. The Rom. 9:8 passage, "- - - They which are the children of the flesh, these are not the children of God: but the children of promise (God's promise) are counted as [for] the seed [God's posterity]," makes an appropriate introduction to the beginning of the Gospel of Matthew. Many people who begin their reading of the New Testament are overwhelmed at the outset when they read first the "begat" verses, Matt. 1:1-17. However, the genealogy of our Lord is very meaningful in light of the above information about the seed of God as represented by his only Son, Jesus Christ. Matthew was a Jew who was led by God to write an account of the Gospel to his own people, the Jews. This Gospel is expressly directed to the attention of the Jews, and Matthew quoted from the Old Testament more than either of the other three Gospels. The Jews expected God to establish a kingdom for the Jewish nation, and Matthew uses the term "the kingdom of heaven" thirty-two times whereas the term does not appear once in the other three Gospels. The terms "that which was spoken," "it was spoken," and "that it might be fulfilled which was spoken" are all used many times by Matthew but not by the other Gospel writers. In all, Matthew quotes the Old Testament sixty times, because he knew that his prime readers were the Jews

or Jewish believers in Jesus as God's Messiah, Savior.

III. Jesus had been in the area of north Galilee performing many significant miracles when he came to where Matthew was performing his vocation as a collector of taxes for the Roman government. At Capernaum the Romans had set up a collection point for customs of goods going from and coming into the Palestinian area from Damascus to the north. When Jesus invited Matthew to become his follower, Matthew accepted at once and gave a feast at his home to announce his change of life. Many of his tax collector friends along with Jesus and his disciples were invited, and the Jewish Pharisees noted that Jesus was socializing with "tax collectors and sinners," Matt. 9:9-10; Lk 5:27-29. Matthew was also known as Levi. As significant as Matthew's Gospel is as a portion of God's Word, I believe that the Lord had this disciple in mind for this very assignment from his calling. This Gospel is the "Genesis of the New Covenant" in many respects. Since much of Genesis involves the early genealogy of God's people, the Israelites, so does Matthew's Gospel begin with an accurate genealogy establishing the fact that the Lord Jesus Christ is of the line of Abraham and David. Both are very important, because from Abraham places him in the nation and from David on the throne in the royal line. Matthew's genealogy is that of Joseph, the foster father of Jesus, lineal descendant of David and heir to the throne transmitted to our Lord. Luke ends with Mary, our Lord's mother. In Gen. 5:1 one finds, "This is the book of the generations of Adam," and in Matt. 1:1 is, "The book of the generation of Jesus Christ." Compare these two books with I Cor. 15:22, "For in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all [who trust him] be made alive." In noting this Matthew genealogy it is wise to remember that the people in Jesus' genealogy both women and Gentiles are noted. Also, note that Joseph did not "beget" Jesus, for God was his Father through God's Holy Spirit.

IV. Joseph had chosen a virgin named Mary as his future wife, but before the marriage ceremony Mary became pregnant. An angel told Joseph that she was still a virgin, because her child was sired by God's Holy Spirit. Matthew notes that this happened precisely this way to fulfill the sign promised to the Jews at Isa. 7:14. Joseph did not have sexual intercourse with Mary until after "she had brought forth her firstborn son," vs. 25. Jesus was her firstborn, but she and Joseph had at least four half-brothers plus half-sisters of Jesus later, Matt. 13:55-56. Note carefully the communication in vs. 25, "And kept her a virgin until she had brought forth her firstborn son: and she called his name Jesus." (my italics) The assumption that Mary died a virgin, because human sexual activity is inherently against God's will (sinful) is a figment of certain persons' imagination much later, I believe. Human sexual activity as God has ordained it is Godly sanctioned and encouraged, Gen. 1:28; 9:1-7; I Cor. 7:1-9. In fact, this virgin birth was a sign of God as a once-in-human-history event. It was made especially to the Jewish nation as a sign when God would enter humanity himself to bear the sins of all who would believe God, Isa. 7:13-14. God was in the Lord Jesus Christ redeeming all who will trust him for eternal, spiritual life, John 3:16; II Cor. 5:17-21.

Feb. 18, 2001

"The Prophets Proved Correct"
Matt. 2

Couples Class
Wendell Alford,
Teacher

I. We noted in Chap. 1 of Matthew's Gospel that the author was a Jew and that it is apparent that God commissioned him to reveal an explicit relationship between the Old Covenant promises of God and Jesus as the fulfillment of those promises. God promised to send a Messiah who could save people from their rebellion (sin) against their Creator. Mankind's part in the process of that individual, spiritual salvation is to believe God's promise, take him at his Word and live a holy life. Once that trust in God is established, the one who trusts is made an eternal child of God with eternal life assured. Chap. 2 of Matthew is an historical account of how God the Father protected his Son, the Messiah (Savior) during the most vulnerable period of Jesus' early human years. The Jewish nation to whom this Gospel was especially directed could see fulfilled the prophecies of at least four of the Old Covenant writers in this chapter alone, Micah, Hosea, Jeremiah and Isaiah. What an outstanding revelation of God's work in coming directly to earth to save those who will believe!

II. Vs. 1 gives the time and place of God's coming onto the earth and its activities, II Cor. 5:18-19. Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea, a village five miles south of Jerusalem. Bethlehem means "the house of bread" and was the home of Elimelech, the father-in-law of Ruth, Ruth 1:1-2. It was here that Ruth (Matt. 1:5) settled with her second husband, Boaz, and also here where Ruth became the ancestress of the family of David. David was associated with Bethlehem throughout his life, I Sam. 16:17-18; 17:12,15; 20:6. The time of Jesus' birth was during the reign of Herod the Great, one of the most dastardly human beings whoever disgraced God's earth. His personality reflected what psychiatrists of today refer to as an amoral disposition, i.e., he demonstrated no sense of right and wrong. His right was whatever, in his opinion, furthered his own physical gain. His ability to advance his own political posture was enhanced, because Augustus and his successors, the Roman Emperors, stood by Herod and his descendants. Herod it was who murdered his own wife of many years and the children she bore him as well when he felt them to be a threat to his political position. He was designated king of the Jews near the end of his procuratorship during 37 to 4 BC. He followed the reign of his father, Antipater, whom Julius Caesar had made procurator of Judea in 47 BC. Matthew also introduces the wise men (Magi) from the east in vs. 1. We should note that the Bible nowhere gives the number of the Magi to be three, nor does the fact that they brought three gifts mean that there were only three Magi. The distance they traveled probably by camel, would indicate that there was a rather large entourage. This entourage could have consisted of scores of individuals in addition to the group of Magi. These Magi demonstrated two prime abilities, astronomy and dream interpretation. They also knew enough Jewish history to realize that the Israeli nation had been and was expecting a special king to come and rule over them. Remember also that the Jews were taken as captives to the east (Babylonia) hundreds of years earlier, and

no doubt the Easterners learned then of the Jews' expectations of the king. The Magi were apparently convinced that such a one was to come, and, further, that a star was to note for them the occasion. The Magi came to Jerusalem and began to ask around town, "Where is he that is born the King of the Jews? for we have seen his star [while we were back] in the east, and are come [here] to worship him," vs. 2. When this entourage came into town asking about another (other than Herod) King of the Jews, he immediately convened the chief priests and scribes of the Jewish people and demanded of them "where the Christ should be born," vs. 4. They knew at once, and quoted Micah 5:2 who had been told by God that Bethlehem was the place. Herod sneaked to the Magi and told them that Bethlehem was the place where they would find the Christ child. Evidently, Herod was especially interested in the timing of the star, because, I believe, he was particularly concerned about the time of Jesus' birth, i.e., how old Jesus was at the time of his (Herod's) inquiry. Herod sneaked around to the Magi and feigned an interest in also worshiping the new King of the Jews. They left Jerusalem and went to Bethlehem observing the motion of the star. The star which they had noted before they had left their homes back east, stood over where the young child was, vs. 9. They rejoiced when they came into his presence, and presented Jesus with gifts of gold (for royalty, I Kings 10:18; Psa. 21:3), frankincense (for a holy, Godly life, Lev. 24:5-9), and Myrrh (associated with death as it was used in embalming, John 19:39). We should be aware that exact timing is not given by Matthew or Luke. Luke relates the visit of the shepherds to see Jesus immediately after his birth, because he was still in the animal stall (manger), Lk 2:15-20. Matthew does not say that the Magi visited the infant in the stall but in a house, vs. 11. (Many artists' concepts are incorrect!) The Magi were warned in a dream of Herod's real reason for wanting to know the exact location of Jesus. They, therefore, returned to the east in a way where Herod could not arrest them for further information about Jesus' whereabouts.

III. After the Magi left for home, the Lord sent a messenger (angel) to Joseph in a dream saying, "Arise, and take the young child - - - to Egypt," vs. 13. This arrangement was to escape Herod's attempt to kill Jesus, and it was also to fulfill the prophet Hosea's prophecy at Hos. 11:1, vs. 15. As God saved Israel as a nation physically from Egypt, in Jesus Christ he was now preparing to offer spiritual (eternal) salvation through his Son. After Herod learned that the Magi had ignored his request to reveal Jesus' location, he had every male child two years of age or younger killed in a circle around the outskirts of the Jerusalem area from Bethlehem to the south to Rama to the north. The sadness and sorrow thus created in the slain children's parents and loved ones were a fulfillment of Jer. 31:15, vs. 18. When Herod the Great died, the Lord's angel told Joseph in a dream to return to north Israel, the Galilee area, but not to Judea where Herod the Great's son, Archelaus, had succeeded to the throne of Israel. Joseph chose the village of Nazareth where Jesus grew up. This village fulfilled the prophecies of Judges 13:5; Isa. 11:1,10, 53:2-3; Psa. 22:6; vs. 23. To understand the "root" idea in these prophecies, one must know that the Hebrew word for Nazareth is Netzer, meaning "branch" or "shoot" [of a plant, shrub, or tree], or, figuratively, "of little significance," John 1:46. That truth is why Joseph chose Nazareth, for no one would consider that place to be the home of Israel's new King, our Lord!

Feb. 25, 2001

"The Forerunner Arrives"
Matt. 3

Couples Class
Wendell Alford,
Teacher

I. Recall that Matthew's Gospel (the Good News of God to mankind) was written for and directed toward the Jewish nation especially. Since that was true, it was not necessary for Matthew to establish a basis for John the Immerser's role as it related to the Messiah who had finally arrived from God. The Jews knew of the promise of God recorded in his prophet Malachi at 4:4-5. There God assured his people, the Israelites, that a day was coming when the earth would burn as an oven, Mal. 3:1; 4:1 (See also II Pet. 3:7,10.). However, before that day comes, (We learned of "that day" in our study of Isaiah, Daniel and The Revelation.), God promised to send a person like Elijah (I Kings 18:40; Lk 1:17) who would prepare the way for God's judgment. All that remained when John the Immerser and Jesus the Savior (Messiah) appeared upon the earthly scene, was for the Jewish nation to accept them as God's promise for mankind's spiritual salvation. Let us leap ahead in Matthew's Gospel to Chap. 11:7-15 where the Lord indicates definitely that John the Immerser was the forerunner of the Messiah's (Jesus') arrival on earth, "and if you [the Jews] will receive it [the person of John the Immerser], this is Elias (Elijah), which was for to come," Matt. 11:14.

II. During the period while Jesus was growing up (Matt. 2:23), Matthew states, "In those days came John the Immerser, proclaiming in the wilderness of Judea and saying, 'Repent you, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand,'" i.e., the kingdom God promised you Jews is ready to be established, vss. 1-2. To tie the activity of John the Immerser to God's promise of the Lord's coming, Matthew quotes Isaiah who prophesied of John's assignment, "The voice of one crying in the wilderness, 'Prepare you the way of [for] the Lord, make his paths straight,'" Isa. 40:3, vs. 3. The Bible relates some details of John's choices regarding personal habits and public activities. His garments were made of rough camel's hair with a wide leather belt around his waist. He ate what was available in the desert area where he worked, locusts and honey from wild bees. Locusts (grasshoppers) are still eaten by some Arabs in the Middle East. Often they are cooked in butter which gives them a mild, less wild or gamey flavor. Wild bees lived in holes in rocks (Deut. 32:13), in hollow tree trunks (I Sam. 14:26), and even in carcasses of dead animals (Jud. 14:8). Some Bible students also allow that the honey could have been a sweet sap which oozed from certain fig or palm trees. John was a young man at this time, because he was about six months older than Jesus (Lk 1:24,26). Further, John was murdered by Herod before our Lord was crucified for mankind's [all who will believe] spiritual, eternal life. Jesus was crucified at about age thirty-three, about 28 AD, I believe.

III. John's message that people should repent of their sins was taken very seriously as is evidenced by the variety of those who came to be immersed by the evangelist. They came from Jerusalem, all of Judea and all along the banks of the Jordan. They openly confessed their sins including many of those Jews of the sects of

the Pharisees and Sadducees, vs.7. John was very blunt with these especially (just like Elijah!) by telling them, "O brood of snakes (vipers), who hath warned you to escape the coming wrath?" (vs.7) He called those seeking immersion henceforth to conduct their affairs to reflect activities worthy of better lives than they were admitting. He emphasized that their being offspring of Abraham was not, of itself, enough to please God. John equated stones with simply being from Abraham's seed. [One must be born from above, John 3:3, by trusting God's only Son and Savior (Messiah), John 3:14-17. Only then would they be right with God and able to live holy, acceptable-to-God lives, John 3:18-21; 6:44-51.] Mankind's need for a Savior (Messiah) and an abiding Holy Spirit (Comforter, John 14:26) is what John the Immerser is proclaiming when he says, "And now also the axe is laid unto the root of the trees," vs.10. For a fuller explanation of what God is doing through Jesus Christ as proclaimed by John the Immerser in Matt. 3:10, see Rom. 11:11-36. By accepting Jesus as Savior one is born from above and sealed by God's Holy Spirit as God's forever child with a desire to please his or her heavenly Father, John 10:27-30; II Cor. 1:21-22; Eph. 1:7-14. John the Immerser could very well not have fully understood the full implications of the message God had commissioned him to proclaim, for recall John's problem of understanding at Lk 11:19-20. Here John, Jesus' half-cousin according to the flesh and proclaimer of Jesus' being the Messiah (John 1:29), wants further confirmation from the Lord himself that Jesus is, in fact, God's Messiah. This act of John has always seemed strange to me, but at that time John was in prison awaiting decapitation by Herod, Mk 6:17-29; Lk 3:19-20. This prison was east of the Dead Sea, far from the center of most of the Jewish population which John the Immerser loved. This long isolation no doubt caused him much mental anguish and probably gave him cause to want an updated affirmation of Jesus as the Messiah.

IV. Along with the repentance required in John's message was that another messenger from God was about to become known who was far superior to himself. John was immersing repenters over on the east side of the Jordan River near the south end of Lake Galilee one day when he looked at those coming for immersion, and noted Jesus among those coming forward. He told those nearby, "Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world. This is he of whom I said, 'After me cometh a man which is preferred before me, for he was before me,'" John 1:29-30. John the Immerser went on to say that as he immersed Jesus, after Jesus had insisted upon being immersed although John had protested doing so, John saw God's Spirit descend from heaven like a dove and remaining upon Jesus. This experience was an indication to John that, although he had not known Jesus' office (as Messiah) before (John 1:31,33), he was thereafter convinced that Jesus would immerse individual believers in him (Jesus as the Christ) with God's Holy Spirit whereas John himself was immersing only with water. John the Immerser's conclusion: "And I saw, and testify that this [one, Jesus] is the Son of God," John 1:34. When Jesus finished God's plan of spiritual salvation through his death on the cross, burial, and resurrection, John the Immerser's immersion for repentance no longer pleased God as an indication that an individual had exercised appropriate faith in God's Savior, Jesus Christ, Acts 19:1-7, for God said at Jesus' immersion, "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased," vs. 17. (See also Matt. 17:5b, where God said, "hear Jesus [alone]"

I. Immediately following John the Immerser's immersion of our Lord Jesus, the Lord "was led up of the spirit (Holy Spirit) into the wilderness (desert area) to be tempted of the devil," vs. 1. We are not told the reasons for this testing of Jesus, but we can believe that if Jesus were to be completely identified with sinful humanity as he was in being immersed by John in the Jordan, he would need to be as is stated in God's Word at Heb. 4:15-16, tested by the wiles of Satan's influence. This testing was an appropriate training for Jesus as a priest to stand between believers and God the Father, the only necessary priest, king, and judge, Psa. 110:4-6; Zech. 6:12-13; Heb. 5:5-10; 7:14,20-28. (The only priest) If Jesus is to rebuke Satan on our behalf as God's only High Priest, how better to recognize Satan's tactics than to confront the old Deceiver head-on, directly. So, God the Father through his Spirit directed Jesus to go alone out to the desert to be without food for "forty days and forty nights," vs. 2. Remember too, that this man Jesus was the one, final wedge between Satan's ability to control sinful mankind and for them to be free of his (Satan's) influence over God's creation, including the pinnacle of that creation, humanity, Rev. 20:10. Sure enough, when Jesus was weakened (humanly) by the long period without food, old Satan showed up with his first test. Satan's first attempt to destroy Jesus as God's Messiah was to seek to undermine Jesus' identity as God's only begotten Son. Jesus' reaction to Satan's "Iffy" suggestion was to quote Deut. 8:3, "Man shall not live by bread only, but by every word out of the mouth of the Lord," vs. 4. In other words, persons consist of more than a physical, flesh and blood being. They need to heed God's Word regarding their spiritual needs, and those needs can be met only by knowing God's promise in his Word and accepting that promise through faith. A person must, to be complete (whole), be enlightened and recreated by God (from above), John 3:3-8,14-15. Of course Satan knew that, but he thought that it could be possible to break Jesus' (as a human) belief in himself as to who he really was, the true God, the Creator's only begotten Son and Savior. (Note Satan's same tactic in disputing God's eternal nature in humanity at Gen. 2:7,16-17; 3:1-5.) Satan's first test of Jesus gained Satan nothing, because Jesus refused to yield to Satan's appeal to his body's need for physical appetites. One's spirit's (soul's) need takes precedence over one's physical needs.

II. One of Satan's strengths is that he does not give up easily. If he cannot cause one to disbelieve God and therefore not serve him, Satan will come at a person from different directions. The "food thing" (lust of the flesh) did not work so how about Jesus' ability to control his spirit's lust for proving himself to be able to control God by subterfuge. Satan told Jesus by quoting Psa. 91:11-12 that, since you believe that you really are God's only Son, God surely will not permit anything bad to happen to you, so let's go up to the Temple in Jerusalem. There you can force God to take care of you by climbing to the top of the [Herod's] Temple and jumping off. Jesus' answer to Satan to countermand this

spiritual test was to quote Deut. 6:16 where Moses took the glory to himself of bringing much needed water from a rock rather than giving God the glory for bringing forth the water, Numb.20:2-13. Jesus refused to test God in this way. Again, Satan was unable to break Jesus' will. In Satan's last attempt to gain Jesus' loyalty to himself rather than to the heavenly Father, he asked Jesus to view all the nations of the world from the peak of a high mountain. Satan said, "All these things [with their glory] will I give to you, if you will fall down and worship me," vs. 9. Of course Satan was lying about his authority, but he has always been a liar, John 8:44. Jesus quoted Deut. 6:13 to say that only God is to be worshiped, vs. 10. (Compare vs. 10 with Matt. 16:23.) Jesus again did not yield to Satan's psychological test of a person's lust for power over others. Eve was likewise tempted by the same Satan at Gen. 3:5, "- - you shall be as God (equal to God)" if you will take my (Satan's) suggestion and do what God has commanded you not to do (eat of the fruit which will cause you to die [spiritually]). Jesus in not yielding to all of Satan's tests, demonstrated a strength of being and will that set him above and apart from every other human being who has ever or ever will live on earth, I Pet. 2:21-25. Every other person has or will yield to Satan's tests in life, Rom. 3:23; Gal. 3:22. This fact is why God sent Jesus to earth as the Savior of all who will trust him, John 3:16-18. After passing Satan's tests successfully, Jesus is now prepared to begin his service (ministry) as God's Messiah. After this grueling, tempting experience, God sent messengers to meet Jesus' needs, Jam. 4:7.

III. Vs. 12 indicates a lapse in time, probably short, between Jesus' learning that John the Immerser had been cast into prison by Herod (Matt. 14:3) and Jesus' proceeding from his home in Nazareth to Capernaum where he then relocated. Capernaum was a fishing center on the north shore of Galilee. Matthew was careful to note that Jesus was going to Capernaum between Zabulon and Nephtholim precisely to fulfill a prophecy of Isaiah at Isa. 9:1-2 which includes, "The people that walked in darkness have seen a great light: and to them which are in the region and shadow of death, light is sprung up." Jesus evidently set up his headquarters at Capernaum, because his neighbors at Nazareth refused to accept Jesus as God's Messiah, Mk 6:1-6. Further, Jesus needed to be among a group of people from whom he could choose those who would join him in spreading the Good News that the kingdom of heaven is now being promoted. So it was, as Jesus walked along the shore of the Sea of Galilee, he saw two brothers Peter and Andrew throwing their net in the water as they exercised their vocation. Jesus asked the two to follow him so that the Lord could redirect their interests from catching and selling fish to "fish for people," vs. 19. They immediately left their nets and accepted Jesus' offer to spread the Gospel. After their acceptance, Jesus located two other brothers, James and John. In fact, these two were at this time with their father, Zebedee, helping him mend their nets. The two sons, as Peter and Andrew had done, agreed to leave their father and the fishing business and become disciples of Jesus. Jesus was now planning his activities so that he went all about Galilee (northern Israel) teaching in the synagogues and proclaiming the Good News about God's being ready to establish his kingdom. The King is now here among you! As he taught, Jesus healed thousands of people who were physically and/or mentally ill, multitudes of people from Galilee, Decapolis, Jerusalem, Judea and east of the Jordan. Next week: what Jesus taught.

Mar. 11, 2001

"Kingdom Citizens And The Law"
Matt. 5

Couples Class
Wendell Alford,
Teacher

I. With Chap. 5 of Matthew's Gospel account, we come to the principles or teachings of our Lord to his disciples, i.e., those who had chosen to be disciplined by the Teacher who had come from God to Israel's people. Following closely the context of Matthew's introduction of these teachings, one discovers (vs. 1) that as Jesus had been out among huge groups of people teaching them about the kingdom of heaven he had been sent to proclaim (Matt. 4:23), he noted that these Jews were in desperate need of a knowledge of their relationship with God the Father and his will for mankind. Therefore, he withdrew, "went up into a mountain," and there his disciples, not the multitudes, came to him for instruction. Apparently, Jesus chose to teach his disciples and thereby prepare them to reach out with his teachings to the multitudes. He did not do this teaching by writing a book but rather divulged God's thoughts orally, "opened his mouth," vs. 2. Why? I believe that Jesus knew that when the Holy Spirit came, he (Holy Spirit) would make known, not only the message itself, but also the meaning which God wanted conveyed, John 14:16-17,25-26; Acts 2:1-4,14-18.

II. To understand Jesus' "Sermon on the Mount" we must keep in mind that its message or teachings are for those who are to be citizens of the kingdom of heaven, those who are led by God's Holy Spirit. No one, I believe, can live by the precepts given in Jesus' teachings without the prompting and power of God himself in the person of his Holy Spirit, John 6:44-45. Not only is that true, but in a world in which Satan is still prince, John 12:31; II Cor. 4:4, God has not yet completely taken Satan away from mankind as he will finally, Rev. 20:10, after he sets up his kingdom, Rev. 20:3. Is this knowledge of God's future plans for his people an excuse for not following God's lead (Jesus' teachings) in our present flesh and blood lives? NO! (See Rom. 6:1-2,14-16; I John 1:8-2:2.) But the Law and Jesus' revealing the intent of that Law to an even higher plane, is to demonstrate that every individual falls short of God's will for us, and therefore, a person has a need for a Savior whom God is providing in Jesus Christ, and a heavenly sustainer, God's Holy Spirit, John 3:16; 14:16-17; 15:10-12; Gal. 3:24-26; Eph. 1:13-14; 4:30-32. A person must place himself or herself under the lordship of God through faith in his only Son, Jesus Christ, and then follow the leadership of God's Holy Spirit to please God, Eph. 2:4-10. Only in this way can one's life please God and produce the "fruit of the Spirit," Gal. 5:22-26. What must one do who abuses his or her relationship with God and who has already become a child of God through personal faith in Jesus Christ, Eph. 4:30? Confess the abuse to God and ask him through Jesus Christ to forgive and strengthen one's spirit against future temptations, I Cor. 10:13. Sinning against God's will after becoming a citizen of God's kingdom, i.e., those bought-with-Jesus'-death are to give an account of their witnessing in this life, II Cor. 5:9-10; I Cor. 3:14-15.

III. There are some Bible students who make the teachings of Jesus in these famous teachings the essence of the Gospel and, in effect,

make their precepts a restoration of the Old Covenant Law to be what one must do under the New Covenant to make one worthy of eternal life. Whereas, in fact, such a proposition takes the grace of God through faith in Jesus Christ out of the picture entirely. As we have noted above, eternal, spiritual life with God is solely accomplished through God's love and grace. I believe that no one can say honestly that he or she maintains the spirit of the directions in Jesus' teachings. As we examine these teachings, ask yourself honestly, whether, since you became a child of God through accepting Jesus' righteousness for eternal life through faith in him, you have never failed to follow Jesus' teachings, but have always followed God's Holy Spirit? Remember, these teachings do not outline the plan of salvation but detail the attitudes and actions which will prevail in the Lord's ecclesia when Jesus returns. As a believer, have you ever disobeyed God? If so, confess such to the Lord in faith, and as Jesus told the woman caught in sin, his response to you will be, "Neither do I condemn thee: go and sin no more," John 8:11. Jesus taught with the authority of God, not as those who taught that keeping the Law was mankind's chief responsibility to God, Matt. 7:28-29. Love takes precedence over the Law, in fact, loving is the fulfilling of the Law, John 15:10,12,17; Rom. 13:8-14.

IV. Vss. 3-14 enumerates states of being rather than commandments to do. It is the nature of a member of the kingdom of heaven's very being to express reliance on God's Spirit for direction and strength (poor in ones own spirit, humble); to mourn ones sincere need for final, complete spiritual salvation, Rom. 7:24-25; 8:18-25; I Cor. 15:25-28,54,58; with meekness (yielded to God) comes an inheritance of the earth; a yearning for righteousness will be satisfied; the results of being merciful is to receive mercy; purity of motive (will) produces a vision of God's will; sons of God are the ones who live and present the plan of spiritual peace with God to others; citizens of the kingdom of heaven can expect persecution [in the present world order before Jesus comes to be Lord of his kingdom], to be reviled, and falsely accused for Jesus' sake; but in this age as you are experiencing being despised and rejected by unbelievers, be happy (blessed) and rejoice, for the reward will be great for you as it will be for representatives of God (prophets) before you, I Cor. 3:14-15; Heb. 11:39-40; I Pet. 4:12-14. As citizens of the kingdom of heaven awaiting our reward, we are to be the salt (preservers) of the earth, the light (enlighteners; witnesses) of the world who are to do God's will and thereby glorify our God in heaven, vss. 13-16. We believers are to do God's will because of the love he has demonstrated toward us rather than to keep the rituals of the Law as was the custom and pride of the Scribes and Pharisees, vs. 20. For examples: anger toward another equals (produces) murder; giving for God's work does not give one license to mistreat others; while the Law requires that one not engage in sexual relations with other than ones own spouse, even looking lustfully on other than ones spouse is equal to committing adultery in God's sight; divorcing for other than immorality causes both thereafter to commit adultery; swearing a commitment rather than a simple assertion is unGodly; do not retaliate when mistreated and give whatever is asked, and more; love even your enemies, even as God does; let God be your example, vss. 13-48. No wonder we can be satisfied only by trusting God's love, mercy, grace, and forgiveness! Praise the Lord for John 3:14-17!

Mar. 18, 2001

"Kingdom of Heaven Values"
Matt. 6

Couples Class
Wendell Alford,
Teacher

I. We noted last week that the Sermon on the Mount is not the Gospel, per se, but the being status and ethical actions and attitudes of kingdom of heaven citizens. The Gospel in a nutshell is stated by Paul in God's Word at I Cor. 15: 1,3-4, "- - - that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures; and that he was buried, and that he rose again the third day according to the scriptures." This Sermon, which is introduced in Matt. 5:1-2 and continues on through Chaps. 6-7, enumerates and expands the attitudes and actions of those who have voluntarily (willed to) accepted God's Good News in and through Jesus Christ. These believers in Jesus Christ have accepted the kingship (authority) of God in Jesus Christ, and are, therefore, citizens of God's kingdom of heaven, a favorite term of Matthew. As citizens of God's kingdom, we believers are sojourners on earth while in our flesh and blood bodies, I Pet. 1:13-21. We wait patiently for Jesus to return and receive us, not simply as the subjects of his kingdom, but as his own very bride, II Cor. 11:2; Eph. 5:32; Rev. 19:7-9; 21:2,9. Jesus taught his disciples to have a deeper respect ("for" or "but I say," Matt. 5:17-20; 21-26; 27-28; 31-32; 33-37; 38-42; 43-48) for God's Law than the Jews had traditionally regarded it. Followers of God's Son, Jesus, are to live the spirit of the Law rather than the letter of that Law. Those who truly want to please God in their daily lives are to act from a motivation of love for God and his will rather than simply how to "get by." We believers are fully blest, because God loves us and has given us the desire and ability to return his love, Rom. 5:3-8; I John 4:13-19. The Sermon on the Mount relates the ethical context for living as disciples of Jesus Christ, but without God's Spirit living in and directing our thoughts and activities, there is no dynamo (power) to live as God desires for us. Our holiness depends entirely upon the power of God and our depending thereupon, Rom. 8:1-3,26-28. Our humility is the reasonable result, Gal. 3:23-4:6; Eph. 1:13-14; 2:4-10.

II. We now look at the continuation of Jesus' teaching of the Law of the kingdom of heaven which Christ has promised to return and establish, John 14:3. We should emphasize that presenting the teachings of the Sermon on the Mount as a guide for unbelievers is like attempting to run a pig on gasoline. We who have the guidance of the Holy Spirit have enough trouble with Satan, let alone those who do not have the power of God's Holy Spirit, Rom. 7! If one is trusting oneself to attain the goals of pleasing God, negative results are inevitable. A proper relationship with God through faith in Jesus Christ is absolutely necessary for one to be able to practice acceptably citizenship in the kingdom of heaven. Chap. 6 speaks to a kingdom citizen's relationship to God whereas Chap. 5 had to do primarily with God's people in the kingdom relating to one another and the Law's part in directing those relationships. In vs. 1 Jesus speaks of a believer's giving to benefit others needs. The King James term "alms" means today giving money or service to others in Jesus' name. Jesus says here that the motive behind such actions will determine what the reward will be for those so engaged.

If you give to impress upon others how "good" you are, your only reward will be their admiration. Jesus characterizes those who practice such charity as hypocrites. On the other hand, if you serve others because of your love of God, do not feel that you are performing self-made goodness (righteousness). Your faith in God's promise through Jesus made you do it, and therefore, God is glorified. God knows why you do what you do, and will reward you openly if your actions were because of your love of God, vss. 1-4. The same principle is demonstrated in praying. Hypocrites also pray and in so doing seek to impress other persons with their "piety" by repeating over and over publicly their assertions and requests. Also, their rewards will be the admiration of their hearers. Someone has said, "Those prayers don't get through the ceiling!" "God knows what your needs are before you pray," Jesus said, vs. 8, Isa. 65:24. And because he knows, your prayers should be prayed in a place where nobody knows where you are, vs. 6. Jesus instructs believers in him to address God as Father as they pray. (See John 1:12-13 to understand who is so privileged. Only those who are born from above are so designated, John 3:5.) Jesus' model prayer continues: address God with awe, directly; ask that God's lordship be accepted in the spirits of more and more people on earth [so that the appropriate time will come when Jesus will return, Matt. 24:14, to formally establish his kingdom on earth]; ask for daily physical needs; ask for God's forgiveness of your shortcomings equal to your forgiving others; ask for God to lead you around (to bypass) those circumstances which seduce you away from pleasing God; your prayer should recognize that your chief purpose in life is to remember that God's lordship (kingdom) takes precedence over everything else, vs. 33. Note that Jesus emphasizes, by repeating, the importance of forgiving others, vss. 12,14-15. See also I John 4:20-5:5.

III. When kingdom citizens choose to make special arrangements to devote themselves to God's service in a special way, they should not do this in such a way as to impress others. Let it (fasting, for example, and see I Cor. 7:2-5) be between you and God. Jesus told his disciples (kingdom citizens) regarding material possessions that all appropriate investments are made with eternity in mind. Investments made in those things which are temporary only draws ones heart (will) away from eternal (spiritual) values and activities. A kingdom national cannot have two simultaneously prime preferences, for inevitably one will supersede the other, e.g., God and spiritual, eternal concerns, or self and material, temporary things, vs. 24. Your treasure (investments) reflects that which is most important to you. Even daily needs such as food, drink, and clothing are not the most important things in God's kingdom. Your fleshly nature is just that, a part of the natural order, like birds. These creatures of God are supplied their physical needs so why should we believers not consider ourselves who house God's eternal Spirit more important than the lower (without God's eternal nature) animals, I Cor. 3:15-17? If God supplies their temporary needs, is it reasonable to presume that God will neglect his own children? (vs. 32) God even creates inanimate life such as grass and lilies with the abilities to live and survive in glorious splendor, and then die without living beyond their physical existence. But God has made believers (citizens of his kingdom) eternal spirits who will live with him forever, John 11:25-26, and never die (spiritually). Those citizens should hold first precedence for being God's children, and furthering the kingdom, knowing that God will keep his promise to take care of their every temporary, physical need as they do so.

Mar. 25, 2001

"Relating To One Another"
Matt. 7

Couples Class
Wendell Alford,
Teacher

I. Chap. 7 continues and concludes Jesus' so called "Sermon on the Mount." Recall that in Chap. 5 Jesus' teaching includes the self status (being) of citizens of the kingdom of heaven and their relationship to God's Law, and in Chap. 6 Jesus discusses how his citizens should relate to God. Now in Chap. 7 the Lord gives acceptable behavior as kingdom citizens relate to one another. The "bottom line" in Jesus' teachings is that those who have placed their eternal welfare into Jesus Christ's keeping are different and should, therefore, have different values about every aspect of life. They should have characteristics which indicate different motives, attitudes, and actions, II Cor. 5:14-21; Matt. 7:16a. As God's children through faith in Jesus Christ, we are continually growing and maturing in and through God's grace, Eph. 4:12-32; II Pet. 3:18. In fact, those distinctives which relate an individual to God through Jesus Christ is what is known in Christian theology as "holy," i.e., Godlike, separated, Matt. 5:48; Lk 6:36; II Cor. 6:14-18; Eph. 5:1. The apostle James summarized this holy aspect of a believer's faith activities at Jam. 2:22, "Do you understand that faith was working with his [Abraham's] actions, [in offering to sacrifice his only son, Isaac], and by [such] actions [Abraham] was made complete?" James' conclusion in his discussion of the relationship of one's faith and that faith's evidence is at Jam. 2:26, "For as the body [flesh and blood] without the spirit [God's Holy Spirit] is dead [separated from God spiritually], so faith without works [evidence of acceptance of Jesus and his teachings] is dead [separated from God, spiritually] as well." To understand how James' letter (God's Word) relates to the teachings of Jesus' Sermon on the Mount, one must note in James 1:1 his letter is addressed to Jews who were, no doubt, struggling with their new faith in Jesus as God's Messiah and their lifelong dedication to keeping God's Law as the sole basis for pleasing God. Further, note that the principle basis of James' message has to do with the part faith plays in the interaction between believers. Remember we stated above that the Matt. 7 emphasis is how kingdom of heaven citizens relate to each other. James discusses the purpose of temptations (tests) in Jam. 1:1-12; the source of tests in Jam. 1:13-18; true faith and God's Word's place in directing the citizens' daily activities in Jam. 1:19-27; faith's part in equating, in God's sight, believers who are rich, poor, or socially elite in Jam. 2:1-13; as discussed above, faith's part in stimulating and undergirding a believer's following God's will, Jam. 2:14-25; faith's urging kingdom citizens not to use language to cause others to stumble (displease God), Jam. 3:1-12; lastly, faith in Jesus Christ produces humility (Jam. 4:1-12), dependence upon God (Jam. 4:13-5:6), patience as we await Jesus' return for us, (Jam. 5:7-12, and upholding fellow believers in prayer, especially those who err (stray) from exercising true faith in Jesus as the Messiah, Jam. 5:13-20 (and see Rom. 11:14 where Paul also speaks of his special concern for his fellow Jews in the flesh).

II. Now let us return to God's message (Jesus' teaching) in Matt.

7, the conclusion of Jesus' Sermon on the Mount. As we learned in Matt. 6:12,14-15, Jesus was very concerned that citizens forgive one another. In vs. 1 he applies the same principle regarding judging one another. God forgives us as we forgive each other, and we escape God's judgment as we do not judge [by law] other kingdom citizens. We relate to God through his mercy and love through our faith in Jesus Christ, not through the keeping of the Law, Rom. 3:19-31. We can, by knowing the actions of fellow believers, see how effective their service is, but not their spiritual condition which is God's prerogative alone. Only God can know ones introspective motives. Many self-righteous persons assess most others worse than self. Such self-righteous ones are rebellious like dogs or swine and are not to be contended with, vs. 6. They are spiritual perverts who insist on putting their own goodness before God's mercy and grace, Jude 4,7,17,20. A citizen of the kingdom of heaven who seeks God's blessings will receive his or her requests with far more wisdom than humanly limited parents give when asked for needs by their own children. God's rule of gold is "Treat others as you would be treated by them," vs. 12, which is the thesis of the Old Covenant. Everyone has two choices, the freedom of trusting Jesus as Savior (John 8:33-36 - the narrow way) or relying upon anything else for spiritual salvation - the broad way. There is one way only which will please God, and that way is to accept Jesus Christ's righteousness, John 3:18; 6:34-40; 10:10; 11:25-26; 14:6; Rom. 3:21-31; 9:30-33.

III. In vss. 15-20 Jesus warns kingdom citizens concerning false messengers who declare themselves to be speaking of God's will and way, prophets. They are really ravenous wolves who are only dressed as sheep. The fruit they bear will identify them, their actions and attitudes. Their actions speak so loudly that their words do not reveal their real hearts and wills. This caution of our Lord continues as a thread through the remainder of the New Covenant, Matt. 24:24; II Cor. 11:13-15; II Tim. 4:3-4; II Pet. 2; I John 4:1; II John 10; Jude; Rev. 2:2. Vss. 21-23 further reveal that many who profess to be allies with Jesus will be fakes. Jesus said, "Not every one who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' shall enter the kingdom of heaven," vs. 21. Others will say that they have proclaimed God's plans, even cast out evil spirits, and performed many miracles in the name of Christ, but at the end Jesus will tell them, "I never knew you: depart from me, you who work iniquity," Matt. 13:24-30. As James put it at Jam. 1:22, "But be ye doers of the Word (accept Jesus and his teachings as children), and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves." Vss. 24-27 relate one of Jesus' many parables. Here he teaches that kingdom citizens who live Jesus' teachings are like a wise person who plans his or her house and then builds the home upon a rock (See I Cor. 10:4,13.). After the house is built upon that Rock (See Peter's confession at Matt. 16:15-18 of faith in that Rock, and also Peter's discussion (God's Word) at I Pet. 2:1-10.). When the trials (temptations) of life (rain, floods, and wind) come, the person who is firmly built upon that Rock will withstand those trials. On the other hand, lives built on (sand) other than that Rock will not be acceptable to God the Father. Jesus taught with authority! "On Christ, the solid Rock, I stand; all other ground is sinking sand; my hope is built on nothing less," I Cor. 3:11-17.

Apr. 8, 2001

"Jesus Shows Godly Authority"
Matt. 8

Couples Class
Wendell Alford,
Teacher

I. No ethical teaching given in human history surpasses Jesus' teachings in the Sermon on the Mount in Matt. 5-7. Not only did he proclaim those ethics, but he also lived a life which demonstrated that a human could follow his teachings. So, how could those principles be a demonstration of what God really desired for human beings to follow? That proper relationship between people and their Creator must be certified by the one (Jesus) who gave the ethical teachings, John 5:26-27. The chapter we examine today fully divulges as fact that Jesus had the authority and Godly power to be the sovereign (king) over a kingdom of heaven itself. I believe that when Jesus returns to earth that he will, in fact, organize and rule over a kingdom where he will guide his loyal subjects to follow the principles which he gave in Matt. 5-7. At that time and in that kingdom, all spirits will love to follow the Lord's leading. Satan's influence in today's world makes following the Lord's leading very difficult, Rom. 7; 16:20. In fact, the nearer one follows Jesus' leading (by his Holy Spirit) in his or her daily living, the more opposition and persecution one experiences, Psa. 34:19; Matt. 5:10-12; II Tim. 3:10-17. Jesus himself was hated by the Jewish religious leaders as he practiced God's will, John 8:59; 10:31. Who Jesus was (God's only begotten Son) was proved by his control of the earth's natural laws, forces (John 10:25,32), and, following his teachings, he went about demonstrating his power over physical and spiritual laws. We see ample evidence of this truth in Matt. 8.

II. Immediately after Jesus came down from the mountain where he taught the lessons in Matt. 5-7, great crowds again began following him. A leprous man came up to Jesus and worshiped him by bowing and saying, "Lord, if you want it to be so, you can make me well (whole)." Jesus' response was to touch the leper with his hand and say, "I want your request to be granted, be cured." Immediately the man's leprosy disappeared, and he was as though he had not been diseased. The Lord's position following this exchange appears strange on its surface, for Jesus said, "See you tell no one [do not take the time] what has happened to you, but present yourself immediately to the [Jewish] priest, offering the appropriate gift according to Moses' Law [so that they can know for a fact that you are well and can give to you a true testimony authorizing you to again associate with others.]," Lev. 13-14. Note especially Lev. 13:2-3,44-46 and Lev. 14:11 which include the priest's instructions concerning the detection, isolation, and restoration of a leprous person. This man whom Jesus healed was hilariously happy. Mark reveals that the healed man proclaimed widespread what Jesus had done. Thereafter, Jesus was so inundated by the crowds in the city that he had to go out into the countryside (desert places). Even so, out there people came to him from everywhere in the area, Mk 1:40-45. Jesus' popularity increased rapidly throughout Galilee.

III. Although Jesus found it impractical to stay in Capernaum, he did come into town on occasion. During one such time a Roman

officer in charge of the local armory (one hundred soldiers) approached Jesus and pleaded with him saying, "Lord, my servant [probably his valet] is home in bed paralyzed (with palsy) and in excruciating pain." When Jesus agreed to go to the centurion's quarters and heal the servant, the officer said, "Lord, I am not worth such personal attention. I believe that if you will simply express the desire, my request will be met. I have authority and my word to those under my command is all that is necessary to have my requests completed. [i.e., I trust your authority with God.]," vss. 8-9. This expression of authority by the centurion, I believe, is very important in this interchange. Jesus was astonished (marvelled) by the faith in Jesus' authority over nature by this Roman, Gentile, military commander. What surprised Jesus, in my opinion, is that a Gentile would have faith in his authority when the Jewish leaders were jealous and discounted Jesus as God's Messiah. The Lord said to them who followed him, "To tell the truth (verily), I have not found such profound faith, even among the Jews (Israel)," vs. 10. Jesus' observation goes even further: "Gentiles will be accepted from all over the world and will join Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob as people of faith in God's Messiah, while some children [by physical birth] of the kingdom [Israel] will be refused as citizens of God's kingdom and thrown out into outer darkness where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth," vss. 11-12. The conclusion of Jesus' relating to the centurion was that the Lord told the officer, "Go about your duties, your request will be answered according to your faith [in my authority]," vs. 13. The centurion's servant was cured exactly when Jesus willed it to be so.

IV. After Jesus healed the centurion's servant, he came to the home of Peter, also there in Capernaum, where he learned that Peter's mother-in-law was in bed sick with a fever. Jesus touched her hand, and the fever immediately left her. She then served her visitor's needs (refreshments?). It appears that the word went out around Capernaum that "Jesus was back in town." Later that day many were brought to Jesus for healing who were mentally ill. The Lord simply ordered the evil spirits (demons) from them, and the mentally ill were made whole (cured). Many others who were physically ill came to Jesus and were made well also. Matthew emphasized that these acts of Jesus were done, "That it might be fulfilled which was spoken by Isaiah [at Isa. 53:4]," vs. 17. Jesus realized that the crowds were so numerous that it became impractical to serve them well. He told his followers (his immediate helpers) to prepare to cross the Sea of Galilee. As they were leaving, a scribe approached him saying that he wanted to follow Jesus as did another disciple who wanted to postpone his discipleship until his aged father had died. Jesus said that, in effect, my time is short, let others care for your father and come, follow me. The Lord then boarded a ship with his helpers to go to the east shore. As they sailed, Jesus, who obviously needed rest, lay down and went to sleep. A violent storm arose, and the fearful ones with him awoke Jesus to declare that they were all in grave danger from the storm. Jesus addressed the storm and told the wind and waves to be calm. They did so. The men were astonished by his authority over natural forces. On the other side of the lake where the Gergesenes lived, they were accosted by two insane men who were living in a cemetery. Jesus commanded the demons in the two to enter a herd of swine. The demons had requested this treatment rather than to be sent to the abyss where evil spirits and Satan live, Lk 8:31; Rev. 20:1-2. Jesus demonstrated his authority over the earth he created, John 1:3; Col. 1:16.

I. Recall that last week Jesus was so depleted by the press of the huge multitudes (Matt. 8:18) that he boarded a boat and sailed across the Sea of Galilee from its west bank and landed on the east bank at a community of the Gergesenes. The Gergesenes begged him to leave their area. Today, at the beginning of the ninth chapter, he takes a boat to return to "his own city" (Capernaum), vs. 1. At Capernaum Jesus was again approached by those who needed healing. In fact, so many people gathered around the home where he lived in Capernaum (Peter's, Matt. 8:14), that some ill patients could not get in his presence for his attention. So it was, that one man afflicted with palsy (was paralyzed) was being carried on a stretcher. The four men who carried him were so determined to see their sick friend healed by Jesus that they opened an entrance in the roof (Mk 2:4), because the intense crowd prevented them from entering at the door. Jesus noted the firm faith of the four friends and said to the paralyzed man, "Son, cheer up, your sins are forgiven," vs. 2, Lk 5:20-26. The scribes and Pharisees who witnessed Jesus' statement to the paralyzed man accused Jesus of blasphemy, because Jesus exercised his authority to forgive the man's sins. The Jewish religious leaders could not deny Jesus' authority, because, when the Lord told him to stand up, take up his stretcher and go home, the man did exactly as he was told, glorifying God all the way, Lk 5:25. We should note the relationship of the sick man's illness (palsy) and Jesus' forgiving his sin. The man's illness could possibly have been caused by a sinful choice or choices which he had made, e.g., advanced syphilis, and I rather believe such was the case. However, all illnesses are not directly attributable to any given person's sins. Such a case is revealed at John 9:3, and today many are made ill because of blood transfusions, etc., and through no personal choice of sinful actions. The blind man whom Jesus healed in John 9 was born blind precisely so "that the works of God could be made evident that Jesus was, in fact, God's Messiah."

II. Note Matthew's (a.k.a. Levi) humility as indicated by the short reference to his own calling by Jesus in vs. 9. The writer of the first Gospel stated simply that Jesus went where he worked as a tax collector for Rome and ask that he become a proclaimer of the Gospel rather than continue as a servant of the Roman Empire. He did, immediately. To celebrate his change in vocations, Matthew invited some of his tax collector friends as well as Jesus and his disciples to a special meal, Mk 2:13-17. Also at the feast were scribes, Pharisees and other sinners whom Matthew had invited. The scribes and Pharisees grumbled to Jesus' disciples, because Jesus had agreed to socialize (eat) with these despiteful Roman tax collectors and other sinners. Jesus said, "Healthy people do not need a doctor, but they that are sick. But you go and learn what this means. I desire mercy and not sacrifice, for I am not here to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance," vs. 13. I believe that Jesus was subtly expressing the need for the Jewish leaders to examine themselves regarding their spiritual condition

before God. In regard to this admonition of Jesus, note the following Scriptures: Hos. 6:6; Mic. 6:6-8; Rom. 3:23; 5:12; Gal. 2:11-21. There were others who noted Jesus' associating with outcasts and otherwise not adhering to Jewish religious customs, e.g., not fasting. Among such were those who were disciples of John the Immerser. John's followers were, in fact, abiding by the Jewish Law in many stringent ways. For example, they fasted often as did the Pharisees, vs. 14, and so John's disciples asked the Lord: "Why the difference?" Jesus' answer revealed the vast difference between God's Old Covenant and his New Covenant in and through his only begotten Son, vss. 15-17; John 1:17-18; Rom. 5:19-21; Gal. 3:23-29. Under the Law fasting was an integral, necessary part of recognizing God's Lordship over his created beings, humanity, but now a new arrangement has been prescribed by God, a New Covenant, a new Sacrifice, Heb. 7:27-28; 8:7-13. Jesus stated the change this way: "No man puts a piece of new [unshrunk] cloth into an old garment, for that [the patch] which is put [sewn] in to replace the worn area takes [pulls away] from the garment, and makes the results worse than before," vs. 16. To emphasize the concept further, Jesus compared the Old with the New Covenants by saying, "Likewise, people do not put new wine in old containers (wineskins), else the old containers will break open [and lose a year's work in the vineyard]. But rather, people use appropriate containers (new wineskins) which will properly allow the wine to go through its normal process in fermenting and becoming good wine," vs. 17.

III. While Jesus was doing the above teaching, a certain ruler of the synagogue, Jairus, came to him and fell down at the Lord's feet in worship. The ruler was distressed, because his twelve-year old daughter was terribly ill. He begged Jesus to come to his house and touch her so that she would live. Jesus agreed to go to Jairus' home and look into the problem. As they went along the way, a huge crowd surged about the Lord. Near Jesus was a woman who had been losing blood for twelve years and had exhausted all of her assets for doctors' services. She managed to squeeze through the crowd and touch the edge of Jesus' garment. Her blood loss stopped immediately, and Jesus realized that her touch had used his power. The embarrassed woman confessed what she had done and how she had been healed at once. Jesus told her that her faith had healed her and that she should rejoice. While he was still speaking to the woman, a messenger from Jairus' home came to say that his daughter had died so there was no reason to bother Jesus further. Jesus assured Jairus, his (Jesus') disciples and the crowd not to fear but continue to believe (in Jesus' authority), Lk 8:49-56. The group who had been with Jairus' daughter derided Jesus when he told them that she would be made alive again. Jesus went into the room with Peter, James, John and the dead girl's parents only. Jesus took the girl by the hand and told her to stand up. Her spirit returned to her, and Jesus asked her parents to feed her. The Lord's popularity intensified even more. He left Jairus' home and along the way healed two blind men and cast an evil spirit from a mute who then was able to speak. The Pharisees then accused Jesus of being an ally of Satan. As Jesus continued his service, his compassion for the masses made him conclude that the people were like a sheep herd with no shepherd to care for them. "The harvest is much needed, pray that God will send forth more laborers," Jesus said to his followers (and us)," vss. 37-38.

I. In this chapter we come to a distinct change of direction in the period of Jesus' three years of serving the people of Israel in person. His message had a twofold content: he was God's King (Messiah) and was therefore ready to fulfill God's promises made in the Old Covenant to establish an eternal kingdom, and, secondly, the ethics which God expected to prevail in that kingdom Jesus had taught. John the Immerser had been the forerunner of Jesus the King's appearing, and they both emphasized that God's kingdom of heaven "is at hand." Jesus had then "gone up onto a mountain" and taught his disciples (followers, students, learners) the attitudes and actions that kingdom of heaven citizens should have and practice as they lived in God's kingdom. After his comprehensive instructions (seminar), he came down from the mountain and performed twelve miracles to demonstrate his authority over the creation which he had made, John 1:1-3, 14-18. Also, Jesus literally healed thousands of people with both physical and mental maladies, but Matthew specifically cites twelve as examples of Jesus' control over natural forces. His creative control was so evident that the Jewish religious leaders accused him of blasphemy, i.e., exercising only God's prerogatives. We learned at the end of Chap. 9 that Jesus, as he "went about the cities and villages teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom," became alarmed at the extent of the people's physical, but especially their spiritual, needs. He noted that the harvest was so plentiful that his disciples should pray that "the Lord of the harvest" should make arrangements for laborers to enter the fields and gather the vast harvest.

II. In Chap. 10 Jesus answered his own prayer which he announced as needed at the end of Chap. 9. And this is the way he answered the prayer: By now he had selected twelve special disciples from among his followers for special assignment. These he called apostles (sent with a unique commission), vs. 2. Five of these Matthew had noted earlier, Peter and Andrew (brothers), James and John (also brothers), Matt.4:18-22, and himself, Matt.9:9. To complete the twelve who were selected, Matthew lists all at vss. 2-4: Simon Peter, Andrew, James, John, Philip, Bartholomew, Thomas, Matthew, Alphaeus' son James, Lebbaeus Thaddaeus, Simon the Canaanite, and the one who later demonstrated his disloyalty by betraying our Lord, Judas Iscariot. To understand fully the change Jesus is making in his strategy at this time, we should examine closely the context of his choice. These twelve were not, with this commission of apostleship, to remain students (disciples), but Jesus authorized them to perform with the same authority he had been demonstrating. "He gave them (the apostles) power against unclean spirits (demons), to cast them out, and to heal all manner of sickness and all manner of disease," vs. 1. This assignment was phenomenal, very unusual. Not only was their new power unique, but such power was to be demonstrated only among the Jews and specifically not among Gentiles or partial Jews, the Samaritans, vs. 5. These twelve apostles were to go exclusively "to the lost sheep of the house of Israel," vs. 6, and to no one else at this time. Many "Christian" sects have

been based upon a wrong interpretation of the contents of this chapter, because they have claimed the power given to these twelve by claiming to be apostles, II Cor. 11:13-15; Rev. 2:2. As followers of Jesus Christ today our assignment is not the same as that given to the twelve apostles for that time and specific purpose, but rather, "Ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in Judea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth," Acts 1:8. By the time of Acts 1 God's eternal sacrifice had been offered by Jesus himself on the cross, and God the Father had approved the sacrifice by glorifying Jesus' body in the resurrection from physical death. A new Covenant had been constituted, Heb. 8:7,13. Therefore, the later message of Jesus to all his followers was to go worldwide, not just to the Jews, the house of Israel in Galilee and Judea. Jesus himself went into Samaria (John 4:4) later, as well as among the Gentiles (Matt. 15:21-28), but the instructions to the twelve were exclusively for those twelve at that time and for the place given. This fact is especially noted by the envelope formed by the beginning of Jesus' command at Matt. 10:5 and the end of that command at Matt. 11:1.

III. After Jesus had instructed the apostles where and to whom they should go, he told them that everywhere they went they were to proclaim, "The kingdom of heaven has come near," vs. 7. The King is now here! Jesus' commission to the apostles involved the following: do exactly what he had been doing, including "heal the sick, cleanse lepers, raise the dead, cast out demons, as [instructed by the Lord]," vs. 8. On this special commission they were to take no provisions for their material needs but depend upon the generosity of the Jews to whom they were witnessing of the kingdom, vss. 9-10. The rather detailed instructions given the apostles reflect the Jewish social customs of that time. Their itineraries were not fixed, but they were to go randomly through Galilee into all cities and towns. They were not to coerce the people. Upon entering a community, the apostles would inquire as to who might accommodate them during their stay while witnessing concerning the coming of the kingdom of heaven. Jesus assured them that they would meet with opposition. Had they not accused their Teacher of being Beelzebub (in alliance with a heathen god!)?, vs. 25. Those who opposed the spread of the Gospel would find worse judgment against them in "the day of judgment" than those whom God destroyed in Sodom and Gomorrah for practicing homosexuality in Abraham and Lot's day, Gen. 19. Not only would the apostles find individuals against them and their message, but established religious and political authorities would attempt to stop them by beatings with whips. Jesus told them that they should not be concerned about what they should say, because simultaneously they would be prompted by "the Spirit of your Father" what to say. This communication by God through them was evidently a special action of God's Holy Spirit which directed and empowered the prophets and Godly Old Covenant leaders. Those who accepted the apostles' message would be divided from other members of their families. The feelings would be so strong that death could result. The opposition received should not cause them to fear, for this witnessing was God's will. "He that accepts you is accepting me," Jesus told them. God's plan was that the Jews be the first to be offered citizenship in God's kingdom of heaven through faith in Jesus as Messiah, and afterward to everyone who would believe, Acts 11:18; Rom. 3:29; 9:24.

Apr. 29, 2001

"What the Miracles Mean"
Matt. 11

Couples Class
Wendell Alford,
Teacher

I. Matthew's message (God's Word) which brings us to Chap. 11 has told us that the person Jesus was fathered by God himself (the Holy Spirit) in the womb of one Mary before she married one Joseph. Jesus was the only begotten Son of God the Father to be the long promised Messiah (Savior) whom God had revealed by and through the Hebrew prophets, Isa. 7:14; Matt. 1:22-23. Joseph and Mary settled in Nazareth up north in Galilee where Jesus grew to adulthood with children born afterward to Mary and Joseph, Matt. 2:23; 13:55-56; Mk 6:3. At about age thirty Jesus moved his living place to Capernaum on the Sea of Galilee and began teaching and proclaiming that God's kingdom was then ready to be established. As he went about the area around Capernaum teaching, a group of students (disciples) began going about with him. On an occasion he went up on a mountain side with a number of his students and taught them what God wanted his kingdom citizens to know and practice. This teaching incorporated an explanation of who (their state of being) the citizens would be, how they would relate to God, his Law, and to one another. Jesus then went about the Galileean villages, towns and cities performing acts (miracles) which only God could do, i.e., acts altering the natural (physical) laws which God had built into his creation at the beginning. Through these unique acts Jesus was proving that he was God's Messiah (Savior). The crowds who were following Jesus for instructions grew so numerous that he realized that he could not do all that he needed to do in the time he had. He therefore chose twelve of his disciples to whom he gave special instructions and a unique apostolic commission to help him to spread the message about the forthcoming kingdom of heaven. They were commissioned by Jesus to perform those miracles which he himself had been doing as they proclaimed Jesus' message of the kingdom of heaven. After commissioning and empowering the twelve, he sent them out only to the Jews in Galilee, and specifically not to the Gentiles and Samaritans. The kingdom of heaven was planned at that time for Jewish citizens only, I believe.

II. Chap. 11 begins, "And it happened, when Jesus had finished empowering (commissioning) his twelve disciples [apostles], he left to teach and to proclaim in their [the Jews'] cities." vs. 1. With vs. 2 the scene changes abruptly when Matthew shifts his attention to the prison where John the Immerser was being held by Herod Antipas. John had been in jail for some time since Jesus had heard of the imprisonment just as he began his public proclamation of the kingdom of heaven, Matt. 4:12,17. Solitude and isolation from relatives and friends affects some differently. John who had immersed Jesus in the Jordan just after he (John) told those about him as Jesus was coming to him to be immersed, "Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world," John 1:29,36. After a long time in prison John began to question whether he had misinterpreted the timing or some other aspects of Jesus' being the Messiah. Was Jesus to come back later and exercise his Messiahship, for instance? Remember what was being said about Jesus by some. Some were saying that he was John the Immerser,

others Elijah, Jeremiah or other of the prophets, Matt. 16:14. At any rate, John wanted an update from Jesus himself about the Lord's position on his being the Messiah from God. He managed to send two of his followers to Jesus to learn what Jesus was doing and Jesus' feeling about the situation at that time. The two messengers reached the Lord at a time when he was openly speaking to the crowds who overheard the messengers from John and Jesus' answer to them. Jesus told them to tell John again (repeat) those things which you have personally witnessed, not only what I am doing but also have commissioned the apostles to do in his (Jesus') name. Here Jesus makes clear that his miraculous acts signify the fulfillment of Isaiah's prophecy, Isa. 29:18; 35:3-6. Further, those who are believers of what Jesus is doing and proclaiming in his message should rejoice, be happy (blessed), Isa. 8:14; 28:16; Rom. 9:33; 10:11. Jesus was reassuring John that, although he (John) was now suffering imprisonment and humility because of his proclaiming God's message about Jesus, he should be confident that what he had done was God's will. God was certainly pleased with John's service, [but the timing of the coming of the kingdom of heaven could change depending upon acceptance of Jesus as Messiah by the "lost sheep of the house of Israel," I believe.], Isa. 61:1-2; Lk 4:16-30; Matt. 10:6.

III. After John's messengers left Jesus to return to Jesus' forerunner in prison, the Lord told the crowd around him his assessment of John the Immerser's contribution in ushering in the coming of the kingdom of heaven. Jesus' opinion of John given to the crowd began with a series of questions. When you went out to hear John in the desert, what did you expect to see? A man who was a run-of-the-mill speaker with a hackneyed message; a suave, natty dresser, or did you visit him to see a true prophet bearing God's true message? Jesus said, "He it is about whom it is written [prophesied by Malachi at Mal. 3:1] - - - truly I tell you John's assignment is greater than every Old Covenant prophet who ever lived, but he is the least as compared with those serving in the kingdom of heaven," vss. 7-12. That is true, because, "all the prophets and the law prophesied until John, and if you will accept it [what I am saying], this one, [John] is Elias (Elijah) which was to come," vss. 13-15; Mal. 4:5. Jesus said that those with "spiritual ears" would understand what he was saying. Further, Jesus said that that generation [of Jews] were like children playing in the street who played dance music, but their playmates would not dance. Or, they "played funeral," and their playmates would not weep. Jesus came eating and drinking and was accused of being a glutton and an (excessive) alcohol consumer. John, on the other hand, came forth in destitute circumstances and was accused of being demon possessed. In effect, both were sent by God, and both were rejected by the people of the cities in Galilee and would not repent (turn to God). Jesus condemned the Jewish inhabitants of Galilee (Chorazin, Bethsaida, and Capernaum) for not accepting the offered kingdom of heaven (and its King!). In fact, Jesus said that Sodom (the seat of homosexuality) would not have been destroyed (Gen. 19:5,24,29) had they repented and followed God's will. The Jews were not willing to accept Jesus as God's Messiah (Savior) even though Jesus' miracles proved that he was approved by God, vss. 20-24. Jesus thanked God the Father for revealing him (Jesus) to the humble but concealing him from the "wise" and "prudent." Jesus claimed oneness with God the Father and invited individuals to come to him for spiritual rest and assurance.

May 6, 2001

"Jesus Versus Religious Leaders"
Matt. 12

Couples Class
Wendell Alford,
Teacher

I. If Jesus in the flesh was God's unique and only supreme representative (I believe he was and is.) among mankind, then it follows rationally that anyone else claiming such representation and who disagrees with Jesus will find the relationship unacceptable. The appearance of the situation given in Matt. 12 and before in Matthew is that Jesus' popularity grew steadily and exponentially from the beginning of his public service which began at Matt. 4:17. Jesus' proclaiming that God was now ready to establish his kingdom of heaven on earth with Jesus as king was interpreted by the Jewish religious leaders as an affront to their position directly and thwarted their religious traditions which required their priestly position to be in place, an absolute necessity. The Pharisees in particular felt the severest attack from Jesus' teachings and activities. The Sadducees were out of contention, because they denied the spiritual dimension of mankind's existence. Jesus discounted the Sadducees when they came to him presenting a literal translation of Deut. 25:5 concerning a male sibling's taking a dead brother's wife as his own wife after the brother died. The Sadducees did not believe in the continuation of the human spirit after physical death, and therefore believe that a resurrection is impractical. A person could have too many spouses in the next life! Jesus told the Sadducees that they were misinterpreting the Old Covenant Scriptures and misunderstanding God's power, for, in fact, there will be a resurrection. Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob are still alive awaiting the resurrection, and God is still their God, Mk 12:18-27; Heb. 11:39-40. The Herodians were allied with the politicians through Herod to Rome. They were to some extent like the "moral majority" which exercised church-government influence beginning in the 1970's in this country. And, of course, there have been "national churches" (churches united with governments) around the globe since Rome claimed the ecclesia as its own beginning in c. 325 AD. The Pharisees believed that they could incorporate Jesus and his influence into their group at the beginning of the Lord's public service. They were meticulous in their keeping of their interpretation of God's Law. They constituted what would be considered today "holier-than-thou" ones because of their self-proclaimed "holiness." They did not believe themselves to be sinful, i.e., sinners. With that attitude, why would they need an humble Savior?

II. The Pharisees' devotion to God's Law was their badge of religious honor, and in Chap. 12 they observed intently Jesus' relationship with their brand of "law keeping." Chap. 12 begins with Jesus' walking through a grain field (like wheat) with his disciples (followers), who were hungry, pulling heads of grain from the stalks and eating them. The spying Pharisees noted Jesus' students "working" on their holy day, the Sabbath. Food preparation was contrary to the Pharisees' belief in how the Jews should observe their Sabbath, and they told Jesus that "his people" were breaking the religious law. Jesus' answer to them was to quote again (Matt. 9:13) Hos. 6:6 where God told the Israelites that he wanted mercy (faithfulness) rather than a ritualistic sacrifice of animals.

Attending regularly church services, tithing, saying "praise the Lord" occasionally, or repeating other religious cliches for others benefit, as important as those things can be, on the other hand, can be made rituals which mean nothing to God. The final observation in Jesus' answer to the Pharisees' admonition concerning Jesus' "Sabbath keeping" was probably what designated, for the Pharisees, an impossible proposition for their ever being able to accept Jesus as an ally. That observation states: "But I say to you that in this place (Temple) is one (Jesus, the Messiah) greater than the Temple, but if you had known what this (Hos. 6:6) means, you would not have condemned the guiltless (Jesus' disciples satisfying their hunger on the Sabbath); For the Son of man (Jesus) is Lord even of the Sabbath Day," vss. 6-8. After this incident, Jesus went into a synagogue where a man (planted by Pharisees?) with a withered hand was attending. The Pharisees asked Jesus whether it is lawful to heal on the Sabbath. Jesus said that they themselves would rescue an animal in distress on the Sabbath so why should a fellow human not be healed on the Sabbath. He healed the man in the synagogue on the Sabbath! (vss. 1-8; I Sam. 21:1-6)

III. The Pharisees went from the synagogue and immediately considered how they could destroy Jesus. The Lord learned of their council and left the area followed by great crowds. Jesus healed them all and told them not to tell others where he was. Matthew notes that this activity by Jesus fulfilled Isaiah's prophecy at Isa. 42:1-4; 49:3. This quote, incidentally, includes reference to the Gentile part in the kingdom of heaven. Following the Pharisees' confrontation with Jesus in the synagogue, a person who was both blind and deaf was brought to Jesus, and the Lord healed him so that he was then able to both see and hear. The Pharisees heard the response of the crowd to the miracles, "Is not this the son of David [Does not Jesus have the qualifications to be the Messiah?]," vs. 23. The Pharisees heard what the response was and announced that Jesus could heal because he was allied with Beelzebub, the ruler of demons. Jesus' reply relates to a fact which is often attributed to Lincoln, "A house divided against itself shall not stand," vs. 25. Jesus said that if he by Beelzebub controlled demons, by whom did the Pharisees cast them out? [However,] if I cast them out by God's Spirit, then God's kingdom has come to you, vss. 27-28. In other words, if there is a difference in your source and mine, then the results determines the source of power from God the Creator. My power to do so is undeniable, and the Spirit of God is with me. The Pharisees could not deny Jesus' absolute power, because they had witnessed his healing of thousands. (And do not forget Jairus' daughter!) What Jesus says then about their position with Jesus' miracles not demonstrating the power of God's Holy Spirit is very important. In effect, the Pharisees had attributed God's Spirit's actions to another (Beezlebub's, a Philistine idol) which Jesus stated was blasphemy against God's Spirit and eternally unforgivable. Those who killed Jesus could be forgiven (Lk 23:34), but following his glorification after his sacrifice on the cross, it has been the leading of God's Holy Spirit who makes it possible for all people to know how to be made alive spiritually (quicken in spirit). Rejecting the leading of that Spirit to accept Jesus as God's sole spiritual Savior is blasphemy against God's Spirit and is unforgivable. God's Spirit has ever been God's Ghost performing God's will, Gen. 1:2; Matt. 1:20; John 1:1-5,14,17; II Cor. 5:19; Col. 1:13-17. Therefore, Jesus said that to refuse the leading of the Holy Spirit to accept Jesus as Lord and Savior leaves nowhere else to go to satisfy God for eternal life, John 14:6-7; Acts 4:5-12.

I. The ecclesia, per se, was not prophesied in the Old Covenant, I believe, because when Jesus came the first time, he, as well as his forerunner, John the Immerser, proclaimed that the kingdom of heaven was at hand (ready). John the Immerser was the promised Elijah whom God promised at Joel 2:28-32; Mal. 4:5; Matt. 11:7-15; Acts 2:14-21, if the Jewish nation would receive Jesus as God's Messiah (Savior). In Chap. 12 we learned with a considerable degree of finality that the Jewish leaders as representatives of the Jewish nation Israel were rejecting God's Messiah, Jesus of Nazareth (and heaven). After the experiences in Chap. 12, I believe, Jesus had reached the conclusion that God's plan for Israel was in need of modification, not because of the lack of God's love for Israel, but because of their refusal of himself (God) in the person of his Son, Jesus the Christ. It is noteworthy to observe that, on this one-of-a-kind occasion, God did not change his position regarding his own relationship to humanity, i.e., he would not overrule mankind's freedom of choice. He did not force or coerce Adam and Eve in their decision to defy God's will by disobeying his will and sinning, thereby separating themselves from God (spiritually), Gen. 2:17; 3:1-6, 22-24. Further, God refused to force the nation Israel to conform to his Law, but let them choose defiance rather than to choose compliance. God even promised through his prophets that he would send a Messiah (Savior) who would be a sacrifice for bringing the Israelites back to himself, Isa. 7:13-14; 53; Matt. 1:22-24. By the time Jesus gave what were mysterious parables in Chap. 13, Jesus the Lord had been born of a virgin, proclaimed the readiness of the kingdom of heaven, outlined the conduct expected in the kingdom, performed actions which only God could perform (miracles), John 3:2, and finally had been rejected by the Jews as God's Messiah to save those very Jews. What then would happen to the kingdom of heaven which John the Immerser and Jesus had proclaimed?

II. At the end of Jesus' conversing with the scribes and Pharisees in Chap. 12, these Jewish leaders asked the Lord for a sign (physical proof removing the need for faith in God). Jesus' answer gives further credence to his persuasion that the Jews had, for all practical purposes, rejected him as their Messiah, because he told them that the only sign they would see would be illustrated by Jonah's experience when swallowed by the fish. The only sign Jesus referred to (his sacrifice and resurrection) was to take place after his absolute rejection by the Jews. In fact, it was at the Jewish leaders' insistence that Rome's representative, Herod Antipas, agreed to Jesus' crucifixion. Still in Chap. 12 Jesus identified as members of his family (spiritual) those who did God's (his real Father) will, i.e., accept him as God's Savior. His physical death was necessary in God's plan for Jesus to become God's Savior, Acts 2:22-24,36. At the beginning of Chap. 13 we find Jesus apparently still pressed constantly by the large crowds. He was living with Peter and his family at Capernaum, and on the same day that his mother, brothers and sisters (from Nazareth) were there to see him, he left

the house and went down by the Sea Of Galilee (to cogitate?). That visit to Peter's house could have been to visit with his family from Nazareth, but the Bible does not tell us that. We are told that he went to the house. The "whole multitude" found Jesus and surged about where he sat on the seashore. The Lord, perhaps to reach more of the people, boarded a ship and went some distance from the shore with the apostles. At this juncture Jesus gave information to the people in parables, because, I believe, he realized that the immediate establishment of the kingdom of heaven on earth had been delayed. The disciples (apostles) recognized the change in Jesus' teaching method at once and asked about the change, vs. 10. Jesus told the apostles, "Because it is given unto you to know the mysteries (hidden truths) of the kingdom of heaven, but to them (the multitudes) it is not given," Jesus said, vs. 11. Jesus quotes the prophet Isaiah who prophesied that the Jews would not understand what they were seeing and hearing, Isa. 6:9-10. These parables revealed in coded form the answers to the question asked in the last sentence of Sect. I above of this outline. In other words, Jesus was now, in parables, indicating what would happen to the kingdom of heaven following the rejection of Jesus, the King of the kingdom. Until Jesus returns to earth to establish formally the kingdom of heaven, that kingdom consists of all individuals who accept Jesus as God's Messiah. However, during the calling out of the ecclesia, Jesus is taking unto himself a special people who will be his bride, Rev. 21:2. These parables, then, cover the period between the offer of the kingdom to the Jews and their rejection of Jesus as God's Messiah (King) and Jesus' return to earth to establish his kingdom. The kingdom of heaven is not the same as the ecclesia in the kingdom's entirety, but since Jesus is the husband and Lord of the ecclesia, Jesus is their King as well. Jesus' bride, the ecclesia, consists of all who live and accept Jesus as Savior during the period when God is calling out the ones whom he chooses to be Jesus' bride, John 6:44; Acts 2:39; Eph. 5:25-27,32.

III. I believe that the apostles came to know more fully the parables after the Holy Spirit came, John 14:26; 15:26-27. Now to the parables themselves: Of the nine parables given in Chap. 13, Jesus interprets only two, the sower and the wheat-tares. Terminology in these two give some insight into all nine. Generally, the seed is the Word; the sower is the Son of man (Jesus), vs. 37; the field is the world (peoples); the harvest is the end of the ecclesia period (age); the Lord of the harvest is Jesus; the soil is the will (spirit) of each individual; and the birds represent Satan or his influence. During the ecclesia period the Lord said that it is not the prerogative of believers to judge but to sow the seed (Word), (tares-wheat); the church as an organization will grow, but not all in the organization will be ecclesia members (mustard seed); cults will spring up combining false doctrines with the Gospel toward a final complete apostasy (leaven, II Thes. 2:3; Rev. 3:14-17); Israel is the treasure hidden in the field (the world) which will be found by God at the end time, Rom. 11:1-2,28-33; Jesus Christ left heaven and came to earth where he found people wandering in the wilderness of sin (lost, away from God), but Jesus gave himself that those (the pearl, the ecclesia) who will accept him will live with God eternally; at the end of the ecclesia age, God will cast a net and separate out those who are Jesus' bride and citizens of the kingdom of heaven; the householder is that one who maintains the true Word and rightly divides it, II Tim. 2:15. Jesus, after giving these parables, returned to Nazareth where he was summarily rejected as God's Messiah.

May 20, 2001

"Jesus Meets Human Needs"
Matt. 14

Couples Class
Wendell Alford,
Teacher

I. After Jesus was rejected by his home town of Nazareth, his actions and reputation were spreading to all areas around Galilee, Samaria and even southward into Judea as well as eastward across the Dead Sea. Herod Antipas spent some of his time at the city of Machaerus, inland near the east shore of the Dead Sea. He was a tetrarch (the ruler of a fourth of the eastern region of the Roman Empire) over the area to the east of the Mediterranean Sea. Rome's political purpose for Herod was to keep order (no insurrections) in the area, i.e., keep the population subject to Rome's rule (collect taxes, support the military, etc.). The Herod family was originally from the extreme southern part of the Palestinian area, Idumea, which lay south of the Dead Sea. Herod had reservations about the political threat which John the Immerser could be to the peace, in especially the eastern part of Palestine along the Jordan River. Therefore, rather early in John's public service, Herod had him imprisoned at Machaerus where the Romans had built a castle, a prison and a retreat installation. Herod and his subpoliticians could feel safe there to revel and party. At the time of Matt. 14 John had been murdered by Herod, and when the tetrarch began to hear stories about Jesus, his superstitious, paranoid mind supposed that Jesus was John the Immerser's reincarnation. Matthew (God's Word), with past perfect insight, relates the details of how Herod allowed John to be slaughtered. Apart from the supposed political reason to have John imprisoned, there was also a personal reason. John had publicly, openly criticized Herod's living with his brother's (Philip's) wife, Herodias. John had condemned such an arrangement proclaiming it to be illegal and immoral. Herod would have already had John killed for this reason, but he feared the people who considered John to be God's representative, a prophet. Herod held a birthday party for himself at the castle at Machaerus to which he invited his underlings and their wives. Herodias' daughter was also there and performed a dance which pleased Herod exceedingly. In fact, Herod was so pleased that he promised the daughter, under oath, anything she wished. The daughter consulted her mother Herodias about what to request, and the mother told her to ask that John the Immerser's head be brought on a platter to the party immediately. The drunken Herod regretted the request but felt that he must grant it because of the oath. He sent the executioners to fill the sadistic request. The head, when brought to the daughter, was given to her mother. Herodias, no doubt, gloated over the revenge she was experiencing by eliminating the forerunner of our Savior and Lord. She probably felt that her adulterous activities would no longer be a problem for her! We know better!

II. Now Matthew's Gospel account returns to the activities of Jesus whom superstitious Herod had supposed to be John the Immerser reincarnated. Jesus' first reaction upon hearing of John's death was to depart by ship from the upper west shore of the Sea of Galilee to the east shore by himself, vs. 13. While he was mourning John's departure, the word of his presence spread about the area, and a huge group gathered to be healed and taught about the kingdom

of heaven. Late in the day the apostles and others of his disciples came over to join Jesus. The time of the evening meal came and the huge crowd (perhaps ten to fifteen thousand - there were five thousand adult males) was without food in the arid open countryside. Food could be had only in markets in the villages some distance away. Jesus' disciples suggested that the people be sent away to the villages for food. Jesus said that they need not leave but that the disciples should feed them. Andrew, Peter's brother, located a young fellow who had brought a lunch consisting of five rolls (biscuits?) and two small fish. Jesus asked that the lunch be brought to him and that the multitude be asked to sit on the grass in groups of fifties. When this arrangement had been made, Jesus took the rolls and fish, looked up to heaven, and blessed the lad's lunch. He began handing the food to the disciples to deliver to the thousands, of the bread and fish. After the divinely provided "picnic," Jesus asked his helpers to gather the surplus which had not been consumed, and they gathered twelve baskets which had been left after all had eaten their fill. This evidence of the divinity of Jesus the Messiah was so spectacular and revealing that this event is the only divine miracle of Jesus recorded in all four Gospel accounts, Matt. 14:13-21; Mk 6:31-44; Lk 9:11-17; John 6:1-13.

III. After the activities of Jesus in healing, teaching and providing and distributing food for the thousands, no doubt the Lord was very tired (How truly human he was!). He, therefore, sent his disciples (apostles) back across the Sea of Galilee to the west shore while he had a last word with the crowd before sending them away. Finally, Jesus was able to get away by himself to converse with his heavenly Father, back in heaven. We are not given the thoughts of his prayer, but it could have been for strength and recuperation from the weariness he was experiencing as a human being. With the birthdays we have experienced, we can certainly identify with Jesus in his weariness! During the return across the Sea, the apostles experienced a rather regular occurrence there, a storm was churning waves and blowing against the direction which they were going, westward. The time was during the fourth watch which was from three o'clock in the morning until daybreak. Even at this late hour Jesus, (He must have had a long talk with the Father.), was walking across the Sea perhaps to gain time for his next day's obligation to meet the needs of the people on the west side of the Sea of Galilee. When the apostles saw him approaching the ship, they were afraid, because under the severe weather conditions Jesus appeared to be a ghostly figure. People do not walk on water! Natural, physical laws do not allow such! Jesus sensed their bewilderment and said to them, "Take courage, I am [the one you see]; do not be afraid," vs. 27. Audacious Peter said, "If it is really you, permit me to come to you on the water," vs. 28. Jesus gave him permission, and Peter went over the side of the ship. As Peter began his "water walk," his faith weakened, and he began to sink and pray at the same time. His prayer was appropriate, short, and precisely to the point, "Lord, save me," vs. 30. Jesus stretched forth his hand and answered Peter's prayer. The sea calmed, and the on-board apostles worshiped Jesus as Lord, affirming their belief that truly Jesus is the Son of God. Peter concurred with the other apostles at Matt. 16:16. Next day, on the western shore of Gennesaret, Jesus continued to heal the sick, vss. 34-36.

May 23, 2001

"The Ecclesia And The Kingdom"
Matt. 13

Couples Class
Wendell Alford,
Teacher

I. The ecclesia, per se, was not prophesied in the Old Covenant, I believe, because when Jesus came the first time, he, as well as his forerunner, John the Immerser, proclaimed that the kingdom of heaven was at hand (ready). John the Immerser was the promised Elijah whom God promised at Joel 2:28-32; Mal. 4:5; Matt. 11:7-15; Acts 2:14-21, if the Jewish nation would receive Jesus as God's Messiah (Savior). In Chap. 12 we learned with a considerable degree of finality that the Jewish leaders as representatives of the Jewish nation Israel were rejecting God's Messiah, Jesus of Nazareth (and heaven). After the experiences in Chap. 12, I believe, Jesus had reached the conclusion that God's plan for Israel was in need of modification, not because of the lack of God's love for Israel, but because of their refusal of himself (God) in the person of his Son, Jesus the Christ. It is noteworthy to observe that, on this one-of-a-kind occasion, God did not change his position regarding his own relationship to humanity, i.e., he would not overrule mankind's freedom of choice. He did not force or coerce Adam and Eve in their decision to defy God's will by disobeying his will and sinning, thereby separating themselves from God (spiritually), Gen. 2:17; 3:1-6, 22-24. Further, God refused to force the nation Israel to conform to his Law, but let them choose defiance rather than to choose compliance. God even promised through his prophets that he would send a Messiah (Savior) who would be a sacrifice for bringing the Israelites back to himself, Isa. 7:13-14; 53; Matt. 1:22-24. By the time Jesus gave what were mysterious parables in Chap. 13, Jesus the Lord had been born of a virgin, proclaimed the readiness of the kingdom of heaven, outlined the conduct expected in the kingdom, performed actions which only God could perform (miracles), John 3:2, and finally had been rejected by the Jews as God's Messiah to save those very Jews. What then would happen to the kingdom of heaven which John the Immerser and Jesus had proclaimed?

II. At the end of Jesus' conversing with the scribes and Pharisees in Chap. 12, these Jewish leaders asked the Lord for a sign (physical proof removing the need for faith in God). Jesus' answer gives further credence to his persuasion that the Jews had, for all practical purposes, rejected him as their Messiah, because he told them that the only sign they would see would be illustrated by Jonah's experience when swallowed by the fish. The only sign Jesus referred to (his sacrifice and resurrection) was to take place after his absolute rejection by the Jews. In fact, it was at the Jewish leaders' insistence that Rome's representative, Herod Antipas, agreed to Jesus' crucifixion. Still in Chap. 12 Jesus identified as members of his family (spiritual) those who did God's (his real Father) will, i.e., accept him as God's Savior. His physical death was necessary in God's plan for Jesus to become God's Savior, Acts 2:22-24,36. At the beginning of Chap. 13 we find Jesus apparently still pressed constantly by the large crowds. He was living with Peter and his family at Capernaum, and on the same day that his mother, brothers and sisters (from Nazareth) were there to see him, he left the house and went down by the Sea Of Galilee (to cogitate?). That visit to Peter's house could have been to visit with his family from Nazareth, but the Bible does not tell us that. We are told

that he went to the house. The "whole multitude" found Jesus and surged about where he sat on the seashore. The Lord, perhaps to reach more of the people, boarded a ship and went some distance from the shore with the apostles. At this juncture Jesus gave information to the people in parables, because, I believe, he realized that the immediate establishment of the kingdom of heaven on earth had been delayed. The disciples (apostles) recognized the change in Jesus' teaching method at once and asked about the change, vs. 10. Jesus told the apostles, "Because it is given unto you to know the mysteries (hidden truths) of the kingdom of heaven, but to them (the multitudes) it is not given," Jesus said, vs. 11. Jesus quotes the prophet Isaiah who prophesied that the Jews would not understand what they were seeing and hearing, Isa. 6:9-10. These parables revealed in coded form the answers to the question asked in the last sentence of Sect. I above of this outline. In other words, Jesus was now, in parables, indicating what would happen to the kingdom of heaven following the rejection of Jesus, the King of the kingdom. Until Jesus returns to earth to establish formally the kingdom of heaven, that kingdom consists of all individuals who accept Jesus as God's Messiah. However, during the calling out of the ecclesia, Jesus is taking unto himself a special people who will be his bride, Rev. 21:2. These parables, then, cover the period between the offer of the kingdom to the Jews and their rejection of Jesus as God's Messiah (King) and Jesus' return to earth to establish his kingdom. The kingdom of heaven is not the same as the ecclesia in the kingdom's entirety, but since Jesus is the husband and Lord of the ecclesia, Jesus is their King as well. Jesus' bride, the ecclesia, consists of all who live and accept Jesus as Savior during the period when God is calling out the ones whom he chooses to be Jesus' bride, John 6:44; Acts 2:39; Eph. 5:25-27,32.

III. I believe that the apostles came to know more fully the parables after the Holy Spirit came, John 14:26; 15:26-27. Now to the parables themselves: Of the nine parables given in Chap. 13, Jesus interprets only two, the sower and the wheat-tares. Terminology in these two give some insight into all nine. Generally, the seed is the Word; the sower is the Son of man (Jesus), vs. 37; the field is the world (peoples); the harvest is the end of the ecclesia period (age); the Lord of the harvest is Jesus; the soil is the will (spirit) of each individual; and the birds represent Satan or his influence. During the ecclesia period the Lord said that it is not the prerogative of believers to judge but to sow the seed (Word), (tares-wheat); the church as an organization will grow, but not all in the organization will be ecclesia members (mustard seed); cults will spring up combining false doctrines with the Gospel toward a final complete apostasy (leaven, II Thes. 2:3; Rev. 3:14-17); Israel is the treasure hidden in the field (the world) which will be found by God at the end time, Rom. 11:1-2,28-33; Jesus Christ left heaven and came to earth where he found people wandering in the wilderness of sin (lost, away from God), but Jesus gave himself that those (the pearl, the ecclesia) who will accept him will live with God eternally; at the end of the ecclesia age, God will cast a net and separate out those who are Jesus' bride and citizens of the kingdom of heaven; the householder is that one who maintains the true Word and rightly divides it, II Tim. 2:15. Jesus, after giving these parables, returned to Nazareth where he was summarily rejected as God's Messiah.

June 3, 2001

"Jesus And Jewish Traditions"
Matt. 15

Couples Class
Wendell Alford,
Teacher

I. In the last three chapters we have seen an abrupt division of the Lord Jesus from the religious leaders of Israel. Today, in Chap. 15, we note that Jesus makes very plain that the Jewish leaders had come to interpret God's Old Covenant to make that Covenant mean in daily living something entirely contrary to what God originally intended. On a one to one basis such a contrast is noted in Jesus' conversation with Nicodemus in John 3, the lesson you studied on April 6 in my absence. On that occasion Nicodemus came to Jesus representing the Sanhedrin to learn what Jesus was all about. Now, in Chap. 15, a contingent of Pharisees and scribes have come all the way from Jerusalem to the desert area where Jesus is teaching and serving the masses to inquire further of Jesus why his position (teaching) was contrary to their own. After all, they thought, they were God's people as descendants of Abraham, and, therefore, as God's people they represented God's position on the earth, John 8:33,39,41,44. The main problem which Jesus pointed out about the Jews' religion was not the Old Testament itself but rather the religious tradition (Torah) which had been accrued and which was considered to have the same authority as the Scriptures themselves. Christianity today has, in my opinion, many professing Christians who have accrued many traditions which are misinterpretations of the original text and intent of the New Testament Scriptures. For example, such elements as an authoritative priesthood hierarchy, purgatory, union of church and political entities, baptismal (spiritual) regeneration, etc. We should keep in mind what God's Word states concerning us Gentiles as relating us to Jews in God's plan at Rom. 11:11-24. We Gentiles can (and I believe some have) fall into the same trap of mongrelizing God's message of the New Covenant to make that Word fit human, selfish ambitions, both as individuals and as organizations. Jesus said of the scribes and Pharisees, "Woe unto you - - - hypocrites, you travel all over to make one convert [to your religious position], and when he is made, you make him twofold more the child of hell than yourselves," Matt. 23:13,15. Changing religious traditions to pervert God's message to mankind and leading others into that false position can make Christian missions hollow, worthless, and counterproductive.

II. At the beginning of Chap. 15 the scribes and Pharisees came from Jerusalem to Jesus to learn more of his position. Specifically, the religious leaders ask the Lord, "Why do your followers transgress the tradition of the elders? They do not wash [ceremoniously] their hands when they eat bread." Jesus asked them boldly, "Why do you transgress the commandment of God by your tradition?" The Lord then cited a specific example where their tradition was sidetracking God's will. When Jesus countered their question with another question, he was, in effect, challenging their authority to have changed God's will (message) through their own misinterpreting that message by tradition. Jesus then, following his own question, quotes from Deut. 5:16, the fifth of the ten commandments, "Honor your father and mother," and Exod. 21:15,17, "And he that striketh his father or his mother [or] - - - he that curseth his father or his

mother, shall surely be put to death." In other words, one is to care for his or her parents in need to the point of sacrificing ones own life. That position is God's will, the letter and spirit of God's Law. Now how had the Jewish tradition destroyed the true meaning and practice of God's position regarding offspring and their parents? Vss. 5-6 gives Jesus' statement on how the Law had been changed by Jewish tradition (misinterpretation). The Jewish leaders, following "improvisations" of God's Law by Jewish tradition, had concluded that if a Jew gave to the support of the Temple and those who lived from temple donations, he or she would thereby be excused from supporting their needy parents who really needed the children's material support. Today's application would allow a believer to adopt a priority whereby he or she could take support needed by a parent for daily sustenance and make a donation to the church instead! Jesus labeled this perverted religious priority, hypocrisy and a supplanting of God's will (Word) with an improper religious tradition, vss. 6-7. Jesus said that their policies followed human precepts, not God's, vss. 7-9 and Isa. 29:13. The Lord quoted the latter. I believe that Jesus' position involves what we would call "Common Sense," like removing a stuck ox from a ditch on Sunday.

III. After correcting the position of the scribes and Pharisees, Jesus gathered the crowd about him and expanded upon what he had been telling the Jewish religious leaders. He said to the crowd that the ritual performed as one eats does not make ones spirit right with God, but the innerspirit which ones comments reveal as one talks. (See James 1:26;3:1-12.) The apostles reminded Jesus that his correction of the scribes and Pharisees had offended them, but the Lord said that the Jewish leaders should be left alone, because, "They be blind leaders of the blind [spiritually]," vss. 13-14. Peter wanted a further explanation for himself and the other apostles, and Jesus told the apostles that food is eaten, furnishes the body nourishment, and finally is discharged as worthless feces. However, from ones heart (spirit) proceeds that which pleases or displeases God. Eating with ceremoniously unclean hands does not defile a person's spirit (standing with God), but a human spirit not born from above does, vss. 18-20, and John 3:5-6,18. Following this interlude the Lord and the apostles went westward to the eastern coast of the Mediterranean where a Canaanite woman (a Gentile) approached Jesus and asked him to heal her daughter. Jesus would not even recognize her. The apostles asked the Lord to send her away, and Jesus stated firmly that his mission was exclusively to the lost house of Israel. However, the woman persisted in her request and worshiped him and addressed him as Lord. Jesus again stated his exclusive relation with the Jews. The woman pleaded and begged for "crumbs from the Master's table," and Jesus, because of her ardent faith, healed her daughter. See and study also Lk 18:1-8. The Lord then returned to Galilee where, again, the large crowds were healed of all types of physical maladies. After three days in a desert area without food, the people needed nourishment. As he had done before with the five thousand males and their families, the Lord blessed the available food, this time seven buns and some fish, and four thousand males and their families were fed, with seven baskets of surplus food left over. Jesus then took a ship and returned to Magdala on the west coast of the Sea of Galilee.

June 10, 2001

"Jesus' Final Exam"
Matt. 1 6

Couples Class
Wendell Alford,
Teacher

I. By Chap. 16 Jesus' period of public proclamation of the kingdom of heaven has reached about two and one-half years. The opposition of the Jewish leaders has gradually intensified and their intentions have reached a practical conclusion: Jesus and his movement must be obliterated, Matt. 12:14. They had been successful in eliminating the person who had been Jesus' forerunner, John the Immerser. Now Jesus, whom the Jewish leaders considered to be John's successor, must likewise be crushed as another who could uproot the organized Jewish religious group. The greatest problem which Jesus had created for the Jews was the attention and growing loyalty of the general population in Galilee and Judea especially, but also, even in the surrounding provinces of Phoenicia, Samaria, Decapolis and Perea. This chapter also presents an episode in which it is possible to interpret the making of a governmental hierarchy of the Christian Church with one monarchical position with dictatorial power. As the concept has developed through the centuries, the organization which this dictator controls has fulfilled Jesus' parable of the wheat and tares, Matt. 13:24-30. This evolutionary process of the "Christian Church" has created a man-made political empire which is contrary to the teaching of our Lord Jesus Christ at Matt. 20:20-28; Mk 10:35-45; and Lk 22:24-30. Other such religious organizations have grown up on the world scene which also mix the Good News with "Gentile-type" authority. I believe that the results of what has happened to the childlike faith which Jesus said would characterize a citizen of the kingdom of heaven (Matt. 18:3) has become for many an authoritative intrusion into the initiative of God through the agency of his Holy Spirit, Matt. 12:32-33; John 6:44-45; 14:26. A viable question is: Has not the Gentile treatment of the Gospel made the Church, i.e., Christendom, very much like the Jewish leaders made Israel's faith when Jesus was among mankind as a human, Matt. 15:12-14; Rom. 11:18-24?

II. The Pharisees accompanied by the scribes had come to Jesus at Matt. 12:38 asking Jesus for a physical sign which would assure them that Jesus was the Anointed One. Now in Chap. 16 the Pharisees are with the Saducees, testing Jesus' heavenly authority, approach Jesus and again asked the Lord for a sign. Jesus told them they were hypocrites, for they could predict the weather by the atmospheric conditions (signs) but would not realize what was happening in the area of God's relating to man's condition at that time. The Lord again cited the only sign would be that of Jonah. He said that the people of that generation were wicked and adulterous (serving self rather than God's will, i.e., accepting God's Messiah). His admonition to realize what was happening to mankind and their relation to God should, I believe, give us caution to keep constantly aware of what mankind is doing as they relate to God, especially as a people who profess Jesus as Savior and Lord of life. When the apostles came to Jesus, the Lord apparently still had the incident with the Jewish leaders in mind, for he said to them (the apostles), "Beware of the leaven (yeast) of the Pharisees and Saducees," vs. 6, [for they did not accept Jesus as the Messiah]

III. Jesus and the apostles were at this time up north in the foot hills at Caesarea Philippi, and the Lord gave them an exam containing two questions. First, he asked, "Whom do men [other than the apostles] say that I the Son of man am?," vs. 13. They answered that some were saying John the Immerser, Elijah, Jeremiah, or another of the prophets (reincarnated). The second, and last, question of the exam was, "But whom do you say that I am?," vs. 15. Forward, ever ready to speak for the group, Peter repeated what they all had already proclaimed when Peter was embarrassed by his "walking-on-water" experience at Matt. 14:30, i.e., "Of a truth you are the Son of God," Matt. 14:33. Peter's answer for the group to the second question about Jesus' own person was, "You are the Christ [God's Anointed One], the Son [the only begotten] of the living [Creator] God," vs. 16. Jesus noted that Peter had not conceived his (nor had the others for whom he had spoken) answer by his own reasoning, but that the knowledge had come directly from God himself, vs. 17; Matt. 12:32-33; John 6:44. The apostles through Peter passed the Lord's final examination concerning who Jesus is. The next two verses, 18 and 19, have been as incorrectly interpreted through the centuries as any other ideas in the Scriptures, I believe. These verses are extremely important, because they reveal the foundation upon which Jesus has built and expanded his ecclesia, mentioned here for the first time. Some have interpreted the verses to mean that Jesus' intention was to build his ecclesia upon the person of Peter. Others believe that the ecclesia was to be built upon the faith expressed by the apostles. But, I believe that these both miss the truth that Jesus was revealing although the second is not without some merit and is certainly involved in what Jesus was (and is) revealing. My belief is that Jesus was saying that the base (foundation) upon which the ecclesia would singularly depend was the person of Jesus himself since both of Jesus' questions were about himself. Jesus said, "Peter, you are a chip of rock, but on a bedrock is my ecclesia to rest (depend)," vs. 18. The pathway to hell will be closed to those depending upon the Rock. Jesus' forthcoming death and resurrection proved Jesus' assertion. Peter, after the coming of God's Holy Spirit (Acts 2), understood Jesus to be the foundation Rock of the ecclesia, I Pet. 2:4-10. Paul also understood Jesus to be the Rock upon which the ecclesia rests, I Cor. 3:4-17; 10:4; Eph. 2:20-22. Jesus as the foundation of the ecclesia and God's Rock has been an offense to many through the centuries who have supplanted him by other foundations. I believe if Peter had not been with Jesus in paradise since his mortal separation from the earth, he would have been grieving because of what many have assigned him to have been, the original and continuing foundation of Christendom. Jesus gives the keys to his kingdom to all who make, through faith, Jesus their Savior and Lord. A believer's testimony is the key (Matt. 28:18-20; Acts 1:7 8; I Pet. 2:9) which points to the leading of God's Holy Spirit and God's spiritual promise of eternal life through faith in Jesus, the Rock, (Foundation), of his ecclesia. That promise is given in God's Word (which Jesus also is, John 1:1-2, 14), and that Word is the binder on earth of God's promise, vs. 19. Jesus promised to return in the Glory of God the Father in vss. 27-28. We believers lose our lives for the sake of becoming citizens of the kingdom, citizenship in which, is better than gaining the whole world! (vs. 26)

June 17, 2001

"Jesus Prepares To Return Home"
Matt. 1 7

Couples Class
Wendell Alford,
Teacher

I. The time has come for God's only begotten Son to prepare to return home to heaven. He has laid the groundwork for the establishing of the kingdom of heaven on earth. God intended that his Son be the King of that kingdom, but the people, the Israelites, who were to be the original citizens of that kingdom, refused to accept the Creator's King. By now Jesus has come to realize that there will be a delay in the establishing of the kingdom of heaven on earth. In this chapter, Chap. 17, Jesus begins making concrete arrangements to identify what events must take place before he returns to the Father. Although the apostles had been closely associated with Jesus for nearly three years and had properly identified and accepted him as God's Anointed Messiah, the Father God wanted them to have further evidence of the position and stature of Jesus as his Son and Savior. At the end of Chap. 16 Jesus had left the eastern shore of the Sea of Galilee and returned to Magdala west of the Sea. Further, the Lord had led the apostles up north to Caesarea Philippi where he examined their position about who he, the Son of man, was (and is). The group of apostles had confessed that Jesus is the Son of man and also the Messiah, the Son of the living God, the God-man.

II. While Jesus and the apostles were up in the foothills of Caesarea Philippi (They had been in that area for about six or eight days.), the Lord took Peter, James and John (James' brother) apart farther up the high mountain. I believe that what happened here fulfills the prophecy of Matt. 16:28, a verse that should be the beginning of Chap. 17, (See also II Pet. 1:15-18.). With just the four of them present, God transfigured his Son before the three apostles, vs. 2. When this transfiguration happened, Jesus' face "did shine as the sun, and his clothing was white as the light." (cf. Acts 26:12-15) Every bit as miraculous as Jesus' change of appearance was the fact that Moses and Elijah appeared with Jesus, and the three of them held a conference, "talking with Jesus," vs. 3. How long Jesus conferred with Moses and Elijah we are not told, but we do know that the three discussed Jesus' forthcoming departure (death) which the Lord was about to experience in Jerusalem, Lk 9:30-31. However, when the discussion was finished, the audacious Peter volunteered a suggestion: "Lord it is good for us to be here, and if you approve, let us construct three temples here, one for you [Jesus], one for Moses, and one for Elijah," vs. 4. As Peter was making his ignorant (Lk 9:33b) suggestion, a bright cloud enshrouded them, and God the Father himself spoke out of the cloud, "This [Jesus] is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased: You listen to him [only]," vs. 5. I believe that God was making here a decided change from the Old Covenant to the New Covenant, Heb. 1:1-2. Jesus' person and teachings were to take precedence over the Law given to Moses by God and the messages which he (God) had given by the prophets where there could be a conflict of interpretation. At any rate, no one is equal to God's only begotten Son. Jesus is forever one of a kind. However, we who trust Jesus as God's Savior and Lord look forward to becoming like Jesus in

his transfigured being as promised in God's Word at Rom. 8:22-23; I John 3:1-3. What a glorious day that will be! At the sound of God's voice proclaiming the preeminence of Jesus as Lord, the three apostles fell prostrate on the earth filled with fright. Jesus touched each and told them to arise and not to be frightened. Their eyes had been closed, but they arose and "saw no one but Jesus only," vs. 8. As thy descended from the mountain, Jesus commanded them to tell no one of the event until he (Jesus) had arisen from death, vs. 9. Elijah's appearance, perhaps, prompted the apostles to ask Jesus about Elijah's coming, promised at Mal. 4:5, before the Messiah would "restore all things." Jesus' answer should be examined very carefully, I believe. Vss. 11-13 contain Jesus' answer and their understanding of his answer. Jesus' statement tells more than the apostles understood at that time, I believe. John the Immerser was the fulfillment of God's promise through Malachi if the Jews had accepted Jesus as God's Messiah at the time, Matt.11:14. However, they did not, and so the "dreadful day of the Lord" did not happen then but was postponed, Rev. 6:12-17. Jesus' answer included, "Elijah truly shall come, and restore all things." But the Jewish leaders "knew him not," and, further, "Likewise also shall the Son of man suffer of them." To understand the further implications of Jesus' answer one should examine Joel 2:28-31; Acts 2:16-21; Isa. 61:1-2a; Lk 4:16-21; Matt. 24:27-31. Jesus states three times in Chap. 17 that he must suffer physical death, vss. 9, 12, 23.

III. Beginning with vs. 14 the three apostles and Jesus had joined the other apostles, returned from the mountains to Galilee, and again were meeting the needs of the multitudes. A certain man approached Jesus and asked the Lord to heal his son of a very serious illness. The Greek text states that he was "moonstruck," probably an epileptic. His muscular coordination (seizure) was so bad at times that he would fall into the water or fire. The man told Jesus that he had asked the disciples to heal his son, but they could not. Jesus later told the apostles privately that their weak faith was the reason for their ineffectiveness. (Vs. 21 is omitted from many early manuscripts. However, the sense there is that much prayer and dedication [spiritual focus] is required when ones faith is exercised.) Jesus said that a mountain can be moved when a believer's faith is anchored in absolute belief. Nothing is impossible! Jesus rebuked the demon from the man's son, and the son became normal immediately. Requests from God must comply with God's will for God to fulfill them, Jam. 4:3. In vs. 24 Jesus and the apostles come back to Capernaum where Peter's home was and where Jesus was living after moving from his home in Nazareth. The local tax collector came to Peter and asked whether Jesus was paying his Temple tax (since he had moved there into Peter's home?). This tax was a tribute which all Jews paid annually to support the Temple and those who were members of the priesthood and who served there. Peter had told the tax collector that Jesus did indeed pay the Temple tax. When Jesus and Peter entered Peter's house, Jesus asked Peter whether the kings of the earth collected taxes from their own citizens or from the citizens of other countries? Jesus said that he (Jesus) would pay the tax so as not to offend, but the Lord said, in effect, as God's King he (Jesus) did not really owe the tax, John 18:36a.

June 24 , 2001

"Jesus Prepares To Return Home"
Matt. 17

Couples Class
Wendell Alford,
Teacher

I. The time has come for God's only begotten Son to prepare to return home to heaven. He has laid the groundwork for the establishing of the kingdom of heaven on earth. God intended that his Son be the King of that kingdom, but the people, the Israelites, who were to be the original citizens of that kingdom, refused to accept the Creator's King. By now Jesus has come to realize that there will be a delay in the establishing of the kingdom of heaven on earth. In this chapter, Chap. 17, Jesus begins making concrete arrangements to identify what events must take place before he returns to the Father. Although the apostles had been closely associated with Jesus for nearly three years and had properly identified and accepted him as God's Anointed Messiah, the Father God wanted them to have further evidence of the position and stature of Jesus as his Son and Savior. At the end of Chap. 16 Jesus had left the eastern shore of the Sea of Galilee and returned to Magdala west of the Sea. Further, the Lord had led the apostles up north to Caesarea Philippi where he examined their position about who he, the Son of man, was (and is). The group of apostles had confessed that Jesus is the Son of man and also the Messiah, the Son of the living God, the God-man.

II. While Jesus and the apostles were up in the foothills of Caesarea Philippi (They had been in that area for about six or eight days.), the Lord took Peter, James and John (James' brother) apart farther up the high mountain. I believe that what happened here fulfills the prophecy of Matt. 16:28, a verse that should be the beginning of Chap. 17, (See also II Pet. 1:15-18.). With just the four of them present, God transfigured his Son before the three apostles, vs. 2. When this transfiguration happened, Jesus' face "did shine as the sun, and his clothing was white as the light." (cf. Acts 26:12-15) Every bit as miraculous as Jesus' change of appearance was the fact that Moses and Elijah appeared with Jesus, and the three of them held a conference, "talking with Jesus," vs. 3. How long Jesus conferred with Moses and Elijah we are not told, but we do know that the three discussed Jesus' forthcoming departure (death) which the Lord was about to experience in Jerusalem, Lk 9:30-31. However, when the discussion was finished, the audacious Peter volunteered a suggestion: "Lord it is good for us to be here, and if you approve, let us construct three temples here, one for you [Jesus], one for Moses, and one for Elijah," vs. 4. As Peter was making his ignorant (Lk 9:33b) suggestion, a bright cloud enshrouded them, and God the Father himself spoke out of the cloud, "This [Jesus] is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased: You listen to him [only]," vs. 5. I believe that God was making here a decided change from the Old Covenant to the New Covenant, Heb. 1:1-2. Jesus' person and teachings were to take precedence over the Law given to Moses by God and the messages which he (God) had given by the prophets where there could be a conflict of interpretation. At any rate, no one is equal to God's only begotten Son. Jesus is forever one of a kind. However, we who trust Jesus as God's Savior and Lord look forward to becoming like Jesus in

his transfigured being as promised in God's Word at Rom. 8:22-23; I John 3:1-3. What a glorious day that will be! At the sound of God's voice proclaiming the preeminence of Jesus as Lord, the three apostles fell prostrate on the earth filled with fright. Jesus touched each and told them to arise and not to be frightened. Their eyes had been closed, but they arose and "saw no one but Jesus only," vs. 8. As thy descended from the mountain, Jesus commanded them to tell no one of the event until he (Jesus) had arisen from death, vs. 9. Elijah's appearance, perhaps, prompted the apostles to ask Jesus about Elijah's coming, promised at Mal. 4:5, before the Messiah would "restore all things." Jesus' answer should be examined very carefully, I believe. Vss. 11-13 contain Jesus' answer and their understanding of his answer. Jesus' statement tells more than the apostles understood at that time, I believe. John the Immerser was the fulfillment of God's promise through Malachi if the Jews had accepted Jesus as God's Messiah at the time, Matt.11:14. However, they did not, and so the "dreadful day of the Lord" did not happen then but was postponed, Rev. 6:12-17. Jesus' answer included, "Elijah truly shall come, and restore all things." But the Jewish leaders "knew him not," and, further, "Likewise also shall the Son of man suffer of them." To understand the further implications of Jesus' answer one should examine Joel 2:28-31; Acts 2:16-21; Isa. 61:1-2a; Lk 4:16-21; Matt. 24:27-31. Jesus states three times in Chap. 17 that he must suffer physical death, vss. 9, 12, 23.

III. Beginning with vs. 14 the three apostles and Jesus had joined the other apostles, returned from the mountains to Galilee, and again were meeting the needs of the multitudes. A certain man approached Jesus and asked the Lord to heal his son of a very serious illness. The Greek text states that he was "moonstruck," probably an epileptic. His muscular coordination (seizure) was so bad at times that he would fall into the water or fire. The man told Jesus that he had asked the disciples to heal his son, but they could not. Jesus later told the apostles privately that their weak faith was the reason for their ineffectiveness. (Vs. 21 is omitted from many early manuscripts. However, the sense there is that much prayer and dedication [spiritual focus] is required when ones faith is exercised.) Jesus said that a mountain can be moved when a believer's faith is anchored in absolute belief. Nothing is impossible! Jesus rebuked the demon from the man's son, and the son became normal immediately. Requests from God must comply with God's will for God to fulfill them, Jam. 4:3. In vs. 24 Jesus and the apostles come back to Capernaum where Peter's home was and where Jesus was living after moving from his home in Nazareth. The local tax collector came to Peter and asked whether Jesus was paying his Temple tax (since he had moved there into Peter's home?). This tax was a tribute which all Jews paid annually to support the Temple and those who were members of the priesthood and who served there. Peter had told the tax collector that Jesus did indeed pay the Temple tax. When Jesus and Peter entered Peter's house, Jesus asked Peter whether the kings of the earth collected taxes from their own citizens or from the citizens of other countries? Jesus said that he (Jesus) would pay the tax so as not to offend, but the Lord said, in effect, as God's King he (Jesus) did not really owe the tax, John 18:36a.

I. Jesus had just given instruction to Peter about paying the Temple tax at the end of Chap. 17. Chap. 18 begins by saying that at this same time the apostles came to the Lord and asked him about rank and position in the kingdom of heaven. That question was based upon how men organize themselves in many of the earthly affairs as mankind live their daily lives in politics, the military, business, etc. Who will be the chief potentates in the kingdom of heaven which Jesus has been proclaiming? Who will be the semisovereign underlings of the king? Note that the question regarding taxes mentioned above and which we studied last week at the end of Chap. 17 had to do with who collects taxes from whom. A king does not collect taxes from citizens subject to another king of another kingdom. In that discussion Jesus told Peter that the king of the kingdom of heaven was not expected to pay tribute to the Jewish nation, Israel. We know that Jesus is the king of the kingdom of heaven, and, therefore, he alone can assign rank or position in that kingdom. Jesus answered the question of position or status in his kingdom with a demonstration. Jesus called a small child to himself and gave him prominence in the group, center stage. The Lord then stated that to be a citizen of his kingdom one must be converted (born from above [made spiritually alive] by God's Holy Spirit, John 3:5) as a child before he or she can be a citizen of the kingdom of heaven. We should recall that God's people, the Israelites, from Abraham's demonstration of faith in the living God through most of Samuel's prophecy, never had a king over them. Neighboring nations had kings and the Jewish people demanded of Samuel a king as their neighbors had. The Lord God permitted the Jews to have a king over them even though such an arrangement signified that Israel, in so doing, was rejecting God's direct kingship over them, I Sam. 8:6-9. God told Samuel to reveal to the people the difference a king would make in their kingdom, I Sam. 8:10-22. One qualified to serve the Lord in the kingdom of heaven Jesus said must be as humble as an innocent child, vs. 4. He or she must humble themselves, and the most humble (meek, Matt. 5:5) will be "the greatest in the kingdom of heaven." I believe that vs. 5 substantiates the truth that a child still in its innocence is already in the kingdom, or, as I believe, before reaching the "age of accountability," II Sam. 12:19-23, vs. 10. The "bottom line" is that all kingdom citizens will be completely, directly loyal and subservient to our Lord Jesus Christ. There will be no other prophet, priest, or (spiritual) king, even as the current arrangement is for us believers who are born from above.

II. Immediately after one is born from above, he or she is a spiritual babe in Christ and needs spiritual training and nurturing, I Cor. 3:1; Heb. 5:13; II Pet. 3:18. In vs. 6-10 Jesus instructs those who follow him to be careful how new believers are nurtured, because those who cause these new believers to do contrary to God's will (sin) will be dealt with severely, vs. 6. (This truth is especially true also of those who have not reached the age of accountability.) Note that in vs. 6 when these "little ones" (spiritually)

have grown beyond the age of accountability and "believe in me [Jesus]," they should also be properly trained and nurtured. Whether a person is right with God through faith in Jesus Christ later or in ones innocence, causing them to sin against God has most hurtful consequences. Two weeks ago we discussed Jesus' warning against mongrelizing God's true Gospel with men's traditions. When spiritual babes are taught a hybridized "Gospel," it is extremely difficult for that one to unlearn the false teaching and accept the simplicity of God's grace through faith in Jesus Christ, Matt. 23:15. Jesus uses most dire physical ideas to communicate God's displeasure, such as "sinking with a millstone, cutting off ones feet and hands, or plucking out ones eyes." God is aware of all such influencing of his own to err from God's ways, because his messengers (angels) keep the Lord informed about such sinful activities, vs. 10.

III. With vs. 11 Jesus tells the chief purpose of why the Son of man left his home in heaven to come to earth. That purpose is to save any and all individuals who will come to and trust Jesus as Savior and Lord (Shepherd, Psa. 23:1; John 10:7-18; Heb. 13:20; I Pet. 2:21-25). This parable of Jesus emphasizes the Shepherd's concern over every individual as an individual and not as an insignificant outcast. One could imagine that if a shepherd has ninety-nine sheep, why would he worry about just one who is outside the fold, "is gone astray?" Because every person is important to the Lord. There appears to me to be a difference between the lost sheep in this parable and the lost sheep in Jesus' parable at Lk 15:4-7. In Matthew the lost sheep is out of service in the kingdom while in Luke the lost sheep is out of relationship with God. In Matthew the sheep has strayed, but in Luke the sheep is lost (spiritually).

IV. The last lessons in this chapter have to do with reconciliation of two members of Jesus' bride, the ecclesia, and how many times should such members forgive one another. In the first lesson Jesus outlines the procedure for a member of a local ecclesia who has been trespassed against by another of the same local ecclesia. First, the one transgressed against should approach the transgressor alone for reconciliation. If no reconciliation occurs, the offended one should take with him one or two more members and approach the transgressor the second time. If, again, no reconciliation is attained, the matter should be brought before the local ecclesia at a meeting of the entire body. If the ecclesia cannot convince the transgressor of his error, then he should be considered an outsider, i.e., out of fellowship with the group. This happened in the ecclesia at Corinth as noted at I Cor. 5:4-6. The transgressor was later reinstated to fellowship at II Cor. 2:6-10. If the local ecclesia agrees on a spiritual matter (even a small group, two or three), God the Father will honor such a Holy Spirit led action, vss. 17-20. Peter asked Jesus how many times should a member of the ecclesia forgive another member, seven times? Jesus said that those under the Lordship of Jesus Christ should forgive one another seventy times seven, because God has forgiven each ecclesia member an innumerable number of times against God and one another for Jesus sake, Eph. 4:32.

July 8, 2001

"Jesus Begins Final Trip South"
Matt. 1 9

Couples Class
Wendell Alford,
Teacher

I. Please recall that in Chap. 16 Jesus was up north at Caesarea Philippi. There the apostles reconfirmed their belief that Jesus was who he is: the Son of man and the unique Son of God, Matt. 16:13-17. On this occasion Jesus announces for the first time that God will be calling out the ecclesia, Jesus' bride, Matt. 16:18-19. Jesus commanded them not to tell anyone what God had revealed to them, Matt. 16:20. Then, in Chap. 17, following this test of the apostles' position about the person and position of Jesus as God's Messiah, God then made three of the apostles, Peter, James and John, aware of what Jesus would be like following his mortal death and resurrection therefrom later in the kingdom of heaven. Again, at Matt. 17:9 the Lord commanded the three not to divulge the transfiguration experience to anyone until after his resurrection from death. In Matt. 18 Jesus told the apostles about proper humility; about influencing innocent children and new believers in Jesus Christ to sin; about Jesus' main purpose in coming to earth - to provide spiritual salvation for all who will believe; about forgiveness by local ecclesia members who trespass against other members; and about how many times local ecclesia members should forgive one another.

II. The above reviews of the preceding three chapters, 16-18, were given to signify what Matthew (God's Word) is referring to at the opening of Chap. 19, "When Jesus had finished these sayings," vs. 1. Further, we can see the geographic journey Jesus has begun on his final trip to Jerusalem. From the mountain up at Caesarea Philippi, Jesus came back south to Galilee, and, at the beginning of Chap. 19, we are told that Jesus and his company bypassed Samaria (as was the Jewish custom) by going south on the east side (Perea) of the Jordan to Galilee. On this leg of his journey south huge crowds followed the Lord, "and he healed them there," vs. 2. We should have noted by now that the Pharisees were like mosquitoes, for about everywhere Jesus went they appeared. They picked this occasion to present Jesus with a question about marriage and the part divorce should play in it. Their question did not ask whether divorce is right or wrong, but rather whether it is legal for a man to put away his wife for any (every) cause. Jesus' answer used as its basis the original arrangement which God had made for intimacy, procreation and mutual support of a man and a woman, i. e., whether divorce is right or wrong according to God's original will and purpose for his creation, mankind. The reason for a male and female to become exclusively related for such purposes was to separate the new couple from their parents. This separation from the parents was to be so exclusive that the two should be considered, not two people (fleshly speaking), but one (to be considered joined together exclusively). This arrangement was the way God originally planned marriage, and any deviation from that plan was because of mankind's refusal to accept God's will and purpose. That plan, of course, precludes sexual intimacies of a human being with lower animals as well as between persons of the same sex ("God made human-kind male and female from the beginning."), Gen. 1:27; 5:2; Lev.

18:20,22-23; 20:13,15-16; Rom. 1:24-28. When Jesus said, "What God has joined together," he is referring to two aspects of marriage, I believe. First, God considers the male and female together as one fleshly being, and second, he excludes other than male with female human beings. God allows nothing else for marriage, for that is only what God "joins together." The Pharisees were quick to point out that Moses in his law permitted a man to divorce his wife by simply putting his position in writing. Jesus said that that was not God's will from the very beginning, but man refused to obey God's will ("hardness of their hearts") so that Moses' position was one of compromise on man's part, not God's, vs.8. Jesus said that if a spouse divorces his or her spouse, except for breaking the exclusive marriage commitment (sexual intimacy with other than ones own spouse), the one getting a divorce and anyone who engages in sexual activity with the one who gets the divorce is guilty of adultery. Then the disciples asked Jesus whether marriage is a better choice for believers at all. The Lord said that the choice for the believer to marry or not is an individual decision. Some are born without sexual sensitivity; some are castrated by others (many slaves were for forced celibacy); and some choose by self-discipline for different reasons to remain unmarried. However, a believer is free to marry at his or her own volition, because marriage is honorable for all, Prov. 5:18-21; I Cor. 7:2; Heb. 13:4; I Tim. 4:1-5. It is not accidental, I believe, that Jesus, immediately after his discussion of marriage and divorce, brought a little child to himself and said that children [in their innocence] are of the kingdom of heaven.

III. In vss. 16-26 Jesus is approached by a young ruler (of the Sanhedrin?) who wanted to know from the good Teacher what he should do to earn eternal life. The Lord noted that only God is good, and said that the man should keep God's commandments. The man asked, "Which?" Jesus named the last six of the Ten Commandments having to do with peoples' relating to one another. The young man declared that he had kept them all his life, and asked, "Is there something else?" Apparently Jesus knew that he had become rich by improperly relating to God, the breaking of the first four Commandments having to do with his relation to God, Exod. 20:1-11. Jesus told him to sell what he had, give all to the poor, and follow Jesus, i.e., trust everything to Jesus as Savior and Lord, become Jesus' disciple, vs. 21. Accepting God's love in and through his grace in Jesus Christ is what makes anyone pleasing to God the Father, Matt. 17:5. Jesus is Lord, the only begotten Son of the Living God, Psa. 110:1,4-6; Matt. 22:41-46. Accepting Jesus as Savior and Lord is only possible through God's grace, vs. 26; John 6:41-47. It is not possible for anyone (rich or poor) to earn eternal life. Only those who are trusting God's spiritual provision through Jesus Christ can hope for eternal life, being at one with their Creator, i.e., spiritually alive forever. After the apostles witnessed Jesus' conversation with the affluent young man, Peter asked the Lord if their choice of following Jesus as Lord would be rewarded. Jesus answered, "Truthfully, I tell you that you [anyone] who follows [trusts] me will share with me in my glory in the generation [age] to come," vss. 28-29. Many who appear to be great in the world today could be least in the kingdom of heaven when Jesus returns, vs. 30, and many who appear to be least in men's judgment could be great in the Lord's kingdom.

July 15, 2001

"Jesus Nears Jerusalem"
Matt. 2 0

Couple Class
Wendell Alford,
Teacher

I. When we examine the first sixteen verses of Chap. 20, and especially vs. 16, it is obvious that vs. 30 of the preceding chapter should have been made the first verse of Chap. 20. That vs. 30 introduces Jesus' parable of the vineyard workers. In fact, Chap. 20 begins with the conjunctive term "for". Jesus at this time had taught the disciples many aspects of the kingdom of heaven through the use of parables. The Lord began this method of imparting spiritual truths to the apostles in Matthew, Chap. 13, because, in Chap. 12, it became obvious that the Jewish religious leaders were determined to relegate Jesus' spiritual authority to Satan. The Lord at Matt. 12:31-32 proclaimed explicitly that such position was eternally unpardonable. At Matt. 13:10 when the apostles asked about Jesus' change in teaching methods, he told them that, even as Isaiah had prophesied, "[the Jewish leaders, this people] would hear and not understand and also see and not perceive," Isa. 6:9-10. Now in Chap. 20 Jesus and the apostles are about to enter Jerusalem for the last time before the Lord is to be sacrificed for the sins of the world, and Jesus is still teaching about the kingdom of heaven in parables, i.e., to veil the spiritual truth from those who were unwilling to receive that truth.

II. Jesus began this parable, "For the kingdom of heaven is like when a landowner who went out early one morning to hire some workers to work in his vineyard, agreed to pay each worker a denarius (Greek), which the King James translators equated to an English penny, for the day's labor," vss. 1-3. The workers agreed to work for that wage. Evidently, the crew which the landowner was able to hire early (perhaps six o'clock AM) was not sufficient to do what was immediately needed. At nine o'clock the owner saw that other workers were waiting for work in the marketplace so he sent them into the vineyard promising to pay them "whatsoever is right" at quitting time, six o'clock PM. To expedite this seasonal work the owner found other workers at twelve noon, others at three o'clock, and finally others were hired one hour before quitting time, five o'clock, the eleventh hour. At each hiring time the available workers were unable to find employment elsewhere. In other words, they were able and willing to work, but no one had hired them. The landowner at quitting time instructed his steward (paymaster) to call the workers to receive their day's pay "beginning from the last unto the first," vs. 8. The ones who were hired late at five o'clock PM, the eleventh hour, were paid a full penny for an hour's work which was the same pay each worker received regardless of his hiring time, six, nine, twelve, three, or five. Except for the first group hired no worker was promised a given amount for his labor but simply, "whatever is right." I believe that the Lord is the landowner in this parable and that his rewards for workers throughout the ecclesia period will be based upon every worker's faithfulness to his opportunities, not on what men may assess of the labor produced. People's abilities are so varied that only God can know for sure what a reasonable output of their spiritual labor should be. This fact, I believe, is why we are

admonished by Jesus at Matt. 7:1, "Judge not, that you be not judged." Even as the landowner (Jesus) in his parable before us said to those who had been laboring all day in the vineyard, "And when they had received it (the same pay as those who had worked less, as little as one hour), they grumbled against the landowner," vs. 11. Jesus said, in effect, "Friend, I have not wronged you, because I paid you exactly what you agreed to work for. Your opinion (the way you see the situation in retrospect, through "thine evil eye") does not change the agreements, for the vineyard is mine and our agreement was mine to make. Therefore, be on your way," vss. 13-14. I believe also that Jesus is not only referring to individual believers but also to the Jews as a people in their rejection of Jesus as God's Messiah (Savior) as compared to the Gentiles who accepted Jesus as Savior and Lord, Matt. 8:10-12; 15:24; 16:19; Acts 10:9-37,44-48; Rom. 11:11-32.

III. In vss. 17-19 Jesus is very aware of their forthcoming arrival at Jerusalem, and, although the Lord had already told the apostles three times about what was about to happen to himself (Matt. 16:21; 17:9,12), he here gives them a more detailed description of the coming events at Jerusalem. Jesus and the apostles, remember, were on their way southward on the east of the Jordan, and they were now coming upward toward Jerusalem from the east. Jesus told the twelve apostles that he would be betrayed (by one of the twelve he was then addressing, Judas Iscariot) to the Jewish leaders. The Jewish leaders would turn him over to the Gentile (Roman) authority who would mock, scourge and finally crucify him. The Lord at this time assures the twelve that he would rise again from mortal death. I do not believe that the apostles comprehended the full implication of what Jesus had just told them, because shortly thereafter James' and John's mother, wife of Zebedee, approached the Lord worshipfully asked him a question. As Jesus encouraged her to spell out her desire, she asked him for permission for her two sons to sit in places of authority when Jesus had established his kingdom. The result of her request was that Jesus noted the envy expressed by the other ten apostles and told them all, "You know how the Gentiles organize their kingdoms. They designate political leaders (princes) who control those under them. These political great ones exercise authority, but it shall not be so among you. The great ones in the ecclesia, let them be those who serve. The greatest ones will be slaves to the groups. That is the role model which is being performed by the Son of man (himself)," vss. 25-28. This teaching of Jesus took place in Jericho to the west of the Jordan. Here a large crowd gathered around Jesus and his followers. As they walked along the road at Jericho, two blind men sat along side the road and, as Jesus passed, yelled, "O Lord, thou son of David." Some in the crowd told them to be quiet, but they yelled out even louder, "Have mercy on us, O Lord, thou son of David," vss. 30-31. Jesus stopped and asked them what they wanted. "Lord, that our eyes may be opened," vs. 33. With loving compassion, the Lord touched their eyes, and immediately they could see. They both became disciples of Jesus and followed him.

"Living for Jesus a life that is true; striving to please him
in all that I do; Yielding allegiance, glad-hearted and free
This is the pathway of blessing for me!"

July 22, 2001

"Jesus Enters Jerusalem"
Matt. 21

Couples Class
Wendell Alford,
Teacher

I. In Chap. 20 Jesus and his company were passing through Jericho which is east and slightly north of Jerusalem. At the beginning of Chap. 21 they enter the small village of Bethphage (House of Figs) on the Mount of Olives, a ridge of low mountains east of Jerusalem across the Kidron Valley. The ridge runs about a mile long, north and south. To understand this chapter which details the Lord's kingly entry into Israel's most sacred city, I believe we must have a broader view of this last week of Jesus' flesh-and-blood life as a human, the God-man. The Lord had come to Jerusalem to observe the Jewish celebration of Passover. The Passover was memorialized annually to remember the event in Jewish history when God delivered his people from slavery under the Egyptians. It was this delivery which made the Israelites for the first time a national entity, a unified people. Passover was observed in the Jewish month of Nisan (March-April) from the fourteenth to the twenty-first. Although technically, Passover refers only to the meal of unleavened bread itself, the celebration lasted seven days when our Lord was on earth. So then, Jesus arrived at Jerusalem at the beginning of the seven days, but did not stay overnight in the city until the night of his trial. His nights were spent across the Kidron Valley in the village of Bethany, vs. 17. Matthew's Gospel does not attempt to give a chronological account of Jesus' activities during the week, but all of Chaps. 21-28 tell of the Lord's activities and teachings in and around Jerusalem in those seven days. Jesus' bold assertiveness is an obvious change in our Lord's behavior. He is acting like the King that he is, giving the Jews a last chance to accept him as God the Father had sent him to earth to be. Many refer to Jesus' entry into Jerusalem as detailed in this chapter as "triumphant," but that entry is yet to happen, Zech. 14:1-4; Heb. 9:28. At that time, Jesus' second coming, Zech. 9:9 can be fully applicable. (Matthew only quotes it partially, "Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion" and "he is just, and having salvation" are not given in vs. 5.) At any rate, the entries of Jesus into Jerusalem sequentially chronological are not given by Matthew. By combining the accounts of Matthew, Mark, and Luke there appears to be at least three distinct entries of Jesus into Jerusalem from Bethany that week.

II. Chap. 21 records one of Jesus' entries into Jerusalem, but as stated above the real triumphant entry into Jerusalem will happen when Jesus comes the second time. Jesus had made plans for this entry by arranging for a donkey and its foal to be available for him to ride. We must remember that Jesus had very close friends who owned a home across the Kidron in Bethany, a village adjacent to Bethphage and which were both within walking distance of Jerusalem. These friends were Lazarus and his two sisters, Mary and Martha, John 11:1-5. It was in their home that Jesus spent his nights during this week, I believe. With the donkey available, Jesus rode her through the gate into the city. We know that this entry of Jesus was generally known, because "a very great multitude" spread tree branches and straw along the street and quoted Psa.

118:25-26, "Save now (Hosanna), I beseech thee - - Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord - - ." Many of the people in Jerusalem were there from out of town for the Passover. However, "all of the city was moved," and some were asking, "Who is this?" The crowds said, "This is Jesus the prophet of Nazareth of Galilee."

III. Jesus went into the Temple and drove the money exchangers out as he quoted Isa. 56:7 and said, "'My house shall be called the house of prayer for all people,' but you have made it a den of thieves," vs. 13. Jesus healed the blind and lame there, and the children were singing, "Hosanna the son of David," vs. 15. The Jewish religious leaders witnessed all of these things and were very angry. They asked Jesus, in effect I believe, "Do you realize that you are desecrating God's Holy Temple at this most holy time. Even the little children are reacting to you." Jesus answered by quoting Psa. 8:2, "Out of the mouth of babes you have [perfected praise] established strength because of your enemies - - ." The next day as Jesus returned to the city from Bethany, evidently without breakfast, he stopped by a fig tree for figs, but the tree was bare of fruit but full of leaves, "for the time of figs was not yet," Mk 11:13. Jesus expressed disfavor with the tree, and the tree immediately withered away. The apostles were amazed when they heard the Lord say, "No man eat fruit of thee forever." Jesus said in answer to their amazement that faith in God through prayer reveals the will of God. I believe that in the fig tree experience Jesus was expressing with subtlety how the nation of Israel was bearing no fruit for God in his plan for mankind. They had a form of religion through practicing rituals (leaves), but were not living according to God's will in their daily lives (fruit). How does the Church today compare to the Jews during Jesus' first visit to earth? (Rom. 11:21-22; Rev. 3:15-17) While Jesus was in the Temple that day, the chief priests and members of the Sanhedrin came to him and questioned his authority to "carry on" as he was doing. Jesus quieted them by asking them whether John the Immerser's authority was from heaven. They were afraid to say, so Jesus refused to answer their question about his own source of power.

IV. The Lord used the occasion of his authority's being questioned to teach the chief priests and Pharisees two parables against their religious position. Jesus said that a certain man had two sons (I believe Jews and Gentiles) whom he asked to go to work in the father's vineyard. The first one said that he would not go, but later went and worked (Gentiles). The second (Jews), when asked, said, "Sure, I'll go and work," but never went. Jesus asked his hearers who did the will of the father (God). They said the first son did. Jesus told them abruptly that whores and tax collectors heeded John the Immerser's call to change (repent), but they did not. In the second parable, a landowner (God the Father) left his estate for a long time but left tenants (Israel) in charge. At harvest time the landowner sent workers to harvest the crop, but the tenants abused them so that the workers could not do the work. The traveling owner heard of the problem and finally sent his own son (Jesus, the Messiah) to manage the tenants. But the tenants thought that, by killing the son, the estate would then be theirs so they killed the son. Jesus quoted Psa. 118:22 and said, "The kingdom of God shall be taken from you [the Jews] and given to [another, the Gentiles]," vs. 43; Rom. 11:25. The Jewish leaders would have taken Jesus then, but they feared the people.

July 29, 2001

"A Parable And Conflict"
Matt. 22

Couples Class
Wendell Alford,
Teacher

I. This chapter begins with Jesus' third parable, interrupted from the two at the end of Chap. 21 only by the Pharisees and the chief priests who understood themselves to be directly implicated in Jesus' parables. These Jewish leaders were seeking ways to incarcerate the Lord, but they feared the people. Jesus spoke to them a third parable relating these leaders to the kingdom of heaven and to Jesus as king of that kingdom. A king (God the Father) is preparing a feast for his son's (Jesus', God's only begotten) forthcoming wedding. The king did not want to be embarrassed by a low turnout to the feast, and he, therefore, sent his servants early to invite those whom he wanted to attend. The monarch went ahead and planned for the wedding feast, including the killing of his choice beef cattle for barbecuing. Now, the king again with the preparation all made, sent his servants through the kingdom to invite his subjects to the feast. They not only refused to come, but made fun of the king and continued their daily activities, farming and businesses. Some of those invited even spoke spitefully of the king. Others even killed the king's representatives. When the king learned about his being treated so spitefully, he called out the military, sent them throughout the kingdom, and burned their cities. When those who were most appropriate to attend the feast were destroyed, the king sent his militia out and forced anyone they could find, to come to the feast. Some who showed up were good, i.e., they knew and cared enough to dress appropriately. However, when the hall was full of guests and the sovereign king came in, he noted a guest in the hall who had not bothered to dress appropriately. The king personally approached the person and said, "Friend, why have you come here without proper attire?" The person was speechless! The person was seized, bound, and thrown into the dungeon. Jesus' conclusion was "that many are called, but few are chosen." The message, I believe, of the parable is that God had sent prophets and his apostles (Lk 10:1-24) consistently to his people, the Jews, but they would not heed his messengers and now are rejecting his son (Matt. 20:16). The events are now under way to honor his son at a wedding of the son to his ecclesia (Rev. 19:7-10), but the Jewish nation is, even with the wedding preparation about to be complete (John 17:4-5), again rejecting God's gracious invitation to do God's will. That will is that each person put on the proper garment, faith in the righteousness of God's mercy and grace through his Son, Jesus, God's Messiah, Isa. 64:6; Matt. 5:20; Rom. 3:21-31; 13:10; Eph. 2:8-10; Rev. 3:5; 7:9,13-14.

II. After this third parable which Jesus related against the Jewish leaders in their presence, all of these leaders assembled to decide how to "entangle him in his teaching," vs. 15. The Pharisees spear-headed this concerted effort against our Lord, and they first sent the Herodians with their followers to Jesus and said, "We understand you to be a true teacher from God and are not afraid to say things which could offend anyone." Therefore, is it right for us Jews to have to pay taxes to support the Romans (Caesar)? Jesus was not fooled by the evil intent of their question, and answered, "Why

do you tempt me, you hypocrites?" Jesus knew that the Herodians' real "religion" was a loyalty to Herod and his political position. Jesus asked them for a coin with which they paid taxes. They brought him a denarius (penny), and the Lord asked them whose picture and name are on the coin. They answered, "Caesar's." Jesus said, "Pay, therefore, to Caesar the things which are his, and unto God the things which are God's," vs. 21. The Herodians were amazed that he would allow that the Jews owed both support of the Roman government (roads, military protection, etc.) and support of God's work (Temple, priests, etc.). They gave up trying to trick Jesus, vs. 22.

III. Immediately after the Herodians "took a swing" at Jesus, the Sadducees' turn came next. They were an antitradition denomination of the Jews, and were, for the most part, well-to-do and quite concerned about their being of the "upper" class. Their "religion" had become influenced by Greek philosophy to become "this life" centered, materialistic. They did not believe in any afterlife. They approached Jesus with feigned respect, calling him, "Teacher, Teacher," and quoting the Law of Moses. They proposed an example in which a man who had six brothers married a woman and then died. According to Moses' Law (Deut. 25:5-6), the Sadducees reminded the Lord, one of the dead man's brothers is required to marry his brother's widow. Now, the "shrewd" Sadducees told Jesus that every one of the seven brothers died, and each one of the brothers had dutifully married the same woman who herself then died. The Sadducees then presented the Lord with this "dilemma," "[Ah ha!], after the resurrection, whose wife shall she be of the seven, for all had her [as wife]?" No doubt all the Sadducees gathered around our Lord closely with their arms folded across their chests, daring him to answer their "impossible" query. I believe that Jesus (the Lord of the Universe) looked them deep within their eyes and said calmly, in effect, "You have posed a situation which demonstrates your ignorance. First, you do not understand the Scriptures, and, secondly, you do not understand the power of God [the Father], for after people are resurrected, they will not marry nor will they be marriageable. Human beings will be, after the resurrection, of a different nature (I Cor. 15:37) such as God's angels (messengers) are in heaven. The Scripture makes this fact about the life after physical death known where God spoke to you [by Moses at Exod. 3:4-6] 'I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.' God is not the God of the dead [All three had long since been physically dead when God spoke this to Moses.], but of the living," vss. 29-32. By the end of Jesus' reply to the Sadducees, they and those around them were astonished at the Lord's teaching. A lawyer of the Pharisees then asked Jesus which commandment in the Law is greatest [first]. Jesus said that loving God completely is the first, and loving ones neighbor is second, because on these two all the others are based. In fact, the second is really dependent upon the first. Jesus then asked the Pharisees a question: "Whose son is the Messiah?" They answered, "David's." [If this is true, then], "How does David in the spirit [led by God's Holy Spirit] call him [the Messiah], 'Lord?'" (Psa. 110:1) David said, "The Lord said to my Lord, 'You sit on my right hand, until I make your enemies your footstool.'" If David called him [the Messiah] 'Lord,' how is it that the Lord is David's son?" They could not answer, and that ended the Jewish leaders' conspiracy through questions. Now they wanted Jesus' death.

MANY ARE CALLED BUT FEW ARE CHOSEN
Matt. 22:14

Following is a discussion of Jesus' statement, "many are called, but few are chosen" at Matt. 22:14. Jesus had said earlier at Matt. 19:30, "But many that are first shall be last, and the last shall be first." At Matt. 20:16 Jesus said, "So the last shall be first, and the first last: for many be called but few chosen." (italics-WA) The "calling" and "choosing" are intricately tied together in Jesus' mind, I believe, as he did at Matt. 20:16 with "last" and "first." The substance of the two concepts has to do with the sequential timing of the "calling" and "choosing" as Jesus did at Matt. 20:16. I believe that the first two quotes (Matt. 19:30 and Matt. 20:16) of Jesus are more particularly clarified in the parable in Matt. 22:1-14 concerning the King (God the Father) and his Son (Jesus, God's Messiah). That fact is repeated as the conclusion of Jesus' parable in Chap. 22:1-14. Jesus said in that parable that God is literally refusing to have his Son ignored, and, therefore, he will create a group, Jesus' bride the ecclesia to include all Jews and Gentiles who will accept God's grace and mercy alone through faith in his Son Jesus the Savior.

This problem bothered Paul immensely, I believe. As far as we need to know, God's Holy Spirit explained this problem of Jews vs. Gentiles to Paul who then gave the answer (God's) to us in his Word at Rom. 11.

In summary, God's will has been and is being proclaimed throughout the earth, but all who hear the truth in Christ, though called, will not be chosen. They will be chosen only on God's terms: total dependence upon righteousness in Jesus Christ's sacrifice, Matt.13:30; Rom. 9:30-33. The Jews wanted to earn God's favor as have and do many since Jesus' resurrection and God's sending of his Holy Spirit. Many of the latter have interpreted God's Word to mean that their own goodness (or of someone else) must be combined with Jesus' sacrifice to make them ready to please God. The Jews were the first to make this mistake and the Gentiles will be the second to make this same mistake. In turn the Jews will be the ones to be reconciled to God (as a people) the last time, Rev. 7:1-10, and the Gentiles will be the last to turn away (as a people) from God's will a second time, Rom. 1:18-32; 11:18-22; Rev. 3:14-17.

I believe that it is very easy to confuse individuals with the Jews or Gentiles as peoples. As humanity (all peoples on the earth) God has put all individuals in the same category that he "might have mercy upon all," Rom. 11:32. One must confess that he or she cannot comprehend God's position with ones meager mental ability. Neither did Paul, but he did believe that God is in absolute control of his creation, Rom. 11:33-36. So do I, "many are called, but few are chosen," Matt. 22:14.

The above is why I elected to relate "called" and "chosen" to Matt. 22:14 instead of to Matt. 19:30 and Matt. 20:16.

July 29, 01; Wendell Alford; Teacher

Aug. 5, 2001

"Woe To The Religious Leaders"
Matt. 23

Couples Class
Wendell Alford,
Teacher

I. Jesus had been teaching the multitudes for many months about the nature of the kingdom of heaven in parables. Now the Lord is in Jerusalem for the last Passover during which he is to be sacrificed for our sins, and he confronts the Jewish religious leaders directly in Chaps. 21-22, again in parables. As he did so, the Pharisees, Sadducees, Herodians, chief priests, and elders knew that the thrust of Jesus' teaching was against how they were conducting their religious duties before the peoples of Israel. At the beginning of Chap. 23 Jesus addresses the large crowd and the apostles in and around the Temple. The Jewish religious leaders were no longer directly speaking to Jesus and attempting to cause him to betray himself in public, Matt. 22:46, because they could not. Jesus said, "The scribes (professional interpreters of the Law, the letter not the spirit) and Pharisees (legalists and political religionists) are the people in authority according to Moses' Law. Therefore, you should do what they say [for they quote God's Word], but do not follow their actions as role models. They prescribe life styles and customs which they present to you as God's will for you, but they themselves do not even attempt to comply with the same rules they are laying down for you. They are hypocrites as they associate with you, and their actions in public belie the thoughts and goals of their spirits. They dress in what is generally understood to be holy clothing making them appear to be God's representatives, examples for others to replicate. They assume places of prestige at public religious meetings, making sure that they occupy places reserved for notables. They make sure that their presence is known out in the market places so as to give "religious commoners" an opportunity to address them as 'Teacher, Teacher.'" Jesus then in an aside to his apostles, I believe, said, "Do not allow others to call you 'Leader,' for only one is to be your Leader [Teacher] who is the Messiah. All of you are to consider yourselves brothers [equals]. Neither should you consider any man to represent God for you on earth, for there is only one God, your heavenly Father. There is to be none among you to represent God's Lordship, for only one is your Lord, even the Messiah. In fact, the ones of my followers who are to be considered outstanding shall be those who serve others. Further, if one of you "lords it" over the others, he shall be humbled. Self-discipline which produces humility will demonstrate true leadership," Matt. 20:25-28.

II. At vs. 13 Jesus turns his attention directly to the scribes and Pharisees. As he does so, I believe, his admonitions are begun with the negative term, "Woe," as Isaiah warned the Israelites in Chap. 5 of his prophecy. There Isaiah presents a parable which Jesus reiterates in his parable at Matt. 21:33-46. Compare Isa. 5:1-2 with Matt. 21:33. After Isaiah sets the stage for his parable, he addresses the inhabitants of Jerusalem in particular and the citizens of Judah in general. In that same chapter, 5, the prophet Isaiah proclaims six "woes," vss. 8,11,18,20, 21, and 22. At that time God told the Israelites through Isaiah: Not to cause the farms

to overproduce; not to engage in a continual "party spirit," revelry; not to let vanity (evil) control them without believing that God will recompense their choice of evil; not to call evil good and good evil; not to over value themselves through pride, i.e., consider themselves wise when they are not; and not to occupy positions of leadership and engage, at the same time, in alcohol and bribery. The conclusion which Isaiah reaches is in Isa. 5:25, "therefore is the anger of the Lord kindled against his people," because "they have despised the Word of the Holy One of Israel," Isa. 5:24. This feeling of conviction when precipitated by the death of King Uzziah after a long reign (fifty-two years), caused Isaiah to heed God's call to say, "Woe is me, for I am undone - - Here am I, send me," Isa. 6:5,8. And God said, "Go, and tell this people [the Jews], 'Hear you indeed, but understand not, and see you indeed, but perceive not,'" Isa. 6:9.

III. Jesus was a prophet, priest and king as he dwelt among men. He is still the priest and spiritual king of us believers. In Matt. 23:13-36 the Lord pronounces eight "Woes" upon the same people as Isaiah did in the six in his prophecy, God's people, the Jews. In both instances, it is noteworthy that God's condemnation is especially directed to the religious leaders. Jesus' woes come in Matt. 23:13,14,15,16,23,25,27, and 29. Jesus condemned the scribes and Pharisees because: 1) They hid (shut up) the kingdom of heaven from those they led as well as staying out themselves; 2) They gained profit from the needy (widows) while parading about as pious religious leaders (prayed long prayers); 3) They were ardent missionaries over land and seas to make proselytes to their own religious position, but when they are made, they (the proselytes) are "twofold more a child of hell (away from God) than yourselves;" 4) They were spiritually blind and taught that taking an oath regarding the Temple (God's house) or the altar (God's throne) was not binding (did not have to be paid), but swearing by the tangible items, gold or other gifts, was binding (an emphasis on materialism and the religious leaders' ability to profit thereby); 5) They created a false priority insofar as what is spiritually more important by tithing insignificant herbs and glossing over the weightier requirements of the Law such as judgment, mercy, and faith. The scribes and Pharisees neglected the more important legal requirements, but raising money was emphasized. They were "straining at a gnat [away from their food] and gobbling down a camel" while setting their spiritual priorities! 6) They made themselves appear good publicly, but practiced self indulgence privately; 7) They primped themselves meticulously on their exterior as one would a grave site, but on the inside their spirits were like decayed flesh and broken bones, corrupt; and 8) They claimed that they would have been allies of the past prophets who were tortured and slain by the adversaries of God, but by their (the scribes and Pharisees) actions they are, in truth, offsprings of the killers of the prophets, John 8:41-47. The Jews (as a people) of this generation (the ecclesia age) will continue to contradict the will of God. Jesus then felt sorry for Jerusalem, because it was there where Jewish leadership had killed the prophets. Jesus said that he had lovingly brooded long over the Jews and would have gathered them together as chicks under his wings, but they were rebellious, and still are. Jesus said, "Your house [Temple] is being left desolate to you. You shall not see [understand] me until [I come again to earth]. Then you will call me, 'Lord,'" vss. 38-39; Rev. 7:1-8.

Aug. 12, 2001

"Jesus As Prophet"
Matt. 24

Couples Class
Wendell Alford,
Teacher

I. Last week in the outline at ¶ III the first sentence was, "Jesus was a prophet, priest and king as he dwelt among men." In Matt. 24-25 the Lord exercises his position as a prophet. Jesus and the apostles had just been in the Temple where he had been condemning the scribes and Pharisees for misleading the Israelites in eight (woes) different ways. Jesus was no doubt weary after his long day of confronting the false position of the Jewish leaders. He left the Temple and was joined by the apostles, and they pointed out the grandeur of the large Temple complex which Herod the Great had first announced to the Jewish people at the Passover in 19 or 20 BC. His intention was to restore the Temple on the site where the great Temple of Solomon had stood, near the city of David. Herod had built the Temple to gain the favor of the Jews whose tranquillity brought favor to Herod from the Roman Empire under whom he held political power. The total project of building the Temple began after a long period of amassing the materials. By 16 BC Herod had finished the sanctuary, the holy of holies, and the surrounding porch. In about 9 BC the court and cloisters were finished along with the bridge between the south cloister and the upper city. The magnificence of the structures was breathtaking, especially when the bright sun shone on its huge white marble walls, colonnades, and ten elaborate gateways. The Temple had been under construction for forty-six years in Jesus' time on earth, John 2:20. Herod the Great died in 4 BC, but his son, Antipas, continued the construction of the complex. The entire complex was finally finished in AD 64 under Herod Agrippa II.

II. I believe that Jesus and the apostles were perhaps across the Kidron Valley from where the Temple area could be viewed in its panoramic splendor, Mk 13:3. As the Lord and the apostles looked back across the valley from the Mount of Olives at the magnificent buildings, one of the apostles said, "Teacher, note how significant the Temple and accompanying buildings are!" Jesus prophesied, "Observe these great buildings. There shall not one stone be left upon another that shall not be thrown down." Peter, James, John, and Andrew asked Jesus questions about events which would occur relating to these prophetic times. Specifically their questions were: 1) When shall these things be? (stones thrown down); 2) What shall be the sign of your coming?; and 3) What sign will be given to indicate the end of the world (age - [ecclesia period])?" The first question had to do with the destruction of the Temple, "stone by stone." Luke describes the fulfillment of this prophecy at Lk 21: 20-24. Jerusalem is to be surrounded by strong military forces. Matthew does not elaborate upon this soon coming destruction of the Temple, because his Gospel emphasizes the kingdom of heaven, which we have learned through over two thousand years of history, was postponed until God had selected a bride (the ecclesia) for his Son, Jesus the Messiah. Recall that Jesus had said at Matt. 23:39 that the Jewish people would not understand what was happening until his second coming. Then they will proclaim Jesus as their Savior (Messiah), Rev. 7:1-8. The armies which fulfilled Jesus'

prophecy were those of the Roman general Titus, some forty years later, who finished the destruction of the Temple on August 9, AD 70. A Mohammedan mosque now stands on the old temple site and has since AD 691. This mosque is called today the Dome of the Rock, because it sits on the huge rock where Abraham took Isaac for sacrifice, Mount Moriah, Gen. 22. Muslims believe that Mohammed ascended to heaven from that rock, and that Abraham took Ishmael there for sacrifice rather than Isaac. No wonder Jesus wept over the site!

III. In vss. 4-26 Jesus answers question three concerning the end of the ecclesia age (world order) which ends with the short period of cosmic upheaval spoken of by Daniel, vs. 15; Dan. 9:27; 11:31; 12:11. During this end period there will be spiritual bedlam upon the earth, because the dwelling place of the Holy Spirit (the ecclesia) will have been removed from the earth, II Thes. 2:6-8; Rev. 4. The Jews will be especially upset and confused, because many false messiahs (prophets) will present themselves as God's Savior. In fact, many will be deceived, for evil will prevail, vs. 12; Rev. 6:12-17. Jesus refers to these events as the "great tribulation," vs. 21 which will be without precedence from the earth's creation until forever. The period of this tribulation will be so severe it will take a special intervention of God Almighty to salvage any human life at all, vs. 22. This intervention will be exercised on behalf of his chosen ones, the Jews, vs. 22; Rom. 11:25-26; Rev. 7:1-8. At the end of the answer to question three, Jesus gives another warning that many will claim to be prophets of God, even to be the Messiah himself, but they will be false. How will the real Messiah be manifested? Jesus answers question two of the apostles, "What shall be the sign of your coming [back to earth]?" In vss. 27-31 Jesus prophesies that his appearance will be cosmic. His presence will illuminate the entire earth (Dan. 7:13-14) which will be in a different state immediately following the tribulation, vs. 29. As the Lord appears, the peoples of the earth will be saddened, because a new King has come to establish a new world order. Jesus shall reign one thousand years, Rev. 20:3. The ecclesia will be the bride of Christ during this period in the new Jerusalem, Rev. 21:2, and will reign with Jesus, our Lord, Rev. 5:10.

IV. Beginning with vs. 32 Jesus gives a parable and follow up illustrations, after having answered the apostles' three questions noted above. His parable stresses the uncertainty of the exact timing of the occurrence of the fulfillment of the three questions, "all these things," vs. 33. But when the world order shows the trends toward their fulfillment the soon end is as sure as a fig tree's indicating spring when its leaves sprout from their buds. We believers will be aware of the nearness of our Lord's return, Lk 21:28; I Thes. 5:1-11; Heb. 10:24-25. The world's population just before the return of Christ will feel that all is well, I Thes. 5:23. All believers will be caught up to meet the Lord in the air, those who have died physically and those still alive physically, I Cor. 15:51-58; I Thes. 4:13-18. Just as this event is happening, the world's peoples will be pursuing regular routines as they were when Noah and his family boarded the Ark, vss. 38-44. The wise servant is not hypocritical but serves the Lord as a witness to God's love through faith in God's Son (Word), vs. 35; vss. 45-51. He will come suddenly, Rev. 3:11; 22:7,12.

Aug. 20, 2001

"Jesus' Prophecy Continues"
Matt. 25

Couples Class
Wendell Alford,
Teacher

I. Chap. 25 continues Jesus' prophetic teachings about the end of the ecclesia age and his return for his bride. In fact, there is no break between Chaps. 24 and 25 in what has become known as the Olivet Discourse, because at Matt. 24:3 we are told that these teachings were taught to the apostles privately, "as he sat upon the Mount of Olives." Recall that these teachings were prompted by questions asked Jesus by the apostles. We should not lose the drama of these lessons, because Chaps. 24 and 25 was the last time the Lord had to relate calmly to his beloved followers and close associates of the last three years. Even at this most somber of times for God's Son, Jesus the Christ, the Lord taught in parables. The first parable lesson involved ten virgins and the second had to do with God's investments in the followers whom the Lord was about to leave alone physically with only his Holy Spirit to teach, inspire, correct, and motivate to do God's will. During this period, the seventieth week of Daniel's prophecy, the kingdom of heaven on earth will be delayed while the Lord Jesus' bride, the ecclesia, is called out by God's Spirit from the earth's population, Dan. 9:26-27; John 6:41-47,65; Rom. 9:18-24,30-33.

II. The first parable in this chapter is introduced as a similitude of the kingdom of heaven as were the parables of Jesus beginning with Matthew Chap. 13 onward. Remember it was at that time (Matt. 13:10-17) that Jesus could see that his physical life (at the hands of the Jewish leaders) could be taken before his assignment by God the Father was completed, John 17:1-5. "The kingdom of heaven shall be likened to ten virgins [young unmarried maidens], who took their lamps, and went forth to meet the bridegroom," Jesus said, vs. 1. There are obviously three main factors in this parable: 1) the ten unmarried ladies (denoted "virgins" because they had never been married and hence had never engaged in sexual intimacies with a male); 2) their ten oil lamps for use while waiting for the bridegroom; and 3) the bridegroom himself. A mystery in the parable is that the bride is not mentioned at all. I believe that her omission is because the bridegroom (Christ Jesus) is to be away during the time (Daniel's seventieth week noted above) while the bride, the ecclesia, is being called out by God's Holy Spirit. When the bridegroom returns with his bride, all believers, there will be some wise and some foolish on earth who experience his return. We follow the parable: All ten virgins were equipped with lamps filled with oil as the evening approached. The five wise ones, who planned ahead, brought vessels containing extra oil realizing that the period from dusk until the expected arrival of the bridegroom with his bride could empty the lamps' supply of oil. The five foolish virgins, however, took no extra oil. The custom of that time was that the wedding took place at the bride's parents' home. Invitations were many times limited. After the wedding the groom brought his new bride, usually on a litter, to the couple's new house. On this journey his attendants and guests accompanied the couple with much happiness and glee. But midnight can be a dark time and those attendants and guests needed lights to make

the travel safely. Along rocky and rutted, overcrowded passages at such a time, they needed individual lights. The foolish virgins, with no extra oil, failed to enjoy the occasion. I believe that when Jesus returns for his bride, all who are or have trusted God's promise to make them spiritually alive through his grace in Jesus Christ will be taken from the earth to heaven where the wedding will take place. It is during this time (Rev. 4-5) that the great tribulation will begin on earth, Matt. 24:21-22. The ten virgins are, I believe, a reference to the nation Israel. Some of the Jews will be wise and others foolish in accepting or not accepting Jesus as God's Messiah (Savior), Rev. 7:1-8. Many Gentiles will likewise turn to the Lord at that time, Rev. 7:9-17. As stated above the marriage of Jesus and his bride will occur in heaven, but a wedding feast will follow on earth, Matt. 22:2-14; 25:10; Rev. 19:7-10, at the beginning of the Lord's thousand-year kingdom of heaven on earth, Rev. 20:4. In the meantime, all are to watch and be alert, for the day and hour are known only to God the Father, Matt. 24:36,42; vs. 13.

III. After cautioning his disciples of the necessity for the peoples of the earth to be constantly aware that his, the Lord's, return is continually imminent, Jesus immediately tells another parable. The King James version begins the new parable with, "For the kingdom of heaven is as a man traveling into a far country, who called his servants, and delivered unto them his goods," vs. 14. However, the "kingdom of heaven" phrase is in italics meaning that that phrase is not in the original manuscript but added interpretively. A better translation would be, "For it is as though a man going abroad called his slaves and delivered his goods to them." In other words, this parable is another way of saying essentially the same as the preceding parable. The chief difference is in the emphasis of watchfulness in the virgin parable and the emphasis of service in the talents parable. Constant faithfulness is common to both. Jesus said that when the man with goods decided to travel abroad, he apportioned his goods to three of his servants (slaves). To one he entrusted five talents (money), to another three talents, and to another, one talent. The first two invested those dollars given to them and doubled the owner's money. However, the slave given one talent stored it away in the earth and blamed his concept of the owner's austerity with his not having taken a chance with investing the talent. The owner (the Lord) took the one talent and gave it to the ten-talent slave, but the owner condemned the unfaithful one-talent slave. Following this parable, Jesus told the apostles what would happen to the nations of the earth when he returns in his glory as King of all the earth. Those who have served Jesus as Lord will be separated from those who have not, but neither will understand how they have been or have not been of service to the Lord. He designates the serving ones as sheep and the unserving ones as goats. I believe that this judgment will be upon all nations of the earth "when the Son of man shall come in his glory," and the Jews (Jesus' brothers according to the flesh, Rom. 9:5) become God's evangelists throughout the earth, Rev. 7:1-8. However, the law of faith (love) is our guide throughout our lives as well, Matt. 7:12; 22:40; Rom. 3:21-31; 13:10. Our faithfulness in service will also be added to our accounts as individual believers, I Cor. 3:11-15.

Aug. 26, 2001

"Our Lord Is Betrayed"
Matt. 26

Couples Class
Wendell Alford,
Teacher

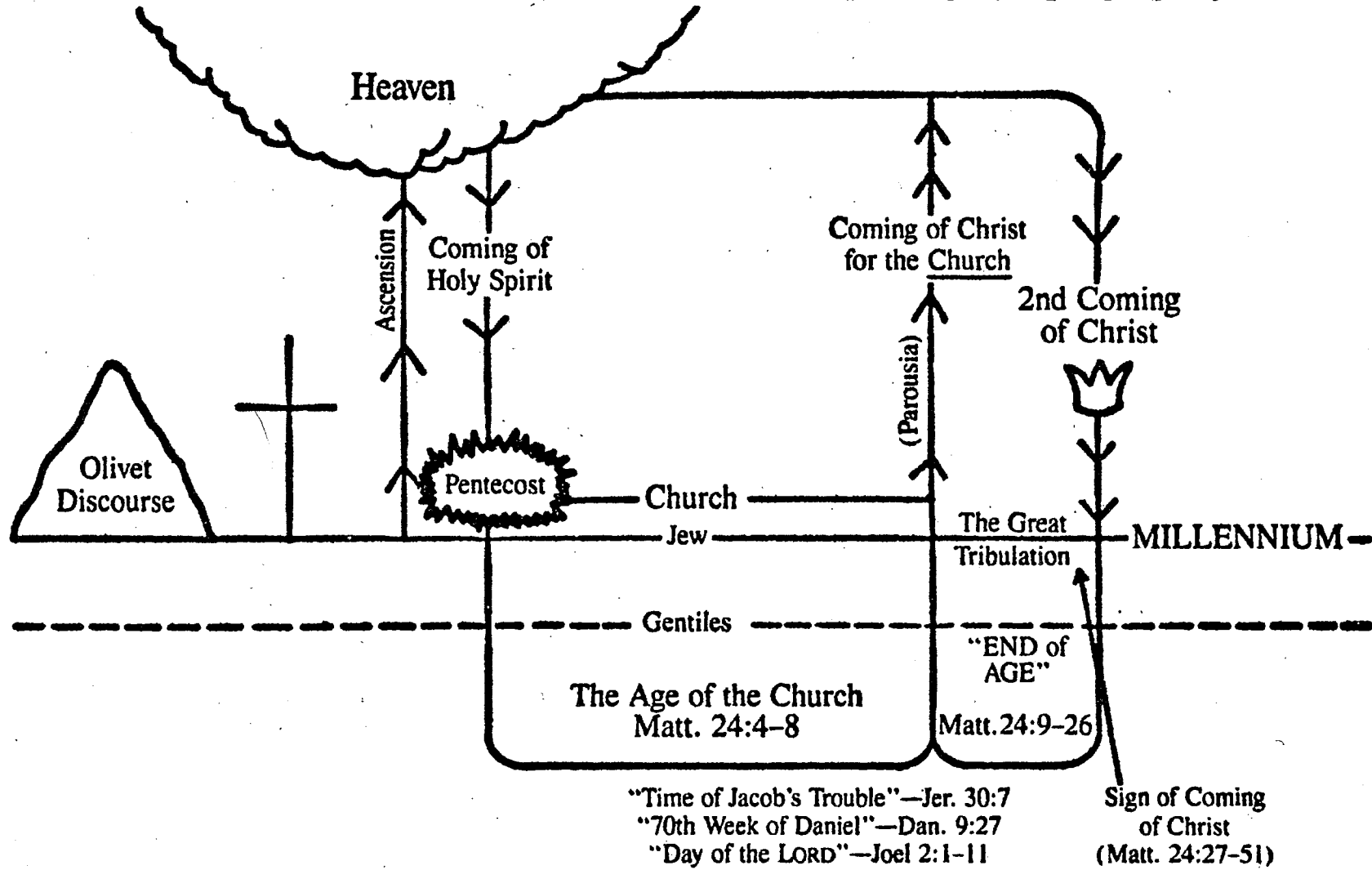
I. The longest chapter in Matthew's Gospel account begins on Tuesday, our April 4, for Jesus said, "- - after two days is the feast of the Passover, and the Son of man is betrayed to be crucified," vss. 1-2. Therefore, the Lord and the apostles ate the first Lord's Supper on Thursday evening, April (Nisan) 6. During these same two days the chief priests, the scribes, and the elders (Sanhedrin) were called into special conference by Caiaphas the high priest at his palace. In their minds and hearts Jesus was religiously guilty of blatant blasphemy and worthy only of death. They also agreed that Jesus should not be slain on the feast day of the Passover lest the people become riotous, vss. 3-5. It was God's plan that his Son be sacrificed on the feast day as "the Lamb of God that taketh away the sin of the world (John 1:29,36), the [sacrificial] Lamb of God." After Jesus had finished the last instructions in the Olivet seminar while answering the apostles' questions concerning the future (all these things), the Lord began making final plans for his death on the cross for our sins. He spent a large portion of these last days over in Bethany at the home of Simon the leper, vs. 6. Simon's leprosy had probably been cured earlier by the Lord Jesus. A strong possibility is that Simon the leper was the father of Mary, Martha and Lazarus, or the husband (who had died) of Martha, because the home was Martha's, Lk 10:38. John in his Gospel account (12:3) tells us that it was, in fact, Mary, Martha's and Lazarus' sister, who anointed Jesus for burial during Jesus' last Passover week. Judas Iscariot voiced the impression (the other eleven agreed) that the expensive perfume should have been sold to help care for the poor. The Lord said that Mary should be commended throughout history for her perception of what was happening to God's Messiah. Some Bible students question whether John 12:1-11 and Matt. 26:6-13 are of the same event. I believe that they are, based upon the fact that the chief priests "took counsel that they might put Lazarus also to death [with Jesus]," John 12:10. Note also that John (God's Word) states that this event happened during the Passover time, John 12:1, and the day before one of Jesus' entries into Jerusalem that week from Bethany, John 12:12.

II. For some reason, known only to God the Father I believe, Judas Iscariot chose to betray our Lord at this time to the chief priests for thirty pieces of silver. We are hard put to believe anyone would do the dastardly act which Judas performed against the Lord of all creation. We do know that Zechariah prophesied that the shepherd of Israel would be betrayed for thirty pieces of silver, Zech. 11:12-13. While Judas was consorting with the Jewish leaders to betray Jesus, Jesus told the apostles where he had made arrangements with a certain man to have his apostles prepare for the Passover meal at his house in a large upstairs room. It was there, when the Passover meal time came on Thursday evening, that Jesus instituted his Lord's Supper. At the beginning of the Passover meal, Jesus said, "Truthfully I tell you that one of you (the twelve) shall betray me," vs. 21. Eleven of the apostles asked Jesus, "Lord,

is it I?" But Judas asked Jesus, "Teacher, is it I?" The Lord answered Judas, "You have said it, [as it is]," vs. 25. The other eleven apparently did not hear or did not understand what Jesus said to Judas. As Jesus instituted his Supper while they were observing the Passover, he took some of the unleavened bread, broke it, and gave it to the apostles saying, "Take, eat; this [represents] my body," vs. 26. The Lord then took the cup, thanked the Father, and gave it to them saying, "Drink from it, all of you, for this [represents] my blood of the new testament [covenant], which is shed for many [all who will believe] for the forgiveness of sins," vss. 27-28. Jesus then said that this would be the last time that he would partake of fruit of the vine until he returns and establishes the Father's kingdom. They then sang a hymn [probably Psa. 111-118, the Hallel (Hallelujah)], and went out to the Mount of Olives. I believe that Judas Iscariot left the group before the Lord's Supper was instituted but while they were still eating the Passover meal. Jesus told the apostles that all of them would be offended because of him (Jesus) that very night and quoted Zech. 13:7, which prophet I noted at Chap. 11:12-13 above concerning Judas' thirty pieces of silver. Peter, ever the other apostles' "mouth-piece" and a "self-starter," said, "Though I should die with thee, yet will I not deny thee." "Likewise also said all the disciples," vss. 34-35. Jesus told Peter that he would deny him three times before the rooster crowed that morning, vs. 34.

III. They reached a place on the Mount of Olives known as "Gethsemane" at this time. The Lord told eight of the apostles to stay there and keep a watch while he went farther (over there). He took with him Peter, James, and John and told the three that he was sorely grieved and deeply distressed. He said that they should stop there and keep watch while he talked with the Father. After a few more paces, Jesus, God's Son who had never, once, disobeyed God's perfect will, literally fell on his face and asked the Father that if spiritual reconciliation for mankind could be accomplished another way, do it. However, your will, my position is, should take precedence over my (human) will. (Jesus was both human and divine, II Cor. 5:19.) After praying, Jesus returned to the three apostles and chided Peter, because they were not watching, but were sleeping. After Jesus' third prayer time, he returned to the three and told them to sleep awhile for soon his time would come to be delivered into the hands of sinners by the "betrayed." Soon Jesus told them to get up, because he (Judas Iscariot) is nearby. Even while Jesus was speaking Judas came up to the Lord and performed his prearranged signal to notify the Jewish religious leaders' representatives. He kissed our Lord to betray him and told the mob to seize him and hold him fast. Peter grabbed a sword and cut off an ear of one of the mob. Jesus told them that he could overcome their power easily but that he would go willingly. As he did so, he was fulfilling God's Word, Isa. 53:7. At that time every apostle forsook Jesus and fled. The Lord was taken by the mob to Caiaphas where two false witnesses testified against him. Caiaphas then placed Jesus under oath and asked him directly, "Are you the Messiah, the Son of God?" The entire group of Jewish religious leaders agreed that Jesus who said, "The answer to your question is 'Yes,'" vs. 64, should be put to death. (Note the parallel terminology at vs. 25 and here at vs. 64 which both mean, "It is as you say.") They blindfolded him, spat upon him, struck him with their fists and open hands, and played games with our God. Outside, Peter denied three times that he even knew the Lord, and the rooster crowed. Peter wept bitterly in repentance. Judas Iscariot never repented.

CHART OF OLIVET DISCOURSE



Sep. 2, 2001

"Jesus Is Sacrificed For Us"
Matt. 27

Couples Class
Wendell Alford,
Teacher

I. Our Lord had been awake all night following the instituting of his Supper, praying in Gethsemane, being betrayed by Judas Iscariot, forcibly being brought before the high priest Caiaphas, and being abandoned by all of the apostles. At daybreak (while the rooster was crowing) the chief priests and elders (Sanhedrin) voted to recommend that Jesus should be put to death for religious blasphemy, Matt. 26:63-66. Knowing that the Jewish religious tribunal could not, under their own authority, murder Jesus, they bound him and delivered him to the Roman governor Pontius Pilate. At this time Judas Iscariot realized that his plan to force Jesus' hand (to become a political king, I believe) immediately felt sorry for what he had failed to accomplish. He tried to rescind his part in the betrayal of Jesus by returning the thirty pieces of silver to the Sanhedrin, but they refused to return the money to the Temple treasury. Rather, they took the money which Judas had contemptuously thrown down in the Temple, and purchased a potter's field where strangers (our homeless) could be buried, vss. 3-7; Psa. 41:9; Acts 1:16-20.

II. When Caiaphas and the Sanhedrin brought Jesus to Pilate, they began to accuse him of, not religious blasphemy, but political treason. They said, "We found this fellow perverting the nation [treasonous], forbidding [encouraging us not] to pay taxes, claiming he himself to be king," Lk 23:1-2. Pilate asked Jesus, "Are you the King of the Jews?" Jesus answered, "Thou sayest it [It is as you say.]," Lk 23:3. Evidently, Pilate did not take Jesus' answer seriously, for the Roman governor said to the Jewish leaders and their crowd, "I find no fault in this man," Lk 23:4. When the crowd realized that Pilate was not cooperating with their recommendation, they declared, "He is stirring up the people, teaching throughout all Jewry from way up in Galilee all the way down here in Judea." Luke's Gospel account tells us that Pilate seized upon Jesus' having lived up in Galilee to refer our Lord to the governor of Galilee, Herod, who happened to be in Jerusalem for the Passover. Herod would not condemn Jesus, but sent him back to Pilate. Pilate really did not want to crucify our Lord, and finally he devised a plan which he thought would persuade the crowd to agree to his release. A custom had developed whereby the Roman authority could acquit a criminal at the Feast of the Passover. A notorious criminal who was well known for treason and other crimes was chosen by Pilate to be paired with Jesus as a choice for the crowd to make, i.e., they could choose either Jesus or Barabbas for freedom. After Pilate had assumed his official role as supreme judge (sat down on the official judgment seat), he received a note from his superstitious wife indicating that Jesus was just and should not be condemned to death. Pilate had already put the choice before the crowd and was waiting for their answer. The Jewish leaders mingled among the crowd urging them to call for Jesus' death and to release Barabbas, vs. 20. When Pilate gave the final choice to the mob, they called for the release of Barabbas and the crucifixion of our Lord. The governor of Judea understood the envy of the Jewish

leaders, Matt. 21:38; vs. 18, so he asked for specific evils which Jesus had done to justify crucifixion. The mob was not interested in specifics nor reason, but cried out together, "Let him be crucified!" In fact, Pilate could not prevail against the mob and proceeded openly to perform the ritual of washing his hands, signifying that he would not personally accept the taking of the blood of innocent Jesus. The mob of Jews declared, "His blood be upon us, and our children," vs. 25; Acts 2:22-23,36. (My italics - WA) At this juncture Pilate released Barabbas, scourged (flogged, whipped) the Lord, and put the Messiah (Savior) under his troops who took him to the governor's headquarters (the Praetorium) for immediate crucifixion.

III. In the hands of the governor's private military guard (Roman soldiers), Jesus was stripped nude and then clothed with a mock scarlet (for royalty) robe. They placed a mock crown of twisted vines upon his head and forced him to hold a mock scepter (a piece of reed) in his hand. They mockingly bowed before him in snappy military courtesy and said, "Hail, king of the Jews!" The soldiers then took the reed and hit him upon the head with it and spat upon him. After tiring of their game, they put his own clothes back on him and led him away to the place of crucifixion, Golgotha. The long night without rest, the physical abuse, and sorrow for the sins of God's creation, mankind, made Jesus unable to carry the cross to the "place of a skull." The soldiers conscripted a Cyrenean, Simon, to carry Jesus' cross. While preparing Jesus to hang on the cross, they offered him vinegar and gall mixed, but after tasting it, he would not drink. Matthew simply states, "They crucified him," without giving minute details. To fulfill Psa. 22:18 the soldiers took his pieces of clothing and gambled to see who would receive Jesus' garments. While watching Jesus slowly die on the cross, they put a sign over the Lord stating, "his accusation," "This is Jesus the king of the Jews." The Jewish leaders stood around the cross and, along with the two thieves on crosses on either side of Jesus, chided him for trusting the God whose Son he claimed to be. (One of the thieves recanted before dying, Lk 23:40-43.) Jesus quoted the twenty-second Psalm, and some thought he was calling for Elijah to come and save him, vss. 46-47. Jesus, God's Word states, "yielded up his [own] spirit," vs. 50. Several signs accompanied Jesus' death (from about 12:00 noon until 3:00 o'clock): the Temple veil tore from top to bottom; an earthquake occurred; big boulders split open; and finally, graves of many Old Testament saints were opened, they were raised from death, and went into Jerusalem where they appeared to many. The captain in charge of the "crucifixion detail" and his men realized from these signs that, "Truly this was [I say, 'Is.'] the Son of God," vs. 54. Many of the women who had accompanied and cared for Jesus from Galilee watched around the cross area. Two rich men, Joseph of Arimathaea and Nicodemus (John 3), prepared Jesus' body for burial and buried him in Joseph's newly prepared tomb. The tomb was sealed and guarded with Pilate's permission as requested by the Jewish leaders. Pilate told them to use their own guards, which they did. Therefore, the Sanhedrin members and Pharisees satisfied themselves that no one could steal Jesus' body from the tomb, vss. 62-66, "So they went and made the grave secure, sealing the stone and posting a guard."

Sep. 9, 2001

"The Temporary Tomb"
Matt. 28

Couples Class
Wendell Alford,
Teacher

I. Before daybreak on the first day of the week (our Sunday), Mary Magdalene whom Jesus had healed of a mental illness (Lk 8:2) went to Jesus' tomb and was later joined by another Mary, the mother of James and Joses, and Salome. The three had come to anoint Jesus with sweet spices, Mk 16:1. So that the women could get in, an earthquake had occurred and an angel had rolled the sealing stone from the tomb entrance. While all three women were at the tomb, an angel sat on the removed stone. God's messenger (the angel) had a striking appearance, for "his countenance was like snow," vs. 3. Evidently, the special guards which the Sanhedrin had insisted on staying at the grave, saw the angel first at this time and heard what the angel said. He said flatly that Jesus was not in the tomb. Legally Jesus' absence assured their being killed for their dereliction of duty, i.e., to guard Jesus' body. God's representative (the angel) invited the three women into the tomb to see for themselves that Jesus had kept his promise to rise from physical death which he had experienced, but I do not believe that they went inside. Further, the angel had told Mary Magdalene during her earlier visit to "go quickly and tell Jesus' apostles that he is risen from the dead." He promised that Jesus would meet the apostles up on a certain mountain in Galilee. The three women left the grave with mixed emotions, "fear and great joy," vs. 8.

II. The three women did exactly what the angel had instructed them to do, made their way to where the apostles were. As they were rushing along, they had an experience which was more exciting than examining the temporary tomb where Jesus had lain: Jesus himself met them with a greeting, "Rejoice," vs. 9. In John's Gospel at 20:11-18 we learn considerably more details about this event. The timing of the occurrence is best understood when information is taken from all four Gospels. I believe that the two Marys and Salome arrived at the tomb first when one angel was sitting on the stone outside the sepulcher. He gave the instruction noted above, and Mary Magdalene left immediately and found Peter and John, writer of the fourth Gospel. The other women were looking elsewhere for the other apostles. On her return to the tomb Mary Magdalene met Jesus along the way. The Lord told her at that time not to touch his person but to go (as the angel had instructed her) and inform all the apostles, John 20:17. After finding and telling Peter and John the Good News, she returned to the tomb, stooped and looked inside where she saw the angel which she had seen before, accompanied by a second angel, one at the place where Jesus' head had lain and the other at the foot end. At this time Peter and John arrived, and Peter rushed inside where he saw all the garments which had been wrapped around Jesus when he was buried. After the two apostles had gone, Mary Magdalene turned from the tomb and saw a man whom she thought to be the groundsman (gardener) and asked whether he had seen Jesus. The man asked her why she was weeping. She did not recognize the man's voice until he called her name, "Mary," John 20:16. He was JESUS! This time she fell at his feet and embraced them, vs. 9. The Lord repeated his instruction to take

the message to all the apostles. The only understandable reason why Jesus did not want Mary Magdalene to touch him when they first met and, later at their second meeting, allowed Mary to embrace his feet is, I believe, that Jesus in that short time had been to the Father and returned. In a solely physical world this would be impossible, but by the God who created everything that exists, whatever he wills is possible, Matt. 19:26; Mk 14:36; Lk 18:27.

III. We have noted earlier that there was a rather close alliance between the Roman political authority in the Jerusalem area and the Jewish religious leadership. Both Pilate and Herod were very careful not to anger the Caesar in Rome regarding the local peace and quiet. In fact, we learn from the secular history of that time that the Jews, just about forty years following Jesus' crucifixion, and as the Lord had predicted, lost Jerusalem when the city was destroyed by General Titus beginning on the Passover in AD 70. I mention this situation again here, because of what happened to the soldiers who guarded Jesus' tomb during the three days between his burial and Mary Magdalene's appearance at the tomb before daylight on the Jewish first day of the week following Jesus' crucifixion. Matthew (God's Word) tells us that when the guards who were guarding Jesus' grave saw God's angel, they "became as dead men [fainted]," vs. 4. In other words, they were physically neutralized, helpless in performing their charge. They reported their experience to the Jewish leaders who convened the Sanhedrin to decide what should be done. They decided to bribe the guards with a large amount of money to lie to their commander by telling him that they were unable to keep awake and that some of Jesus' followers had sneaked in and stole Jesus' body! This preposterous lie would put the soldiers in grave jeopardy, but the Jewish leaders assured the guards that if Pilate learned what had happened and presented any problems, they, the Sanhedrin, would "take care of the situation," vss. 11-14. The soldiers took the bribe and their lie became the official position of the Jewish leadership and remained so to the time of Matthew's writing of his Gospel, and beyond. The truth, according to God's Word, is that Jesus was seen by many following his resurrection from physical death. Jesus met the eleven apostles on the mountain up in Galilee where he had told them he would go. Some of them worshiped him, but some were hesitant to do so. Jesus told the apostles there that his Lordship had now been established since God had declared "all power to be Jesus' both in heaven and on earth." Further, he commanded them to go (therefore, because he was now king with all power) to all earthly nations and teach everyone to observe Jesus' teachings. Everyone who believes is to be immersed in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost (Spirit), vss. 18-20. In Acts we are told that, before his ascension, Jesus specifically charged his apostles that they should stay in Jerusalem to await the Holy Spirit's coming which Jesus had promised, John 14:16,26; Acts 1:3-7. After the coming of the Holy Spirit, "believers are to be witnesses of the Good News of Jesus [coming restoration of the Kingdom of Israel] as God's Messiah (Savior)". The believers' testimony is to be witnessed with the power of God's Holy Spirit "in Jerusalem, all Judaea, in Samaria, and unto the uttermost parts of the earth," Acts 1:8.

December 5, 1993

"Joseph and Mary"
Matt. 1:18-2:18; Lk 1:26-2:52

Couples Class
Wendell Alford,
Teacher

I. Mary was happy as a young woman now after reaching her maturity, because she had met and become engaged to a kind young man named Joseph who was qualified in a trade that assured the family of an adequate livelihood. Carpenters were perpetually needed by the citizens of their home town, Nazareth, and the surrounding region. However, without an appointment, even unexpectedly, an angel (messenger) from God appeared to Mary and disclosed the Lord's message to her, and that message changed her life forever. The angel Gabriel's message did startle Mary, although every young Israeli woman would have been very pleased to learn that she would become the mother of the One whom every Hebrew longed to see, God's long promised Messiah and Savior. Since Gabriel stated clearly that the child would be God's Son, how would the man to whom she was engaged fit into this new arrangement? She knew, and spoke explicitly so to the messenger of God, that she had never had sexual intercourse with a man. How then could she bear a son? She was told that as God had promised her ancient relative David through Nathan, the prophet (II Sam.7:12-17), God himself would cause her to conceive through the agency of his Holy Spirit. Uniquely Mary's first offspring would be unlike any other born of a woman, for he would be the very, only begotten, Son of God. Gabriel said that only God could perform such a feat which is contrary to God's physical laws, Lk 1:26-37. Without hesitation Mary accepted God's plan for her as outlined by his angel, Gabriel, Lk 1:38. When God's Son was conceived by the Holy Spirit in Mary, her cousin Elizabeth had been pregnant for six months, even though she was well beyond child bearing age, with John the Baptist. Gabriel had appeared to Elizabeth and her husband, Zacharias, also to inform them of the miracle which God was working in them. Their son would prepare the Israelites for the coming of God's Messiah by appealing to them in the spirit and power of Elijah, Lk 1:17; Mal. 4:5-6; Matt. 11:7,14-15.

II. At this stage of Mary's willingness to cooperate with God in his plan of the ages, what was she to tell her beloved Joseph to whom she had already promised herself in marriage? Pregnancy, of course, is a condition that cannot be denied, especially to the man who would be her intimate companion soon. Although she loved him and knew that he would patiently hear her story regarding her experience with God's angel and God's Holy Spirit, how could he understand this miracle of all miracles? God is love, and out of his eternal compassion, he understandingly sent a messenger to Joseph just as he had to Mary to explain how he was breaking his own natural laws in bringing about the birth of Israel's [and the world's] Savior, the Messiah. Even before the angel appeared to Joseph, he was sure Mary was telling him truthfully what had happened to her, but he simply did not understand whether he should continue with their wedding plans. Did God want him simply to step out of Mary's life at this time and not make a public spectacle of what had happened to Mary? He certainly was willing to do so in deference to God's plan for Mary. While he was pondering over what he should do and while he slept, in a dream the Lord appeared to him and told him

directly to proceed as they had planned with their marriage. The Lord repeated to him what he had told Mary, that the child Mary was carrying was a miraculous product of God's Holy Spirit's having impregnated her. Further, The Lord told Joseph what name should be given to God's Son, i.e., Joshua (Savior) or Jesus. The Lord also told Joseph that what was happening had been promised to Israel by God's prophet Isaiah, Isa. 7:14, where the Savior is called Emmanuel which means literally, "God with us." [God was uniting with (becoming) a human being, II Cor. 5:18-19.] Joseph and Mary refrained from sexual intercourse until after she gave birth to her firstborn whom they called Jesus, Matt. 1:25. However, Mary and Joseph had other children after Jesus was born named James, Joses, Juda, Simon, and, at least, two daughters, Matt. 13:55-56.

III. Because a tax had been levied by the Roman Emperor Augustus in Palestine, Joseph and Mary were required to go to Bethlehem, the City of David (both were of David's lineage) to report and pay. While there she delivered the Savior of the world in a cow stall, because there was no public accommodations available. (Bethlehem was a very old city known also as Ephrath or Ephratah, Gen. 35:6; 48:7; Micah 5:2). King Herod heard of Jesus' birth, and while Jesus, Joseph, and Mary were in the Bethlehem-Jerusalem area (Jesus was circumcised eight days after his birth and Mary was purified in Jerusalem, Lev. 12:2-4.), he ordered this "King of the Jews" to be killed even if every infant in Bethlehem had to be murdered. He so ordered. The Lord appeared in a dream to Joseph and told him to take the family to Egypt. He took Jesus and Mary to Egypt by night and stayed there until Herod died in 4 BC. [This date is accurately established from secular history, and causes me to believe that Jesus' birth date was in either 5 or 6 BC - WA.] After Herod's death Jesus, Joseph, and Mary returned to Nazareth through instruction by another visit by God's angel to Joseph in Egypt. Following Jesus' birth and until he was twelve, the Bible gives no details of his life except that he increased in wisdom and stature and in favor with God and man.

IV. When Jesus was twelve, the family group went on one of their many pilgrimages to Jerusalem from Nazareth to worship at the Temple. As they returned toward home, Jesus was not with them, and they did not find him for three days. They returned to Jerusalem and there found their oldest son sitting in the Temple and discussing "his Father's business" with the religious teachers. His hearers were astonished by his knowledge, but his mother admonished him for the sadness the experience had caused her and Joseph. They did not understand why he referred to God as his Father nor why he called his discussions "his Father's business," Lk 2:50. After this experience, no reference is again made of Joseph in Scripture. Mary, however, was at a marriage feast at Cana at the beginning of Jesus' public ministry when he performed his first miracle, turning water into wine for the wedding guests. Afterwards Mary along with other members of the family tried to get through the crowds to speak personally to Jesus to ask him about some of the odd stories which were being circulated about the Teacher. This happened at Capernaum and he refused to interrupt his teaching and see them. Mary was also at the cross when Jesus was crucified and where he asked John to care for his Mother after he had gone. Lastly, Mary was in Jerusalem in the upper room also with the other disciples waiting for the coming of the Holy Spirit whom Jesus had promised to come to them with power.

VA

December 5, 1993

"Joseph and Mary"
Matt. 1:18-2:18; Lk 1:26-2:52

Couples Class
Wendell Alford,
Teacher

Handwritten note:
Lk 1:23

I. Mary was happy as a young woman now after reaching her maturity, because she had met and become engaged to a kind young man named Joseph who was qualified in a trade that assured the family of an adequate livelihood. Carpenters were perpetually needed by the citizens of their home town, Nazareth, and the surrounding region. However, without an appointment, even unexpectedly, an angel (messenger) from God appeared to Mary and disclosed the Lord's message to her, and that message changed her life forever. The angel Gabriel's message did startle Mary, although every young Israeli woman would have been very pleased to learn that she would become the mother of the One whom every Hebrew longed to see, God's long promised Messiah and Savior. Since Gabriel stated clearly that the child would be God's Son, how would the man to whom she was engaged fit into this new arrangement? She knew, and spoke explicitly so to the messenger of God, that she had never had sexual intercourse with a man. How then could she bear a son? She was told that as God had promised her ancient relative David through Nathan, the prophet (II Sam.7:12-17), God himself would cause her to conceive through the agency of his Holy Spirit. Uniquely Mary's first offspring would be unlike any other born of a woman, for he would be the very, only begotten, Son of God. Gabriel said that only God could perform such a feat which is contrary to God's physical laws, Lk 1:26-37. Without hesitation Mary accepted God's plan for her as outlined by his angel, Gabriel, Lk 1:38. When God's Son was conceived by the Holy Spirit in Mary, her cousin Elizabeth had been pregnant for six months, even though she was well beyond child bearing age, with John the Baptist. Gabriel had appeared to Elizabeth and her husband, Zacharias, also to inform them of the miracle which God was working in them. Their son would prepare the Israelites for the coming of God's Messiah by appealing to them in the spirit and power of Elijah, Lk 1:17; Mal. 4:5-6; Matt. 11:7,14-15.

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directly to proceed as they had planned with their marriage. The Lord repeated to him what he had told Mary, that the child Mary was carrying was a miraculous product of God's Holy Spirit's having impregnated her. Further, The Lord told Joseph what name should be given to God's Son, i.e., Joshua (Savior) or Jesus. The Lord also told Joseph that what was happening had been promised to Israel by God's prophet Isaiah, Isa. 7:14, where the Savior is called Emmanuel which means literally, "God with us." [God was uniting with (becoming) a human being, II Cor. 5:18-19.] Joseph and Mary refrained from sexual intercourse until after she gave birth to her firstborn whom they called Jesus, Matt. 1:25. However, Mary and Joseph had other children after Jesus was born named James, Joses, Judā, Simon, and, at least, two daughters, Matt. 13:55-56.

III. Because a tax had been levied by the Roman Emperor Caesar Augustus in Palestine, Joseph and Mary were required to go to Bethlehem, the City of David (both were of David's lineage) to report and pay. While there she delivered the Savior of the world in a cow stall, because there was no public accommodations available. (Bethlehem was a very old city known also as Ephrath or Ephratah, Gen. 35:6; 48:7; Micah 5:2). King Herod heard of Jesus' birth, and while Jesus, Joseph, and Mary were in the Bethlehem-Jerusalem area (Jesus was circumcised eight days after his birth and Mary was purified in Jerusalem, Lev. 12:2-4.), he ordered this "King of the Jews" to be killed even if every infant in Bethlehem had to be murdered. He so ordered. The Lord appeared in a dream to Joseph and told him to take the family to Egypt. He took Jesus and Mary to Egypt by night and stayed there until Herod died in 4 BC. [This date is accurately established from secular history, and causes me to believe that Jesus' birth date was in either 5 or 6 BC - WA.] After Herod's death Jesus, Joseph, and Mary returned to Nazareth through instruction by another visit by God's angel to Joseph in Egypt. Following Jesus' birth and until he was twelve, the Bible gives no details of his life except that he increased in wisdom and stature and in favor with God and man.

IV. When Jesus was twelve, the family group went on one of their many pilgrimages to Jerusalem from Nazareth to worship at the Temple. As they returned toward home, Jesus was not with them, and they did not miss him for three days. They returned to Jerusalem and there found their oldest son sitting in the Temple and discussing "his Father's business" with the religious teachers. His hearers were astonished by his knowledge, but his mother admonished him for the sadness the experience had caused her and Joseph. They did not understand why he referred to God as his Father nor why he called his discussions "his Father's business," Lk 2:50. After this experience, no reference is again made of Joseph in Scripture. Mary, however, was at a marriage feast at Cana at the beginning of Jesus' public ministry when he performed his first miracle, turning water into wine for the wedding guests. Afterwards Mary along with other members of the family tried to get through the crowds to speak personally to Jesus to ask him about some of the odd stories which were being circulated about the Teacher. This happened at Capernaum and he refused to interrupt his teaching and see them. Mary was also at the cross when Jesus was crucified and where he asked John to care for his Mother after he had gone. Lastly, Mary was in Jerusalem in the upper room also with the other disciples waiting for the coming of the Holy Spirit whom Jesus had promised to come to them with power.

Edom (and) ...
circumcised ...
at age 8 ...
37 yrs.

intended ...
Lk 2:44 ...
2 miles ...
3 of ...

all ...
2:16

John ...
2:1-12

John ...
12:46 ...
19:26

A. J. ...

December 12, 1993

"Mary, Martha, and Lazarus"
Matt. 26; Mk 14; Lk 10; Jn 11-12

Couples Class
Wendell Alford,
Teacher

*all things
in Jesus
on left*

I. Mary (a tear), Martha (a lady), Lazarus (Hebrew "Eleazar," whom God helps) were adult siblings who were evidently unmarried but lived in one household. Their home was in Bethany about one and one-half to two miles east of Jerusalem across the Kidron valley and the Mount of Olives Ridge, Mk 11:1, Lk 19:29, near another small village named Bethphage. Just as olives were grown on the Mount of Olives, figs were grown at Bethphage. The two villages lay on the eastern slope of the Mount of Olives and on the road to Jericho from Jerusalem. Most of the biblically recorded events which relate to Mary, Martha, and Lazarus occurred in the last week and days before Jesus, the Messiah, was sacrificed. Jesus was especially fond of the three and displayed a profound compassion for their welfare, Jn 11:5,33,35,38. While they are mentioned in all three synoptic Gospels, the most thorough treatment is related in John's account, primarily, I believe, because of the profoundly spiritual significance of what happened to Lazarus through Jesus' sheer will and miraculous power. Jesus had brought back to life before Lazarus, two persons, the only son of a widow as he was being taken for burial (Lk 7:11-16) and the daughter of Jarius, the ruler of a synagogue (Matt. 9:18-26; Mk 5:22-43; Lk 8:41-56), but Lazarus had been physically dead for four days and decomposition had begun, Jn 11:39. [Spot review: Examining this incident again brought to my mind a discussion of our 11-28-93 lesson on Daniel. In looking at Daniel we thought together also of Ezekiel's prophecy. I commented on the mystery related to the ultimate destiny of the Jewish holocaust victims of the WWII period. Some Scriptural incite has come to me about that question. Consider the following texts: Ezek. 37:3-5,11-13; I Pet. 3:18-20 (Good News for Modern Man preferred); Matt. 27:52-53; Rom. 11:25-32 - WA]

II. Some time before Jesus' last Passover celebration at Jerusalem he was visiting in the home of Mary, Martha, and Lazarus in Bethany. Lazarus was not at home, and the meal was not prepared when Jesus arrived. From the biblical account, the household represented considerable wealth. Even so, the ladies were involved in meal preparation. On this occasion Martha, as was apparently representative of her personality, worried about the details of the meal making. She wished to please, to serve, to have everything just so for her favorite guest. Her attention to minutia probably made others uncomfortable, but no doubt, her meals were just right and sumptuous. As the oldest of the three, Martha (and owner of the house, Lk 10:38) perhaps would be most embarrassed if a social event in her home fell short of cultural expectations. Things were not developing as Martha had hoped for this meal, and, as a last resort, she engaged Jesus to help settle her dilemma. Mary's reason for not helping was that she was sitting with Jesus and listening to his teaching, giving sole and intense attention to his every word. Mary's question to Jesus was very direct. "My sister is leaving all the meal fixing to me. Don't you care? Ask her to assist me." Jesus' reply to Mary touched on perhaps the central theme of all his teaching: in effect, people do not live by bread (food) alone but by every

John 4:7, Matt. 7:4 Jesus at 1st temple of his baptism
putted seat 8:3

communication from the Father. "Martha, your chief worry is about (temporary) things, but the most needful thing [is spiritual], and Mary is feeding on that which is most needful and which will not be denied her." Mary's devotion to Jesus was exceptionally fervent.

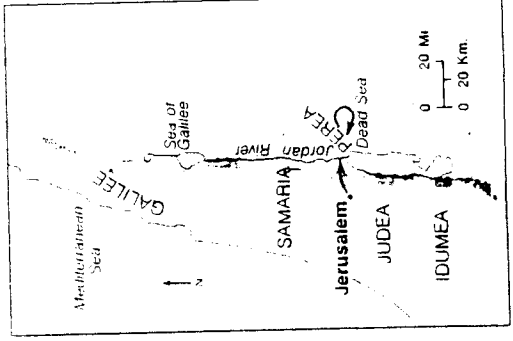
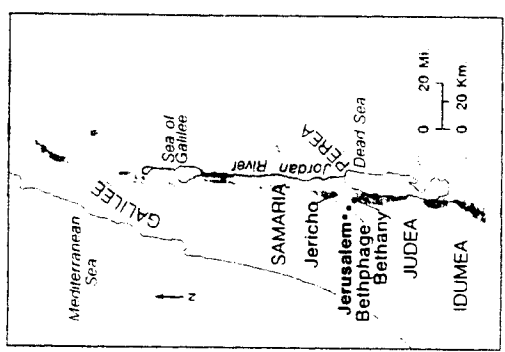
Our treatment of memorializing Christ's birth is Martha's way) John 10:25-30

III. Jesus was in the Temple shortly thereafter and told the Jews that he and the Father are one. The Jews therefore took up stones again to stone him. He escaped across the Jordan to Perea, and while there Lazarus became deathly ill. Mary and Martha sent word to Jesus of Lazarus' condition. Nonetheless, Jesus deliberately remained in Perea two more days after the message came, and he told his disciples then that they were returning to Judea. They feared to return because of the former threat to Jesus. The Master told his disciples that Lazarus was now sleeping which they interpreted as meaning that he was recuperating, but Jesus said simply that Lazarus was dead (physically). As they neared Bethany, Martha went out to meet them. She told Jesus that if he had been there her brother would still be alive. Jesus told her that Lazarus would rise which Martha took to mean that he would be resurrected at the last day. Jesus said, "I AM the resurrection, and the life and whosoever trusts me will die (physically) but will continue to live (spiritually)." When Jesus prayed, he called Lazarus' name and told him to come from the tomb. Lazarus did as he was told even though he had been dead for four days. The Jews were even more determined to kill both Jesus and, now, Lazarus.

IV. After raising Lazarus to life, Jesus was now in Jerusalem for his last Passover celebration in the flesh. As he had done many times, he spent his nights in Bethany. On one of those evenings, he ate the evening meal at the home of Simon the leper (Jesus had probably healed him.), Matt. 26:6-13. Simon's home was in the same village as Martha's, and since she was an excellent preparer of meals (and hostess), she was there along with her brother Lazarus and Jesus' disciples. During the repast Mary, overflowing with deep devotion for Jesus, came in and anointed our Lord with a very expensive ointment. The aromatic fragrance filled the entire home. Matthew's account relates that his disciples criticised Mary for her "waste," and John's Gospel specifies at 12:4-6 that this criticism was championed by Judas Iscariot for his own profit. Jesus reprimanded the disciples on behalf of Mary's action, because she was, in effect, anointing him for his forthcoming burial to take place soon. Jesus announced that Mary's act should be proclaimed as a memorial to her whenever and wherever the Gospel is told. Many people came to see Lazarus whom Jesus had resurrected to life, and when they beheld the living miracle, they believed Jesus to be the Messiah. The Jewish chief priests, again determined that Jesus and Lazarus must be put to death. Jesus in raising Lazarus was demonstrating God's power over death which was about to happen to his (God's) only begotten Son of God.

Signeth was required twice physically, Jesus only once.

John 12:9-11



I. Prayer

- A. General definition: Any person's expression of a sense of dependence upon someone or something more worthy and dependable than him or her self.
- B. Christian definition: Communicating with the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob through the power and authority of his only begotten Son, Jesus Christ, as enlightened by his Holy Spirit. (Mat. 22:32; John 14:13-14; Rom. 8:26-27)
- C. General aspects of prayer
 - 1. Universal among humankind, even atheists pray
 - 2. Recognition of a god or a higher power other than oneself indicates which beings are human - a praying being is a human being.
- D. The nature of prayer
 - 1. Recognition of God - the most directly and specifically religious act of which mankind is capable. It is unique and singular.
 - 2. Adoration and praise - recognition of God's worthiness and glory
 - 3. Thanksgiving - God as source of blessings or needs, and recognition of ones indebtedness to him
 - 4. Confession - recognizes God's right to control ones thoughts and actions - ethics. A person's ethics is directly related to his or her concept of God's nature. (Matt. 5:48; Psa. 51:1-19)
 - 5. Petition - for some the sole reason for prayer, asking God for things or other blessings. Intercession is a type of petition.

Biblical examples:

 - a. Abraham for Sodom - Gen. 18:22 ff.
 - b. Moses for Israel - Exod. 32:31 ff.
 - c. Paul for the Jews - Rom. 9:1-4; 10:1-13
 - d. Jesus about physical death - Lk 22:41-43
 - e. The Lord's prayer for believers in him - John 17
- E. The purpose of prayer
 - 1. To learn God's will, not necessarily to change it (II Sam. 12:13-23)
 - 2. God himself intercedes for Christians in prayer. (Rom. 8:26-27)
 - 3. That Christians may keep themselves in fellowship with God (Rom. 8:15-16; Eph. 6:18; I Thes. 5:17)
 - 4. Prayer and the natural order - nature represents God's long-term plan. (II Sam. 12:13-23; Matt. 5:43-48)

II. Luke 11:1-13 When asked to do so, Jesus gave a model prayer for those who follow him.

- A. vs. 1 The disciple who asked Jesus to teach the disciples how to pray was prompted by hearing Jesus pray himself and the knowledge that John the Baptist taught his followers how to pray.
- B. vs. 2 When and to whom to pray as well as the general context is established.
 - 1. "Our Father" indicates the Author or Creator of all. (Mal. 2:10)
See also: Lk 23:24; Matt. 11:25-26; Mk. 14:36
 - 2. The one and only Father, the one in heaven
 - 3. The name, the essence, the being, or God's self is to be held up as singular, one of a kind, above all else - alone holy.
 - 4. God's heavenly kingdom is to be desired and brought to a reality.
 - 5. God's rule is to be in earth's activities and equal to his absolute, perfect reign in heaven.
- C. vs. 3 Physical sustenance is to be requested to meet one's daily needs.
- D. vs. 4 The problem of that which alienates a person from God (sin) and others (indebtedness) IS TO BE DEALT WITH IN PRAYER.
 - 1. Forgiveness is to be requested for one's sins.
 - 2. It is understood that God's forgiveness is contingent upon the requestor's forgiving those who have wronged the requestor.
(More explicit in Matt. 6:14-15)
 - 3. One should pray that God will help him or her to be spared temptation which could lead to one acting evilly. (I Cor. 10:13; Heb. 4:15; Jam. 1:13)
- E. vss. 5-8 One's prayer should be persistent.
 - 1. Company arrives at a friend's house and there's no food.
 - 2. The man in the foodless home goes next door and asks his neighbor for three loaves of bread.
 - 3. The neighbor says, in effect, that, since it is midnight, so late his family is already asleep, he cannot accommodate the request.
 - 4. If the requestor for bread is persistently insistent, he will be granted the bread. (Lk 18:1-7)
- F. vss. 9-13 Comparison of a biological father with the heavenly Father
 - 1. Ask, seek, or knock and the desire will be granted.
 - 2. An earthly father is rational enough, even with human limitations, not to give a hungry son a stone for bread, a snake for fish, or a scorpion for an egg.
 - 3. Our heavenly Father is far superior to earthly fathers, and the former has the best gift of all, the Holy Spirit, to give to those who ask him. This Gift is given only upon request. God gives physical sustenance to everyone without requests, but he gives himself, the Holy Spirit, only upon request. (Matt. 5:45; John 6: 44,65)

- B. vss. 9-14 The Pharisee, the tax collector, and prayer that justifies a person before God
1. vs 10 There are two characters in this parable also, a Pharisee and a publican (tax collector) who went into the temple to pray at the same time.
 2. vss. 11-12 The Pharisee prays first with a prayer of thanksgiving. He told God that he was thankful for the following:
 - a. He was better than other people.
 - b. He was not an extortioner.
 - c. He was not unjust.
 - d. He was not **an adulterer**.
 - e. He was not like the publican (over there).
 - f. He fasted twice every week.
 - g. He paid tithes of everything.
 3. vs. 13 The publican felt so unworthy before God that he secluded himself away from the others at prayer, bowed his head in humility, and prayed a prayer of confession asking God to be merciful to him, a sinner.
 4. vs. 14 Jesus said, in effect, that because the Pharisee had exalted himself (shown his own worthiness apart from God), he was degraded and unjustified before God. On the other hand, Jesus said that the publican who had humbled himself (admitted his own unworthiness and need for God's forgiveness) would be upgraded and justified before God.

- III. The right attitude for one who is to be justified before God in prayer
- A. Jehovah God is the one-and-only-Creator who is separated from mankind because of mankind's willful sin (choosing to put himself or herself equal to or even above the Creator).
 - B. People are the one-and-only-God's creatures who are separated from God and in need of a bridge to bring the two, God and individuals, together.
 - C. God himself furnished that bridge, his only begotten Son, Jesus the Christ, and faith in God's Christ for the forgiveness of the sin that separates **enables anyone to cross over and be accepted by God.**
 - D. One should have A, B, and C above firmly ingrained in mind and emotion when communicating with God, his Creator, and never give up, lose faith in God's promise, or forget his or her humble position before God.

I. Attitude defined

A. Latin root: aptitudin-, aptitudo meaning, "fitness"

1. The arrangement of the parts of a body or figure (posture)
2. A mental position with regard to a fact or state (intellectual)
3. A feeling or emotion toward a fact or state (emotional)
4. The position of something in relation to a frame of reference (relationship)

B. Synonyms of the connotations of "attitude"

1. Gift = often implies special favor by God directly or through his creation, i.e., nature (spiritual and/or physical)
2. Faculty = applies to an innate or less often acquired ability for a particular accomplishment or function
3. Aptitude = implies a natural liking for some activity and the likelihood of success in it (verbal, spatial, numerical, social)
4. Bent = nearly equal to "aptitude" but stresses inclination perhaps more than specific ability (can be ulteriorly motivated)
5. Talent = suggests a marked special ability without implying a mind of extraordinary power
6. Genius = suggests impressive inborn creative ability
7. Knack = implies a comparatively trivial but special ability making for ease and dexterity in performance

II. Luke 18:1-14 The Lord's parables about prayer

A. vss. 1-8 The widow, the judge, prayer, and God's retribution

1. vs. 1 As in Luke 11:5-8, Jesus emphasizes the need to be persistent in prayer rather than become weary or weak and illustrates his thought by the two parables which follow.
2. vs. 2 The first character in the first parable is a judge who has no fear of God, nor is he sensitive to the feelings or needs of others. He apparently cared for no one other than himself and his own comfort and convenience.
3. vs. 3 The second character is a widow in the same city. She asked the judge of vs. 2 to settle a dispute in her favor between her and her adversary. She evidently believed her position to be just and that she should be compensated accordingly.
4. vss. 4-5 At first the judge in his self-centered attitude (Jesus repeats the judge's lack of respect for God or man and makes that lack of respect the thought of the judge himself.) refuses to relieve the widow's complaint. She continues to appear before the judge in an appropriate, legal manner. The judge admitted to being troubled and that weariness would result if he did not settle the case. Jesus said that, even though the judge was unjust, he judged in favor of the widow.
5. vss. 6-8 Jesus then explains the message he intends to convey through the parable with the judge-widow confrontation. God will relieve the long-sustained injustice dealt upon his people by forces against them, forces against them because they are God's people. Further, God's retribution will be administered quickly. (See Zech. 1:12; Rev. 6:10; 22:7) (It is very noteworthy that the question at the end of this parable implies that Jesus, the Son of Man, himself will be the instigator of God's retribution after the long injustice meted to God's people. (See Rev. 4:11; 5:12-13))

- II. Luke 22:31-32; 23:33-34 Jesus expresses special concern for Peter and asks God, his (Jesus') Father, to forgive Jesus' crucifiers.
- A. vs. 22:31 Jesus tells Peter face-to-face that Satan is seeking to devour Peter. (See I Pet. 5:8)
 - B. vs. 22:32 Jesus tells Peter that he has prayed for him and asks Peter to strengthen his brothers (believing associates) after the Holy Spirit comes to him.
 - C. vs. 23:33 Luke gives a rather brief account of Jesus' crucifixion with the two criminals, one on either side.
 - D. vs. 23:34 Jesus prays that his heavenly Father will forgive his crucifiers, because they do not understand the significance of the event. (See also Stephen's like prayer in Acts 7:54-60.)
- III. Intercessory prayer
- A. Review: Prayer is recognizing the existence and reality of God (See Heb. 11:6) and in doing so admitting a need to communicate with him. Prayer basically is to adore and praise, to give thanks, to confess wrongdoing, and to petition which includes interceding to God on behalf of others.
 - B. The intercession of God's Holy Spirit and his Son, Jesus Christ
 1. Rom. 8:26-27, 34 The Holy Spirit aids the believer.
 2. Heb. 7:25 The ever-living Son aids the believer.
 - C. Negative intercession
 1. Heb. 11:2, but see the entire context, i.e., Heb. 11:1-12, 23-29.
 2. Luke 15:1-32 Jesus' parables of the lost sheep, the lost coin, and the lost son
 3. Matt. 20:1-16 Jesus' parable about the laborers in the vineyard who were paid the same amount (a penny, about 20 dollars today) for different periods of work for early beginning, for beginning at noon, at three o'clock, and even at five, when quitting time was at six o'clock.
 - D. The burden of being a priest (one who communicates with God on behalf of others) in God's kingdom of priests, the church
 1. Exod. 19:3-6 God assigns his people (the Israelites) to be a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.
 2. I Pet. 2:5,9; Rev. 1:4-6 In the Christian covenant period, God has assigned believers in his Son, Jesus Christ, to be a holy priesthood to show forth (witness for) praises of Christ.
 - a. An awesome responsibility
 - b. Requires an unselfish attitude
 - c. Requires time, thought, time, emotion, effort, and energy

- I. Matt. 5:43-48; 9:35-38 Jesus' new law of love: love your enemies and labor for the lost
- A. vs. 5:43 Jesus refers to Old Testament admonitions calling for hating ones enemies and loving ones own kind.
1. Exod. 11:7 The Lord preferred the Israelites over the Egyptians.
 2. Lev. 19:16-18 Stress is placed upon loving ones own kind.
 3. Deut. 23:6 The Israelites told not to help or prosper the Ammonites or Moabites "all thy days forever."
 4. Num. 31:1-2, 9-19 Israel is told to kill their enemies.
- B. vs. 5:44 Jesus expands the love position to include (by his followers, believers) love for everyone, including a believer's enemies.
1. John 13:34 The new commandment to love one another
 2. The enemies to be loved are defined as:
 - a. Those who curse you
 - b. Those who hate you
 - c. Those who despitely use you
 - d. Those who persecute you
- C. vss. 5:45-47 The rationale for Christians to love their enemies
1. Displays God's likeness in God's children, i.e., believers in Jesus Christ
 2. God's rewards are for those who act as he acts, i.e., without preferential significance.
 3. For emulation the Christian is to select God (as demonstrated in his Son, Jesus Christ) not other people (publicans as an example).
- D. vs. 5:48 The perfection (maturity, completeness) of God as an incentive to follow
1. Context of term "perfect" in this verse (Greek = τέλειος , the sense of which was revealed to Peter in Acts 10:34 when it was revealed that God is no respecter of persons.
 2. Some other places in the New Testament where τέλειος is used.
 - a. I Cor. 14:20 "men" used for "mature" sense of the word
 - b. Eph. 4:13 "full-grown" used for the word
 - c. Col. 4:14 "perfect" used again for the word and coordinated (and) with "complete" meaning without lack (See also Col. 2:8-10 where, while the Greek term τέλειος is not used, the idea of "complete" in Christ for the believer is given.)
- E. vs. 9:35 While Jesus is accused of being in alliance with Satan (in the preceding vs. 34), he goes all over the area teaching in the synagogues, preaching the good news of the coming kingdom, healing physical and mental illness.
- F. vs. 36 In these extensive travels, Jesus had compassion for the people everywhere because of their weakness and disarray due to the lack of spiritual guidance.
- G. vss. 37-38 Jesus in reaction to the spiritual condition of the people said that there was a great need for someone with spiritual insight to labor among the people and give spiritual guidance. Jesus asked his disciples to pray for Jehovah God to send spiritual laborers to harvest the people separated from God.