

I. Last week in Chapter 1 we saw that the author of Hebrews indicates that Jesus, God's Savior, not only created the universe, but uses that same power to forgive the sins of those who trust him. Jesus was/is not an angel and is not to be worshiped as one. He has the authority (scepter) of God and is to be worshiped as God. In fact, angels are not to be worshiped at all, because they are servants of God and his children, including his adopted children who have been adopted because they trust his only begotten (uniquely so) Son, Jesus. Many early Christians were being tempted to waver in their trust of God's free grace and begin to combine grace and Judaic legalism and ritualism in their thinking. To meld the two together (law and grace) many were assigning given graces to angels, i.e., some angels for material blessings and others for spiritual blessings. Trying to keep all the angels straight created continual fear. The shepherds who witnessed the angel of the Lord announcing Jesus' birth were filled with fear, and why did the angel tell them not to fear? Because, for their sake (and ours) a savior was born that very day in Bethlehem. While we need not fear angels (since they are our servants), we should be cautious of any messages they bring to us, Matt. 4:3; Lk 10:18-20; John 12:28-32; I John 4:1-6.

II. The Hebrews author [God, really] announces his first warning to the Jewish Christians in Chapter 2 by calling to their attention that neglect of Jesus as superior to the prophets and angels (because of his deity) carries grave consequences. Profound concern about God's revelation of his will in Jesus should hold first priority over every other facet of one's faith otherwise one can lose sight (drift away from) the basis of God's plan of spiritual salvation. If the messages given by God through the Old Covenant (the Law) angels proved to be trustworthy and punishment followed the lack of abiding by those messages, how much severer will the consequences be if one neglects to follow through on the Good News accomplished by his only Son, Matt. 21:33-46! Jesus himself first made the message clear that trusting him would assure the truster of life eternal, John 3:16. Then others who witnessed first hand Jesus' message, sacrificial life, miracles, and resurrection testified convincingly to the Hebrews author that they were persuaded beyond any doubt of the reality of God's salvation through Jesus Christ. Also the assignments by God's Holy Spirit to various believers further confirmed the truth of God's message of Jesus Christ.

III. In vs. 5 the author again refers to angels. When God created the world and everything in it, including mankind, the Lord did not tell the angels "to replenish the earth, and subdue it; and have dominion - - - over every living thing that moveth upon the earth," Gen. 1:28b. Rather, the Lord (quoting Psa. 8) assigned mankind to that position of managing his world. Now at the conclusion of God's plan for his creation, he has chosen a human in which to place his only begotten Son as sole authority to rule. For a season (about 33 years) God subjected his Son to be a little lower than the angels as he had other humans (with more limited abilities,

i.e., subject to time and space restrictions). In Jesus God has glorified mankind even more excellently by placing under him, alone, the total works of God, the universe. This process is still underway as noted in vs. 8b. This process is to reach the ultimate conclusion which God intends. It was God's plan from the beginning of creation that he would come and live among mankind and become perfect (as a human) through suffering the humiliation of human spite. Jesus in submitting himself to severe persecution and even physical death, (although he did not sin which would have justified such death) paved the way for others to trust him and thereby become spiritual siblings to share God's glory. Jesus leads others to God's spiritual reconciliation. He is the only one who can make people pure from their sins, and that purity makes both him (the human component of his being) and those who rely on his goodness to be the children of the same Father, Jehovah God. In vs. 12 the author quotes Psa. 22:22 where God's Son (as later revealed) claims proudly that those who trust him are his siblings. "God, I will speak about you to my brothers; I will praise you before the whole gathering." Again, another Old Covenant quote is given to emphasize the oneness of believers with Jesus. David in II Sam. 22 said, "The Lord is my rock, and my fortress and deliverer; the God of my rock; in him will I trust: he is my shield, and the strength of my salvation, my high tower and my refuge." And again at Isa. 8:18 the author quotes, "Behold I and the children whom the Lord hath given me are for signs and wonders in Israel from the Lord of hosts, which dwelleth in mount Zion."

IV. The children to whom David and Isaiah referred are human beings. God determined that, in order to understand fully the lot of his created human beings, he (God himself) should become a partaker of humanity's nature. The climax of Satan's power over humanity is death (separation from God) by tempting people to rebel against God as the Devil had done. Here the principle that makes one's choice an individual, personal decision and absolute, comes into the plan. But in Jesus (God, but also a fully human being) God overcame the Devil's ultimate power to separate people from their Creator. Since physical death places a person in final, comprehensive jeopardy of being eternally separated from his or her loving Father God, God's plan in Jesus was/is to neutralize Satan's power. Before Jesus fulfilled God the Father's plan, people lived their entire lives fearing death. In effect, their time here was lived in slavery to their forthcoming, inevitable physical death. Now, however, because of Jesus' human nature and his victory over sin as a human (the seed of Abraham), we who trust him are identified with him as fellow humans (not angels). Jesus who lived a perfect, sin-free life as a human is alone qualified to be a priest between God and his fellow human beings and help the latter to be acceptable to be in the presence of a holy God, the Father. Because Jesus suffered as a human and maintained perfection, his righteousness is accepted by God as an appropriate substitute for anyone who will trust him for eternal spiritual life, Rom. 3:21-27. "O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out! For who hath known the mind of the Lord? or who hath been his counsellor, Rom. 11:33-34?"

February 6, 1994

"The Day of Rest"
Hebrews 4

Couples Class
Wendell Alford,
Teacher

I. The author of Hebrews bases the ideas in Chap. 4 upon the admonition given in the preceding chapter, i.e., because Jesus is superior to Moses both in performance and person, a believer in Jesus should not test God by "hardening" his or her heart and thereby distrusting God to keep his promise. Just as the Hebrews under Moses' leadership ceased trusting God to bring them to the Holy Land (the promise of rest from slavery and tribulation), but rather, turned to idolatry (love and trust of immediate, temporary, material satisfaction, Eph. 4:19; Col. 3:5; I Tim. 6:10). In Chap. 3 (vs. 18) the time of "rest" for God's people is mentioned as a time when certain ones whose belief (faith) endures (Matt. 10:22) will "enter into." Chap. 4 is devoted mostly to this time of rest (vss. 1-13), but also Jesus' high priesthood is introduced in vss. 14-16.

II. An obvious assertion is assumed at the outset of Chap. 4: God's promise of rest still stands, and that promise involves ones entering into eternal life and during that eternal life shedding the temporary, flesh-and-blood housing in which every person begins and ends physical life. Each truster in Jesus Christ should be careful to maintain that belief and make it a choice-basis for the way one lives daily, Jam. 2:18-20. There was good news made known to the wandering Israelites for temporary rest just as the good news (Gospel) has been brought to the world in and through Jesus Christ for God's one-time spiritual day of rest. God's message does not produce the potential, desirable result unless an individual receives, appropriates, and makes the message to permeate ones life, (Rom. 6:11) a willingness to follow the leading of God's Holy Spirit, Eph. 4:30. The promise of God to the Israelites during the forty years wandering in the wilderness (desert) was not received with faith that the promise would be fulfilled. In the first covenant period God did not embody (pour out) his Holy Spirit in each individual Israelite, but in response to God's Son's request (John 14:16) God has made his Spirit a part of the life of every believer (Acts 2:38) in God's promise through Jesus, i.e., that that believer is a citizen of God's Kingdom, Mk 1:15; 4:11; Lk 12:31; 14:15; 16:16; 17:21; John 3:5. God had in mind firmly from the beginning of mankind's history (when he created the world) what the end result would be of his creation, including mankind. Here the author quotes Psa. 95:11 in which God said that he was swearing under oath that those who will not believe him (trust his promise) will not be invited to enter the period to which he refers here as "my rest." We who trust Jesus are to remember with diligence that God's word (promise) is true and that there is no appeal from his position.

III. Involved in God's firm promise to those who place their total trust in Jesus, his Son, is the attitude of God following his creation of the world. Again, quoting from God's Word (Gen. 2:2-3) indicating that, following the six days during which God made the heavens and the earth, he rested for a day. The seventh day in which God rested he considered holy or different from the former six days. Not only did God consider the seventh day holy, but he also commanded

mankind to consider the seventh day different, holy. People were to maintain a conduct of life which honored God's desire of keeping the seventh day distinct, holy. When God instructed the manner of life his people should follow through the Law given through Moses, one of the first four commandments relating people to God himself was to keep in mind the seventh day, to keep it holy. This fourth commandment of the decalogue (The Ten Commandments) stated that temporal needs were to be earned on the six days (just as God had worked to create the heavens and earth), but as God rested on the seventh and considered it separated (sanctified), so should people not forget to refrain from unnecessary labor on the seventh day. As God had made the Sabbath (Sunday) holy, people who please God do the same, Ex. 20:8-11; Deut. 5:12-15; Acts 20:7; I Cor. 16:2. [It is possible, of course, to make a fetish of remembering the Sabbath (Sunday) as Jesus plainly and explicitly taught, Matt. 12:1-14; Mk 5:10-16. One can observe the seventh day as holy without considering the observance to be magical or with irrationally obsessive devotion, Rom. 14:5-9.

IV. God has set a day (time, period) yet future which is emphasized in vs. 7 by TODAY where the author quotes Psa. 95:7-9 in which God spoke through David and said, "Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts [and to continue the quote] as you did at Meribah (quarreling), as you did that day at Massah (testing) in the desert, where your fathers tested and tried me, though they had seen what I did." If Joshua had made his period of leadership a true day of rest (spiritual), then another day of Sabbath-rest would be inappropriate. However, the Israelites, because of their reticence to believe and obey God, fell short of the promised day of rest. God's Word (Jesus, God's only begotten Son, John 1:14) will determine (John 5:19,30; Acts 17:31) who participates as the people of God with Jesus during God's Day of Rest. [The Scriptures do not, in my humble understanding of them, make a simplified, succinct outline of the coming rest period for God's people, both Old and New Covenant representatives. However, there is enough Scriptural evidence, as in this Hebrew instance, to leave no doubt about the fact that such a rest day is assured. The assurance is tied directly and exclusively to the sacrifice by God of his only begotten Son, Jesus Christ. To include such a rest day in God's plan there will necessarily be two resurrections and two books containing all mankind's final destinies (noted by Ned Yates on 1-16-94). References are found at Rev. 20:5,12. (For more on the books see Rev. 3:5 and 5:9.) Much mystery has been generated by Bible scholars relating to Rev. 20, primarily, I believe, because of the magnitude of general information given in an extremely small capsule. People would much prefer to have the information "spelled out" in finite detail. God did not inspire John to do so. Therefore, we believers must have faith and trust God that he will, through Jesus, give us everything good, I Cor. 2:9-10; Rom. 8:28; Eph. 1:12. I believe that the thousand year (millenium) is to be the Day of Rest mentioned here in Hebrews 4. Peter in his second letter at 3:8 relates God's reckoning of time in a significant way. There he states this, "But, beloved, be not ignorant of this one thing, that one day is with the Lord as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day."]

March 20, 1994

"Mutual Encouragement"
Hebrews 10

Couples Class
Wendell Alford,
Teacher

I. Continuing the idea at the end of Chap. 9, the author states in 10:1 that the New Covenant was not equal to the image of the Old Covenant, but the Old was only a shadow of the New, i.e., the recurring sacrifices of the Old could not make perfect those who participated in them. If under the Law the rites had abolished the separation between God and his creatures (people), there would not have been need for a new agreement offered by God through Jesus Christ. The blood of amoral animals (creatures with no moral choice) only aroused in keepers of the Law a sense of being sinners (being separated from God's will). A final permanent forgiveness is impossible through animal sacrifice, vs. 4. At this point the author quotes from a Psalm of David (40:6-8) and attributed its message as having been the voice of Jesus, and although the quotation appears nowhere else in the New Testament, it relates God's expectation of his people even in the Old Testament, I Sam. 15::22-23; Psa. 51:16-19; Jer. 7:21-23; Hosea 6:6; Amos 5:21-24; Micah 6:6-8. Jesus quotes Hosea 6:6 at Matt. 9:10-13 and Matt. 12:1-8. The author of Hebrews interprets David's quote (vss. 5-7) as though Jesus had said to God the Father, "You did not desire the Old Covenant system of animal offerings and sacrifices but (instead) you have prepared a (human) body for your Son. To replace the burnt animal offerings and sacrifices in which you had no pleasure, I volunteered to visit the world and do thy will, O (Father) God."

II. The Hebrews author builds on the Psa. 40:6-8 quote to mean that Jesus did follow through and became in his body the acceptable sacrifice which did away with the old system of animal sacrifices and the old priestly order, vss. 8-9. It is this sacrifice (the broken body of Jesus) which sanctifies (sets apart as spiritually perfect) the believers (trusters) in Jesus as Savior. This sacrifice (the body of Jesus) is ultimate in God's sight and makes permanent (once and for always) his relation with his children (believers), vs. 10. The Old Covenant priests work on a temporal basis (repeatedly) and offer sacrifices which cannot take away sins, vs. 11. However, the man (human) Jesus offered a sacrifice which takes away a believer's sins on a permanent basis (forever) and then went into the very presence of God in Heaven. There he sits on the right of God, the Father, vs. 12. The plan of mankind's redemption involves Jesus' remaining there with God and waiting until every enemy of God is put under the power of Jesus. In the meantime, God is singling out selected ones for sanctification (making new creatures and setting them aside) forever those who are trusting Jesus. The Holy Spirit is God's agent in bringing about this reconciliation, vs. 15, and see also Rom. 8:16. Here the author again (Heb. 8:10,12) quotes Jer. 31:33-34. With this eternal arrangement in place (through Jesus as Savior), there need be no more offerings made for God's children, vs. 18. Why? Because God is giving direct guidance and power to every believer, and he or she has an inexhaustible account sitting in the very presence of God. [A believer's relation with God is based upon love, not Law, Rom.3:20; Gal. 2:16; 3:11. A believer does God's will, because he or she loves what has been done

for him or her through Jesus Christ. Jesus said, "If ye love me, obey me. - - - He that hears my teachings, and does them, he it is that loves me: and he that loves me shall be loved of my Father, and I will love him, and will reveal myself to him," John 14:15,21.]

III. We believers have confidence to enter into the Holy of Holies, because Jesus' blood (life) was shed (lived) for us. The veil (Jesus' flesh) was torn apart so that we may enter into the Holy of Holies while the high priest is there, into the very house of God (Heaven), Matt. 27:50-51. Because Jesus, our Lord, is our High Priest, we can approach God with full assurance that "our hearts have been sprinkled from an evil conscience" and made righteous before God. We have been made anew through Jesus' broken (sacrificed) body. Our lives have been consecrated to a new and heavenly purpose, to serve the living God. We are to continue in our profession of hope and not waver, because God who has promised us is faithful, vs. 23 and I John 3:20. Believers at this part of the message are encouraged to "stir up" each other to love and perform activities which become those who profess to know and love Jesus Christ. To make this encouragement easier and more likely to happen, we are to associate one with another and boost each others spiritual morale. The nearer to the occurrence of Jesus' return to complete our salvation, the more important the meetings together become. Evidently, some of the Jewish Christians were not meeting, at least not regularly, with other believers, vs. 25. [Complicating their problems?]

IV. Again, the author proposes a sad situation which occurs when God's children are not practicing their faith vitally. (See 6:4-8) In this Chap. 10:26-31, we are told the mind of God when we do not act as God's children know we should, Eph. 4:30. Since Jesus' sacrifice was "once and forever," there is no next year for another ritual for forgiveness as during the First Covenant. Under Moses' Law a breaker of the Law could legitimately be killed for cursing ones parents (Lev.20:9), for adultery (Lev. 20:10), for homosexuality (Lev. 20:13), for bestiality (Lev. 20:15), and this constitutes a short list. This treatment (death) was for breaking God's Law as given through Moses, and now the author contrasts this harsh punishment with those who would dishonor God's grace after the sacrifice of his own Son, Jesus Christ. Imagine making God's grace something to be stepped upon, a thing to be treated as unholy!!! Quoted here is Deut. 32:35-36 where God says that he will indeed punish those who despise his grace, who become objects of his wrath. This strong view of the evil of spurning God's grace constitutes the writer's fourth warning, this one for Falling Back into Judaism. The first was Neglect in Chap. 1, the second Unbelief in Chaps. 3-4, the third Remaining Immature in Chaps. 5-6. Following the fourth warning the author notes several instances in which these Jewish Christians had been persecuted, made spectacles of, and had their possessions plundered, all because they had accepted Jesus as God's Messiah (Savior). On an occasion they had been merciful to the writer while he was a prisoner. They are not to turn away from their rewarding confidence but remain patient (endure). In vs.39 the author includes the readers with himself as trusting Jesus to the saving of their souls. They were and we are living by faith, Hab. 2:4 Rom. 1:17; 3:22; 9:30.

March 27, 1994

"The Experience of Faith"
Hebrew 11

Couples Class
Wendell Alford,
Teacher

I. The author quoted Hab. 2:4 at Heb. 10:38: "The just shall live by faith." This quote from the Old Testament appears also at Rom. 1: 17 and Gal. 3:11, and is the only Old Testament verse quoted three times in the New. At Chap. 11 he returns to the faith factor by giving an experiential definition and many who have exercised faith in God's promises throughout human history. Even the creation of the physical universe itself is understood through faith that the God of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ created it by actions on matter which is not now apparent, Gen. 1:1. The definition of faith in vs. 1 is perhaps best translated, "Faith is the title-deed (guarantee) of things hoped for, the proof (that which convicts or persuades) of things awaiting (for the ones who are experiencing such faith)." It is this same faith (in God's promise) that provides the good credentials of the Old Covenant witnesses of God's faithfulness in keeping his promises. It is possible to group the faithful ones as follows: before the flood, vss. 4-7; the patriarchs, vss. 20-22; Moses, vss. 23-28; the Exodus generation, vss. 29-31; a general grouping of others, vss. 32-38; and the projection of those during the Christian period, vss. 39-40. One should note the presence of two women among this listing of the faithful. Also the character of some of these faithful could be criticised today by some self-righteous hypocrites who judge others by the Law, Matt. 7:1-5; Rom. 3:20-21.

II. In Gen. 4:4 Abel offered a blood sacrifice to God and was declared righteous thereby. Abel still bears a witness for all who follow even though he died physically. Enoch was unique. [Methuselah was his son who lived longer than any other person in recorded history, 39 years longer than Adam, 969 - 930. Enoch was Cain's oldest son, Gen. 4:17, who murdered Abel.] At last he was honored by God for his faith by never experiencing physical death, Gen. 5:24. In the New Testament Enoch is mentioned at Lk 3:37 and Jude 14. The author in thinking of Enoch stated plainly that without faith it is impossible to please God. One can only know God through believing that he lives, and faith alone can reveal that God will reward those who sincerely seek him, Exod. 33:20; John 1:18; Heb.11:6. Noah is an excellent example of how faith is involved in the salvation process. As James makes clear at 2:14,17,20 faith is not simply forensic or theoretical but must be exercised to develop its full meaning. Noah exemplified the necessity of believing God's promise single-handedly (only eight were saved from the flood, I Pet. 3:20). He was ridiculed for his faith that God would keep his promise, and God declared him to be righteous for acting on his faith.

III. Abraham demonstrated his faith in the promise of the Living God when he left his birthplace in Ur of the Chaldees as God commissioned him to leave for another place. He left without even knowing where his new place of residence would be. He left a good home and lived in tents, for he believed God's promise to make him an eternal home which was permanent and made by God himself. His time

on earth after leaving Ur was spent in tents and lasted for parts of three generations. Sarah, Abraham's wife, likewise proved her faith by believing God could usher her into motherhood at the advanced age of 90 with her husband as good as dead at age 100, vs. 12. In vs. 11 the Greek is better translated: "By faith also Sarah herself, although barren, received power for the depositing of semen." God promised Abraham that his posterity would become nations with innumerable inhabitants. I believe that many self-righteous religionists would condemn the actions of Abraham and Sarah, because they were both the children of the same father, Terah, Gen. 20:12. They lived long lives, 175 and 127 respectively, and underwent many toils and dangers. They were never allowed to enjoy the home God promised them, in fact, they were strangers and pilgrims their whole lives on earth. Their lifelong testimony was that they had received God's promises, embraced them, were persuaded by them, and even died physically believing that God would be faithful to keep his promise to them. The most faithful act which Abraham undertook was taking Isaac through whom God had promised to bless him, vs. 18, and would have sacrificed (killed) him had God not suddenly, at the last moment, furnished a lamb for sacrifice instead, Gen. 22:5-14; John 1:29; Rev. 5:1-14.

IV. The author now lists Isaac, Jacob, and Joseph as men of faith who were faithful in receiving, believing, and acting upon the faith of Abraham which had been practiced by each and passed on to the others. Just as Abraham as father of the children of Israel as a people was given more attention among the individuals of faith, so beginning in vs. 24 Moses is emphasized as the founder of Israel as a nation. Immediately after Moses' birth, his family saved him through their faith in the purpose, plan, and promise of God through the Hebrews to all humanity.. Pharaoh's daughter adopted Moses, but he refused to remain her adopted son and enjoy the luxury and prestige of the king's household. Rather, he determined to further Jehovah's will by remaining with and complementing God's program through his chosen people. Moses could see in that early time the eventual triumph of Jesus Christ as God worked through him at a future time, vs. 26-27. God honored Moses by giving through him the Law which foreshadowed the Good News to mankind through his Son, Jesus Christ. The author now mentioned Joshua and his faith that felled the walls of Jericho as the land promised to Abraham's descendants was taken. Rahab the prostitute is then listed among God's faithful. She acted upon her faith in Israel's Lord by harboring the Hebrew spies, Josh. 2:9-10. (She is another whom the self-righteous would prefer to forget.) Following Rahab are given others who demonstrated faith in their lifetimes: Gideon, Judg. 6:11ff; Barak, Judg. 4:6ff; Samson, Judg. 13:24ff; Jephthah, Judg. 11:1ff; David, and Samuel. Through many trials and tortures these all retained their faith. All of the above remained faithful to God because of his promise, but not one of them has yet received the ultimate promised reward of their faith. God is withholding the promise made to them, for he wants all those who place their trust in the sacrifice (righteousness) of Jesus Christ to receive their ultimate reward at the same time as the Old Covenant faithful. It is amazing to know that we are included with God's great such as Abraham, Moses, and David!! Without Jesus there would be no final blessing!!!

April 3, 1994

"Disciplining Children"
Hebrews 12

Couples Class
Wendell Alford,
Teacher

I. The author, after listing many of the faithful to God's promises in the Old Testament, admonishes the Jewish Christians to beware of the temptations which await to ensnare the believers' fleshly weaknesses, Matt. 26:41-42; Rom. 7:18-25, I John 1:8-10. We believers are going through our salvation experience and should be patient, realizing that the race is long and difficult, Phil. 2:12-15. Every believer has a prescribed race which requires endurance (a second wind) in order to overcome. In the Phil. chapter noted above Paul also stated, "Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus" - - - who as a human became a servant, and was obedient [to the Father] unto death, even the [humiliating] death of the cross. "Wherefore God hath highly exalted him, and given him a name above every name," vs. 5/9. I refer to this passage, because in vs. 2 the writer leaves the Old Testament faithful heroes to call our attention to the Lord himself whom he declares to be the originator (creator) and perfecter of our faith. Jesus' endurance through the trials of the religious leaders' opposition, humiliation, and persecution, the very crucifixion torture itself, was maintained through the JOY of knowing that God would keep his promise, Psa. 22:1-10,24. In fact, about fifty days after his physical death on the cross, Jesus returned to the right hand of God his Father (and our Father through our faith in Jesus Christ). Now, we are to consider the faithfulness of Jesus and his example for our behavior and trust in God's promise as we are "striving against sin." At least, the author tells us, we have not been tested by shedding our blood as Jesus did his, i.e., only Jesus was, is, or can ever be the Savior of people from their sins. Believers' cannot be tempted to displease God so intensely that God's power is not available to enable those believers to overcome that temptation, I Cor. 10:13.

II. With vs. 5 the author (God) calls to mind some changes from the Old Covenant, e.g., they are now God's children, and they have been exhorted (warned, advised) in the Scripture at Prov. 3:11-12 that when God creates offspring, he does not leave his children to fend for themselves. [When a person places his or her faith in Jesus Christ, that person is born from above (reborn, John 3:3,5-7) and is forever a spiritual child of God, John 3:15-16.] God works with his children through discipline (correction) so that they will grow in his grace, II Pet. 3:18. Even human fathers and mothers (God-loving ones) will take the time and expend the effort to nurture and teach their children what proper maturing is. That nurturing is a difficult task requiring constant vigilance and consistency. "What parent is there of you who, if his child asks for bread, will give that child a stone, or who asked for a fish, will be given a snake?" Jesus asked this rhetorical question in his teaching one day. He then gave the parallel to that question by declaring, "If you then, being evil (subject to human limitations), know how to [that you should] give good (proper) gifts to your children, how much more shall your Father in heaven give good things to them that ask him?" (Matt. 7:7-11) For the situation to be other-

wise would indicate that the parent would be bastardizing their own children, relating to them as illegitimate and not ones very own! In other words, a proper parent will own his or her own children and recognize that parent-child relationship by affording appropriate nurture and training, even if that rearing involves disciplining, Prov. 13:24; 19:19. Children with a right relationship with their parents will respect their parents for correct discipline and nourishment. If that be true, and it is, then how much more worthy is it for God's children to be subject to the discipline of his or her Father of their spirits. Human parents are concerned for their children's temporary, earthly welfare, but God is concerned also with his children's eternal, holy welfare. A child who brings pride to his fleshly parents is dwarfed by God's pleasure when his children live holy, sanctified, Godly lives, Matt. 5:48. While discipline is meted, the immediate situation can be (and usually is) unpleasant, but believers should honor the God who has redeemed their spirits by conducting their lives according to the leadership of God's Spirit who dwells within, Rom. 12:1-2. The results of God's discipline when properly received and acted upon by his children, brings inner peace and righteous living, Jam. 3:17-18. We believers are to exercise our spiritual wills just as we do our physical bodies. We should examine our spiritual health regularly and bolster our weaker desires by applying more faith. Especially in our relations with others, we will practice civility, amicability, and utter grace. The best time to stop a fight is to snip negative feelings before they smolder into blazing fires. Eliminate the heat and there will be no fire, Matt. 5:21-22. To ensure a loving relation with our Lord, we must see others through God's grace, i.e., with eyes of Godly (holy) love and forgiveness, Matt. 5:44-47; 6:14-15; I John 4:20-21.

III. Before God extended his grace through Jesus Christ and people's decisions were limited to the provisions of the Law (John 1:17; 8:31-32), one like Esau had no second chance after making a profane or godless decision. After he relinquished his inheritance for a bowl of bean soup and bread (Gen. 25:33-34), he could not change his mind later, Gen. 27:32-35. The author, with this example of Esau, illustrated ones yielding to the temptation of bodily appetites (lust) contrary to the leadership of God's Spirit, Rom. 7:6,25; 8:1-4,35; Jam. 4:1-7. In vss. 18-24 the author makes clear the difference between God's Old Covenant and the fear associated with it and God's New Covenant and the love which motivated it, John 3:16; I John 4:18-19. Believers are not judged by the Law, because their hope is rather in God's grace through the life lived by Jesus Christ and given up by him for the erasing of all evidence which separate those believers from their Holy Father. We come to God who is our exclusive and final Judge and who can see no impurities in us as he views us through our faith in Jesus blood (life). Our spirits are just, being made perfect through Jesus the Mediator of the New Covenant with a blood infinitely better than that which indicated Abel's faith in God. We are not to presume God's grace as something that can be treated without awe and profound respect, because we are royal citizens of the Almighty's kingdom, eternal and holy. Not to presume thusly constitutes the final and fifth warning in the Message of Hebrews. Because God, our heavenly Father, has accepted us through his grace, we too are to be full of grace.

April 24, 1994

"Final Admonitions"
Hebrews 13

Couples Class
Wendell Alford,
Teacher

I. The first mark (that which distinguishes) of believers (trusters) in Jesus as Savior is love of one another, vs. 1. The Greek word used for love here is "philadelphia" referring to brotherly kinship, friendly, admiration, esteem, kindly disposed toward, to wish well, venerate, delight in, to long to be with, to desire to associate with, through ones will (introspectively) rather than by command from without. This love is not Godly love, agape, which is meant in John 13:34-35; 15:12;; 21:15-16. After stressing the need for the Jewish Christians to love one another as members of the family of God, the writer states that they should also not forget to entertain strangers (Gentiles?), because they too can bear God's message (the Good News of Jesus Christ), see Gen. 18:1-3ff; 19:1-2ff. God is using those who were not used in earlier times to make his will known (Matthew, writer of the first Gospel, is an excellent example of such.) It is not possible to distinguish those in whom God places his Holy Spirit by an outward examination of race, color, nationality, or any other physical appearance or social status, Matt. 25:35, 38,40; Lk 17:20-21.

II. The author now specifically mentions concern for those who are imprisoned. We in a democracy usually assume that prisoners are in prisons because they are lawbreakers and mean. The New Testament attitude appears to be that whether one is in prison for such a reason or other reasons (political, religious, etc.), the incarcerated one is in special need of love and care, Matt. 25:36,39-40. In fact, believers' caring for prisoners makes them ambassadors (representatives) of Jesus, King of the Kingdom of Heaven. Many early believers were put in prison, e.g., John the Baptizer, Paul, Silas, Peter, James, and Jesus himself was arrested and crucified to death. Included with the prisoners are others who are mistreated. The context of vs. 3 indicates that those in trouble and prisoners are in this condition primarily because of their being believers in Jesus and members of God's household, i.e., "as being yourselves in the body." Now the author turns to believers' proper attitude toward the exclusive monogamous sexual commitment and continual companionship of one male and female to each other (marriage). There were those who, as Roman citizens, held the institution of marriage in low esteem. To them marriage was not a bond of commitment under God, but often was to create either a lustful, political, or social status and had little to do with sexual purity. Also, there were among the Jews of ascetic persuasion, many who believed that sexual gratification, even in marriage, was inately evil just as many Christians today who believe that those who abstain from marital sex are holier than those who marry, but see I Cor. 7:28,36,38; Col. 2:23; I Tim. 4:3. While sexual activities are honorable for any believer who is monogomous, sexual activities are evil in God's sight (subject to his judgement) which deviate from the singular commitment of one man and one woman to each other (KJV-whoremongers and adulterers). In vss. 5-6 the author admonishes the Hebrew Christians about their attitude toward temporary, material things. He states that believers should conduct their affairs in such a way

that their lives not promote self-greed or avarice. Here he quotes Deut. 31:6, "Be courageous and strong, without fear, for the Lord thy God is with thee wherever you go; he will not fail or forsake thee." Jesus himself said regarding prayer at Matt. 6:8b, "- your Father knows what things you need, before you ask him." Again, at vs. 6 he quotes Psa. 27:1, "The Lord is my light and salvation; whom shall I fear? The Lord is the strength of my life; of whom shall I be afraid?" See what Jesus said at Matt. 6:24-34.

III. The writer at vs. 7 turns to those "which have rule over you, who have spoken the word of God - - ." The message for us in this admonition, I believe, concerns those whom God chose to codify the text of the New Covenant (Testament). He underscores the invariableness of the message contained in that text with vs. 8, "Jesus Christ the same yesterday, and today, and forever." The New Testament was completed by God and thereafter was not to be changed either in its text or modified by later traditions which church leaders might impose upon it. In vs. 9 the writer explains further what he has in mind, "Be not carried away with various and strange teachings, for it is right that the (believer's) heart be established on grace." Rituals will not satisfy God's requirement for a person's righteousness. Only accepting God's grace through relying upon the righteousness of Jesus Christ can a person know peace with God. What is left for the believer to do: offer the sacrifice of praise to God continually, confessing that our hope is beyond this fleshly, temporary state, and do good and share our blessings with others." Obey God's Word with joy, for that is profitable for ones spiritual well-being.

IV. The author begins at vs. 18 a personal conclusion. He solicits the Hebrew Christians' prayers, because he is fully persuaded that he is conveying God's message as he writes to them (Eph. 6:19-20). He seeks restoration to the Jewish Christians, i.e., to be considered by them to be their sibling in the family of God (God's Kingdom). In vs. 20 a doxology which is often used in ending worship services is given, "Now the God of peace, that brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant, make you perfect (whole) in every good work to do his will, working in you that which is wellpleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ: to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen."

V. [I believe that Paul wrote this message to the Hebrews because: 1) The Greek is more refined in style than Paul's letters, but Paul dictated rather than actually writing his (God's) thoughts; 2) Paul would have been careful not to emphasize his authorship, because many Jewish converts (believers) objected to his emphasis of faith rather than ritualistic and nationalistic Jewish practices; 3) Paul referred to his bonds at 10:34 and how he had been refreshed there as he did at II Tim. 1:16; 2:9; 4) at vs. 23 the author refers to Timothy as "our brother" in like terms as at Phili.1; 5) The author does, in fact, emphasize faith (Chap. 11, etc.), but the emphasis is couched in Old Testament history. Note Matt. 5 where Jesus reinterpreted much of the first century Jewish tradition.]

May 1, 1994

"Serving And Waiting"
I Thes. 1

Couples Class
Wendell Alford,
Teacher

I. Thessalonica, where the first believers lived to whom this letter was sent, was established by Cassander, King of Macedonia, and named for his wife, Thessalonice. She was the half sister of Alexander the Great, and her graces Cassander, no doubt, sought as a favor to his own position. The time of the city's founding was BC 316 when Alexander the Great had been dead only about eight years, and his power was still a real factor in Macedonia. Thessalonica became the site for one of Paul's missions established on his second missionary journey. At that time Paul was accompanied by Silvanus (Silas) and Timotheus (Timothy). Very likely this occasion was the first time the Gospel had been heard in this metropolis which by this time had a population of about 200,000. It was a prominent seaport and capital of Macedonia, a Roman province, and was located on a main passage from Rome to the East. Many Jews lived there and were the main religious force against Greek polytheism (paganism). A number of these Thessalonian Greeks had become dissatisfied with attempting to serve so many Greek gods. The three missionaries arrived at Thessalonica shortly after having been jailed and beaten in Philippi. They witnessed in the Jewish synagogue at Thessalonica, and some of the Jews believed that Jesus was indeed the Savior (Messiah). Those who did not believe attacked Jason in whose home the missionaries were staying. Because of a fear for Paul's life, the new believers sent him away to Berea, but the Thessalonian Jews came there also and stirred up the Jews against Paul. Silas and Timothy stayed in Berea while Paul was forced to leave for Athens farther south, Acts 17. An amazing factor in the establishing of the Thessalonian mission was that Paul was there only three weeks, Acts 17:2. So hungry were these people (including many Greeks) for the Gospel that the new believers became very firm in their faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.

II. After a brief stay at Athens, Paul went to Corinth where he stayed for about a year and a half. While in Corinth he wrote the first letter to the believers at Thessalonica. Generally, the letter was intended as one of encouragement to the infant believers there, and a major point which Paul used to encourage them was to emphasize the need for patience to serve until the Lord Jesus returns to establish the Kingdom of God. The time of writing of both letters was during the year AD 51-52 which makes them among the earliest of the New Testament books and the beginning of the New Testament Canon. Not long (a few months) after the Thessalonians received the first letter, Paul received word that some misunderstanding had developed about the first letter concerning Jesus' return. Paul, still in Corinth, immediately wrote and sent to Thessalonica the second letter to further expand the teaching. This fact lets us know that Paul was ever concerned about and therefore kept aware of what was happening to the new believers where he had been. No doubt he was thinking about how effective his prophesying and teaching had been, but also how well the believers were following the Holy Spirit's leadership in his (Paul's) absence. To understand fully Paul's relationship with these dear believers, one must keep profoundly in mind

the severe persecution being meted to this small, new group of believers. Paul himself had been driven away from them after only three weeks, and the Jews were trying to annihilate this new "sect of Judaism." The Jews put it: Turning the world upside down!

III. An amazing revelation in this very first chapter is the maturity of teachings of Paul early in his missionary activities. The two persons of the trinitarian Creator, the Father and the Son, are declared in vs. 1, and the third and only other person of God is noted in vs. 5, the Holy Spirit. Paul assures the Thessalonian believers that, because of their trust in Jesus, they are indeed in God the Father, in the Lord Jesus Christ, and in the Holy Spirit, i.e., the believers assembled there at Thessalonica at that time were united to their loving Creator God through their faith in Jesus. The letter was sent from all three missionaries, Paul, Silas, and Timothy with their prayers that they will sense God's grace and peace through the Lord Jesus Christ. Paul discloses that he, Silas, and Timothy continually thank God for all the Thessalonian believers in their prayers. The "you all" in the KJV is a significant translation, I believe, because it makes clear that both the believers who were Jewish as well as the Greek believers were included. The missionaries were especially recalling how conscientious the Thessalonians were in applying their newfound faith to their lives; how their labor for Christ was motivated by unadulterated love; and how they were exercising patience brought about by their hope in the Lord Jesus Christ, all just as God the Father wanted. They were persuaded that God had chosen and elected them as beloved brethren (made them to become children of God's family), cf. Col. 3:12-17. Paul reminded the Thessalonians of the power of the Gospel to change the lives of those who had believed his message when they became followers of Paul's testimony. How glad they were to learn that God himself had forgiven their sins. Believing that Good News filled them with joy as the Spirit gave evidence of the truth even though some of the local people rejected the Gospel for being false teaching. Their faith was so pronounced that word of it spread freely throughout Macedonia, Achaia and even beyond so extensively that Paul was hearing from others about them.

IV. In vs. 9 Paul notes how the Thessalonian believers' lives demonstrated positively how they had turned to God from idols. There was no "reformation" before conversion to faith, but the faith came to recreate their spirits as the Spirit that was in Jesus Christ came to indwell them. Their becoming believers meant that they had turned (repented) from their sins (idols) to the hope of God's promise through faith in Jesus Christ. Living with this faith motivated them "to serve the living God, to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from among the dead, even Jesus, which (resurrection) delivered us from the wrath to come." Here Paul touches for the first time in the letter upon Jesus' return to earth. They were to serve as they waited for that return. As William Miller said in the hymn: "We'll Work Till Jesus Comes"

O land of rest, for thee I sigh! When will the moment come?
When I shall lay my armor by and dwell in peace at home?
We'll work 'till Jesus comes, and we'll be gathered home!

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We'll work 'till Jesus comes, and we'll be gathered home!

May 8, 1994

"Gentle Witnessing"
I Thes. 2

Couples Class
Wendell Alford,
Teacher

I. In Chap. 2 Paul becomes very retrospective and reviews with the Thessalonians his brief witnessing to them before being chased from them for his faith in Jesus as the Messiah, spiritual Savior. He, Silas, and Timothy had faithfully shared God's message with the Thessalonians and their changed status (believing and accepting God's love through Jesus Christ) proved the effectiveness of the three missionaries' service, how that service was not in vain. Paul in vs. 1 summarizes his first visit there as "our intransit (first coming) to you" (KJV), "was fruitful." Again, Paul relates how he and the other two missionaries had been mistreated at Philippi but had remained bold through God and true to his mission assigned to them in spite of the struggle (suffering) which ensued. Paul's exhortation (advice) he characterized as without deceit or error and complete or without alloy. This statement is similar to the reaction of the Berean Jews when Paul witnessed to them just after the Thessalonian episode. The Berean Jews searched the Old Testament Scriptures regularly (daily) to ascertain the missionaries' message. They believed that Jesus is indeed the Savior based upon that evidence as presented to them. In fact, it was the word received back at Thessalonica that the Berean Jews had become believers, that the Thessalonian Jews went to Berea to hamper Paul's service in expanding the Kingdom of God, Acts 17:10-15.

II. Paul's message was not given that he would gain something personally from the joy and sense of well-being enjoyed by the new believers. His intent and motive were pure and unadulterated. The message was from God to accomplish God's purpose, not to gain popularity or monetary advantage. The message was given without guile, i.e., Paul did not exercise trickery or methods of unreasonable coercion. He did not attempt to cause the Thessalonians to make superficial decisions for Jesus as Savior. If the Spirit of God is to lead and empower the hearers to accept the message of God about Jesus Christ, the message itself must agree with the Spirit's leadership. The message must not be "unclean" or presented as a mixture, pure and error. [The Good News must be of pure iron (strength), not iron mixed with clay (weakness) as was Nebuchadnezzar's kingdom in Dan. 2, especially vs. 42-45. The ultimate test of whether one's interpretation of God's Word is correct hinges upon whether that interpretation is pleasing to God, and only the abiding-within Holy Spirit can determine such. Paul's apostleship authorized him to proclaim and codify (make permanent God's Word) as was not assigned to anyone else following those who authored the New Testament as we have it today.] In vs. 4 Paul makes clear that his proclamation was a special allowance of God's trust and not tradition (human determination). Please note Paul's careful difference at I Cor. 7:3-6 and II Cor. 8:1-9. The test of Paul's declaration was by the Lord himself.

III. A further examination of the message of Paul was that he had not weakened his (God's) position through flattery or covering up a subtle means of self-advantage. In vs. 5 Paul stated that the

Thessalonians knew that truth, and so did God know the honesty of his message. At no time to anyone did he seek to be especially honored or favored as one assigned to be an apostle (with a unique, special commission from Jesus Christ). His gentleness was as conspicuous as that of a nurse (nanny or nursemaid) for her own children. Not only did Paul know the intricacies of the needs of new believers, but those believers were "babes" in Christ resulting from God's work through Paul's own witnessing. They were his own spiritual offspring, so to speak, as God had caused them to respond to the missionaries' testimonies. So intent was Paul's concern for the Thessalonians' relationship to God that his own spirit melded with theirs, vs. 8. He was so jealous of their new kinship with God through Jesus that he would not even live from the benefits of their labor (physical support), i.e., he supported himself by his own labor. In vs. 9 Paul explains explicitly the arrangement he meant. He worked with his own hands during the day just as did his hearers, and at night he served others by sharing his faith in Jesus Christ. He labored day and night to demonstrate his sincerity which amply and favorably impressed the Thessalonians, both Jews and Gentiles, that the missionaries were not there for personal gain. The apostle reminded the new believers that God was pleased with both the message given to them and also the response to God's Good News. Now that they were citizens of God's Kingdom, their new lives were being lived to please not just the bearers of God's message, but God, whose message they bore. Paul had begged, encouraged, and urged them to follow God's leadership for their spiritual welfare even as a father does his own children for their temporal welfare.

IV. Paul reminds the new believers that, not only are they new citizens of God's Kingdom, but they are also to reflect God's glory by the example of their lives among others. Continually Paul gave God thanks for the Thessalonians' understanding that Paul's message was not really his own but the Word of God which empowered them to do God's will. Their lives followed the pattern of other believers in congregations back in Judaea and other places where withstanding persecution was a regular portion for leaving Judaism or idols to serve the living God. Especially the Jews who trusted Jesus as God's Savior were considered unworthy and outside of God's family. Paul himself was instructed not to speak to Gentiles about Jesus as God's Savior. [A leader who had been humiliated by crucifixion could not be God's Messiah, for God had promised his people, the Jews, a leader like David who was a valiant, military conqueror and who would rule with raw strength and physical might. NO! The people of God were to be militant, not meek, to inherit the earth. God's people were to be served by others, not servants, but see Isa. 53 and Matt. 5:1-12.] The one whose influence in the world that holds back the full fruition of God's pleasure in the earth is the same one who drove Paul from Thessalonica after only three weeks, Satan, vs. 17. And who will finally destroy completely this arrogant one? God, who began by sacrificing his only begotten Son, Jesus, for all believers' spiritual rebirth, will exclaim, "Enough!" That same Jesus will return to earth and finalize his glory in the trusters of all ages in Jesus as Savior, vss. 19-20. "While on others he was calling, the gentle Savior did not pass us by, but heard our humble cry." Let us work gently, for the night is coming.

WA

May 8, 1994

"Gentle Witnessing"
I Thes. 2

Couples Class
Wendell Alford,
Teacher

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May 15, 1994

"Mutual Encouragement"
I Thess. 3

Couples Class
Wendell Alford,
Teacher

I. When Paul composed this letter to the believers at Thessalonica, his chief theme was to be the nature of the events to happen when the Lord Jesus returns to keep God's promise to all believers of all time. The person who, centuries later, divided the letter into chapters and verses was wise, I believe, to end each of the first three chapters with a mention of that central theme. Please note 1:10, "and to wait for his Son from heaven," in 2:19, "in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ at his coming," and in 3:13, "at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ with all his saints (believers)." The promise of eventual relief from persecution from earthly pressures and tensions has occurred throughout the ages from God to his faithful. When God destroyed the earth with water in Noah's lifetime, God saved eight persons, Noah and his family. This destruction was due to the ungodliness of mankind which "was great in the earth, and that every imagination (intent) of the thoughts of his (mankind generally) heart was only evil all day every day. - - -But Noah found grace in the eyes of the Lord," Gen. 6:5,8; I Pet. 3:20. When Jesus instructed his disciples (and us) about his coming again, he referred to the evil of mankind on the earth in Noah's day and the recurrence of such wicked conditions just before he returns, Matt. 24:36-39. Noah worshiped Jehovah God when the flood receded, and God covenanted with Noah that never again would the earth be destroyed with water. The rainbow is the symbol of God's perpetual covenant with humankind because of Noah's righteousness. Later, when God's own people (the Jews) disallowed God's Law and will by turning from him to their neighbor's idolatry, God punished the Jewish nation by allowing them to be taken from the land they loved (and where they assumed God's only presence to be) and to become captives of the Babylonians. In the process of taking Israel's leading families and artisans, the invaders completely destroyed their beloved Jerusalem where valiant David created a fortress, and where his son, Solomon, later ruled the entire area with glowing splendor. At this crucial time in Israel's history, God commissioned his prophets to promise the Israelites that if they would turn again and love their God by being his people in deed as well as in name, he would restore their grandeur in the earth. These promises were stressed during times of severe persecution. The two prophets who most vividly relayed these promises during persecutions were Ezekiel and Daniel, especially as they relate to God's final restitution of all mankind's evil against God. In Ezek. 36-39 the terrible persecution which Israel is to endure is noted. The enemies of Israel will come against her, but God will utterly destroy her enemies. Israel will need seven months to bury the dead enemy forces. Ezek. 39:12-13. Daniel refers to a time of trouble for the nation of Israel when "there shall be a time of trouble, such as never was since there was a nation even to that time: and at that time thy people shall be delivered, every one that shall be found written in the book (elected), Dan. 12:1b." See also Rom. 11:25-36.

II. The term which theologians use to designate that division of

systematic theology having to do with the doctrine of last things such as death, resurrection, second coming of our Lord, end of the age, divine judgment, and the future state is "eschatology." The Old Testament teaches a future resurrection and judgment day, Job 19:25-27; Isa. 25:6-9; 26:19-21; Dan. 12:2-3. The New Testament interprets, enlarges, and completes the Old Testament eschatology. The New Testament stresses the resurrection, Rom. 8:11; I Cor. 15, the second coming of Jesus Christ, Matt. 16:27; Lk 17:30; I Cor. 1:7; 4:5; I Thess. 2:19; 3:13; 4:13-18; II Thess. 1:7-10; 2:1-6; I Pet. 1:7; I John 2:28, the final judgment for the unsaved (unbelievers), Rev. 20, and the righteous (believers) entrance into heaven, Matt. 25:31-46. One can see from these references that the two letters of Paul to the Thessalonians has a conspicuous contribution to the learning of the return of Jesus Christ for those of us who are and all those who have ever trusted Jesus as God's Savior.

III. Finally, we come to this third chapter of Paul's (God's) letter to the new believers (and us) at Thessalonica. In chapter one Paul stressed the spiritual salvation which these new believers had experienced through newfound faith in Jesus, and in chapter two he charged them to engage in kingdom service by withstanding the persecution to deny the Lord who saved them and witnessing to those who were yet unbelievers. In this third chapter Paul discusses what could be formally characterized as "sanctification" or maturing in God's grace as God's children. The great Apostle Paul knew that the religious climate prevailing in Thessalonica could mean his own death if he returned there. Therefore, when he, in his deep love for them, could stand the uncertainty no longer, asked his trustworthy fellowlaborer Timothy to return and encourage them. The tribulation which the Thessalonians were suffering was the reason, I believe, why Paul thought the appropriate explanation was to assure them that Jesus would return to earth to bring the ultimate blessings which would compensate for all the misery they were enduring, make all their pain minor compared with the glory to come. When Timothy returned, he told Paul how the Thessalonian believers were standing by their faith in spite of the opposition. Paul now tells them in this letter that their perseverance was an encouragement to him, too, for he was undergoing persecution for his faith in Jesus. The encouragement was mutual, and Paul expressed his prayer for them that they would respond to the Lord's leadership and grow in their love for one another and even for those outside the believing fellowship. The goal for them was that they become well established in their faith, unblameable in holiness (righteous separateness) before God the Father. The "unblameable" in vs. 13 corresponds to the "perfect" in vs. 10. These terms refer to the spiritual condition of individuals who are complete (flawless) in God's sight, i.e., "before God," vs. 13. This does not mean the "sinless perfection" to which some refer and which they attempt to attain by doing good works or keeping the law, but rather the completeness which God himself makes for one who trusts God's only begotten Son, Jesus Christ, and his blood (life) shed for the remission of that truster's separation from God (sin), Rom. 3:21-31; I Cor. 1:29-31; II Cor. 5:21.

Jesus paid it all, All to him we owe;

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adv. & Adv.
Dignity
Positive
comparative
superlative

Jesus paid it all, All to him we owe;
 Sin had left a crimson stain, He washed it white as snow!

Looking forward to Couples Class Annual Cookout at A. & A. Smith's place, May 17, 1994!

May 22, 1994

"Sanctification and the Deceased"
I Thess. 4

Couples Class
Wendell Alford,
Teacher

I. The appropriateness of God's spiritual children's maintaining a high level of Godly ethics is continued from Chap. 3 into Chap. 4. In fact, the first twelve verses are given to righteous living by those identified with our Lord, Jesus Christ. The conduct of the new Thessalonian believers was especially important, because sexual standards and other moral standards were very low in the Roman Empire. The same low standards are evident in the world today. Our own country is not only low in societal sexual morality, but is a poor example in this area of thought and activity as the most powerful nation in today's world. God's Word makes his position clear as to how he would have his people conduct their sexual affairs; adultery, Exod. 20:14; bestiality, Lev. 18:23; fornication, I Cor. 6:18-20; homosexuality, Lev. 18:22, 20:13, Rom. 1:26-27; incest, Lev. 18:6-18; prostitution, Lev. 19:29, Deut. 22:21, I Cor. 6:15; and rape, Deut. 22:25-27. Paul urged the new believers to follow the leading of God (his Holy Spirit) in how to behave. We speak often of chastity as the result of self-control, but actually a believer has the power of Jesus' love to aid and empower him or her to make decisions which will please God. God's will is that believers be sanctified (mature spiritually) and that involves abstaining from sexual impurities vs. 3. One of the right choices in life for believers is to control ones sexual appetite, "possess ones body activities" in "sanctification and honor," vs. 4. Further, believers are not to pattern their lives as the Gentiles whom Paul characterized as given to wanton, unrequited lust, vs. 5. As believers we are called to honor Jesus who paid the price for our holiness (to become uniquely separated in thought and actions). Therefore, if we do not honor God in our living, we are rejecting God, not other people. Paul then encourages the Thessalonian believers to "be quiet," i.e., not to be busybodies who attempt to become other peoples consciences. Neither are they to be lazy and let others support them (their physical sustenance). Being upright as believers in the sight of nonbelievers is a proper way to display a Godly and winning testimony for the Lord.

II. Beginning with vs. 13 Paul turns from proper living standards for believers to a question or concern which apparently Timothy brought back from the believers in Thessalonica. Their understanding from what Paul had told them in his three-week stay with them was that Jesus was coming back to earth to relieve them of their persecution from the Jews and others. Since Paul had been with them, however, some of their members had died physically. How did their death relate to the Good News in Jesus Christ? Would those who had died be among those to be blessed by Jesus' return, or was their death the termination of their relation with the Savior? If this death disrupted the promise of God related to trusting Jesus, why the emphasis on living sanctified lives? [This same feeling of detachment Jesus sensed in the apostles when the Lord announced his departure from them on the night he was betrayed, John 14:1-3,16-18. The apostles were evidently unaware at that time of the spiritual continuance of a person after physical death.

Jesus' answer introduced the truth that his departure was only a temporary arrangement, and, further, he would return in due time after which there would never again be a need for separation. Not only did he promise to return, but he also promised the coming presence of the Holy Spirit to be with them and all subsequent believers until he returns. The Holy Spirit did, in fact, arrive about fifty days following Jesus' return to the Father in heaven. That same promise of the coming of the Holy Spirit had been made through the prophet Joel at Joel 2:28-32; Acts 2:14-18.] Paul at vs. 15 was in keeping with Jesus' communication about his return, for the apostle states clearly that he is really only repeating what he had received "by the word of the Lord." Since Paul had become a believer after Jesus' ascension, one needs to refer to the two instances when Jesus spoke directly with Paul through revelation. Jesus spoke with Paul on the road to Damascus at Acts 9:3-6, and we have that conversation in detail. However, the second conversation was over a period of about three years, Gal. 1:10-20. Paul was told by direct revelation from God the information which became for us a major portion of God's Word.

III. Paul wanted the new Thessalonian believers to know beyond any doubt ("not have you to be ignorant") about the disposition of those believers who had died (physically). They are not to be grieved over as those deceased persons who die not having placed their trust in God's Savior, Jesus Christ. Unbelievers have no such hope, but God's spiritually reborn children through faith in Jesus Christ, i.e., those who die believing that Jesus died and rose again will accompany Jesus when he returns for those believers who are still physically alive. A believer's spiritual status is not changed when he or she puts off the temporary, fleshly body. Those who do die before Jesus returns are said to be "asleep," because they no longer can communicate with those still physically alive, Lk 16:26, and vice versa. Those believers who die will be united with the believers who are still alive at the time God sends Jesus back to revisit the earth, because the Lord will bring those who have died before with him. When the Lord returns to earth, his coming (presence) will be given universal (worldwide) attention. Jesus himself will descend from heaven announced by the voice of God's chief angel (messenger) and God's trumpet. At that time those believers who have gone on before (died) will be with Jesus even before those who are still in the flesh. When both groups meet together with Jesus at this time, this begins the eternal union with the Lord's presence. Never again will we be separated from the Lord whose righteousness made us one with the God who made and loved us. We will have new bodies. Even those who are physically alive when Jesus returns will rise to meet him with new bodies which are to be made instantaneously immortal and incorruptible, I Cor. 15:49-53.

To Jesus Christ I fled for rest; He bade me cease to roam,
And lean for succor on his breast 'till he conducts me home.
I sought at once my Savior's side, no more my steps to roam
With him I'll brave death's chilling tide, and reach my heav'nly
home.

When he shall come with trumpet sound, Oh may I then in him be
found;

had we tried to relate persecution of both people and promise of eventual restitution (atonement).
WA

May 22, 1994

"Sanctification and the Deceased"
I Thess. 4

Couples Class
Wendell Alford,
Teacher

I. The appropriateness of God's spiritual children's maintaining a high level of Godly ethics is continued from Chap. 3 into Chap. 4. In fact, the first twelve verses are given to righteous living by those identified with our Lord, Jesus Christ. The conduct of the new Thessalonian believers was especially important, because sexual standards and other moral standards were very low in the Roman Empire. The same low standards are evident in the world today. Our own country is not only low in societal sexual morality, but is a poor example in this area of thought and activity as the most powerful nation in today's world. God's Word makes his position clear as to how he would have his people conduct their sexual affairs; adultery, Exod. 20:14; bestiality, Lev. 18:23; fornication, I Cor. 6:18-20; homosexuality, Lev. 18:22, 20:13, Rom. 1:26-27; incest, Lev. 18:6-18; prostitution, Lev. 19:29, Deut. 22:21, I Cor. 6:15; and rape, Deut. 22:25-27. Paul urged the new believers to follow the leading of God (his Holy Spirit) in how to behave. We speak often of chastity as the result of self-control, but actually a believer has the power of Jesus' love to aid and empower him or her to make decisions which will please God. God's will is that believers be sanctified (mature spiritually) and that involves abstaining from sexual impurities vs. 3. One of the right choices in life for believers is to control ones sexual appetite, "possess ones body activities" in "sanctification and honor," vs. 4. Further, believers are not to pattern their lives as the Gentiles whom Paul characterized as given to wanton, unrequited lust, vs. 5. As believers we are called to honor Jesus who paid the price for our holiness (to become uniquely separated in thought and actions). Therefore, if we do not honor God in our living, we are rejecting God, not other people. Paul then encourages the Thessalonian believers to "be quiet," i.e., not to be busybodies who attempt to become other peoples consciences. Neither are they to be lazy and let others support them (their physical sustenance). Being upright as believers in the sight of nonbelievers is a proper way to display a Godly and winning testimony for the Lord.

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diff

WA

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Rev. 1:5

atonement

Day 12:1

Enoch
Gen. 5:24
Translation
Elyab
II Kings
2:11

Stanzas 2+3
"I will walk
till Jesus come"
Elizabeth Miss

Stanza 4
"The Solid
Rock"
Edward
Wright

To Jesus Christ I fled for rest; He bade me cease to roam,
And lean for succor on his breast 'till he conducts me home.
I sought at once my Savior's side, no more my steps to roam.
With him I'll brave death's chilling tide, and reach my heav'nly home.

When he shall come with trumpet sound, Oh may I then in him be found;

Dressed in his righteousness alone, faultless to stand before the throne.

X

May 29, 1994

"The Day of the Lord"
I Thess. 5

Couples Class
Wendell Alford,
Teacher

I. One of the reasons we are to study the Old Testament prophecy of Isaiah for at least the last six months of 1994 is the treatment of the "Day of the Lord" which Isaiah examines and foretells in Chapters 2-4, et al. This phrase, the day of the Lord, Paul uses in vs. 2 which relates to what he is telling the new believers about Jesus' return to earth on his second visit. Isaiah is known by many as "The Messianic Prophet," because the theme of his prophecy is that God will save the world through his nation (Israel) which was to become a Messianic Nation led by God's glorified Messiah, John 12:35-43. Understanding Isaiah's prophecy adds depth of meaning to what we are living through in 1994. In fact, Paul noted (or reminded) for the Thessalonian believers that they knew that the day of the Lord is to take place as a thief when those to be robbed are asleep and more vulnerable. Paul states that they (the Thessalonian believers) knew this fact about the surprise of the day of the Lord "perfectly." Either Paul had made this point for them during his short stay at Thessalonica, or else the Jewish believers of the assembly there were familiar with the Old Testament references to the day of the Lord, or both.

II. After relating Chap. 5 with our future study of Isaiah, we look at the last thoughts of Paul (and the Lord) in this first letter to the Thessalonian believers. There had been no change at the time of Paul's writing from the information Jesus gave his first disciples as he answered their questions concerning the destruction of the Herod Temple and Jesus' return for his believers, Matt. 24:27-36. Please note in vs. 24 of that passage the term "This generation" which Jesus said would not pass away before these events related to his return had happened. [I believe that the "generation" meant here is the same as the "generation" in Psa. 22:30. Jesus' special period of grace (during which time God's grace through Jesus Christ will prevail) will be a special time when God accepts all, Jews and Gentiles, who trust God's righteousness created by the shed blood (sacrifice) of his only begotten Son, Jesus Christ, Lk 21:24; John 1:17; Rom. 11:5,25; Eph. 2:8.] Paul is telling the Thessalonians (and us) that no one knows the exact time when God the Father has reserved to his own private knowledge (Even Jesus does not know, Matt. 24:36.). The world's population in general will be as surprised when Jesus comes with the universal, unique announcement as the householder is when his or her home is broken into during the late night hours. The day of the Lord is a fulcrum of history as was the first coming of Jesus. The day of the Lord will begin as a period of sorrow and wrath on the earth as has never been before or will ever be afterwards, Matt. 24:14-22 (Dan. 9:24-27); Rev. 6:12-17. But Paul has already stated in the preceding Chap.3 that the believers will have been taken from the earth, both those who had died (physically) as believers and believers who are still in the flesh at the time of Jesus' return, vss. 13-18. In fact, the world will be of the opinion that finally political and economic peace has come to the earth (the Golden Age). But it is during this portion of the day of the Lord (which is to last seven years,

Dan. 9:24) that the Jewish nation will through bitter travail come to accept the Jesus as Messiah (Savior) whom their forefathers rejected so vehemently, Lk. 23:13,21; Rom. 11:25; Rev. 1:7. The "sudden destruction" which will come upon all the peoples on the earth in this day of the Lord will be like the birth pains of a woman preceding childbirth. No one on earth will be excluded from the physical and mental trauma and torment, see again Rev. 6:12-17.

III. Again, Paul reiterates the disposition of all believers during this calamitous period in vss. 4-11. Believers are not in darkness (without knowledge) so that the day of the Lord will not "overtake you as a thief." Because of your trust (faith) in God's Savior, Jesus Christ, you believers are God's children and thereby are enlightened to know that God has promised to save you from all such destruction. He is faithful to keep his promise in which you trust, I Cor. 1:9. God's promise does not excuse us believers from maintaining constant attention to what is happening in world affairs. We are not to permit ourselves to become drowsy during this time when the world's people are, in general, concerned about and given primarily to worldly, temporary matters. Others (nonbelievers) are asleep continually and not awake to the cloud of separation from God's will that pervades the political and economic affairs of mankind. We believers are to remain sober (self-controlled) and watch, or, as Jesus put it, "And when these things begin to come to pass, then look up, and lift up your heads; for your redemption draweth near," Lk 21:28. We are to keep clothed in faith, love, and with our hope of salvation. Note carefully vss. 9-10, "For God hath not appointed us to wrath [the beginning of the day of the Lord], but to obtain salvation by our Lord Jesus Christ, who died for us, that, whether we wake [alive when Jesus returns] or asleep [physically dead before Jesus returns] we should live TOGETHER with him. This knowledge is to encourage and build each of us up in our faith and hope, vs. 11. [Emphases mine - WA]

IV. The importance of God's children living holy lives while still in the flesh is stressed again as Paul returns to living uprightly in vss. 12-22. He begs us to lean upon each member as he or she performs services which the Lord assigns to each believer. The Lord's work should be done harmoniously as each worker is to be esteemed for whatever the assignment happens to be. All workers are to be praised and encouraged for every accomplishment. Goodness is to be the priority both among members of the fellowship as well as toward those outside. Never give in to sadness or despair, but remember whether you live or die in the Lord, God's promise for final victory is absolutely sure. A believer is never to feel alienated from God, but in continuous communication with him. Give constant thanks to the Lord; give free reign to the Holy Spirit's leadership; be willing to hear God's will as expressed by others, but prove all information and heed all that God's Spirit confirms for you; and avoid everything that displeases the Lord. In conclusion, vss. 23-28, Paul assures them (and us) that the God who has called us to righteousness through Jesus Christ is faithful to keep his promise to us. The Lord's grace will be with us so that we will be with him during the entire day of the Lord!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!

May 29, 1994

"The Day of the Lord"
I Thess. 5

Couples Class
Wendell Alford,
Teacher

WA

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Land II Pet. 3:10

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?
Lk. 20:4-6

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June 5, 1994

"Above All, Trust Jesus Christ"
II Thess. 1

Couples Class
Wendell Alford,
Teacher

I. Because of the question last Sunday concerning the "millennium" concept in Scripture, we probably should take some time to consider it. Bible students refer to the thousand-year period noted in Rev. 20:2,3,4,5,6,7 (six times) as the millennium. The word "millennium" is a compound of the two Latin words, mille and ennium, with the first meaning "one thousand" and the latter "year." We often use the word "biennium" which means two years, for example. The period of one thousand years related to end-time events in human history is mentioned explicitly nowhere else in Scripture. However, implicitly it is associated elsewhere with the time of terrible trouble for the nation of Israel, e.g., all of Isaiah and Zephaniah 3:8-20. Its absence from our Revelation 20 would leave an unusual gap in the chronology of the events following the destructive happenings which begin "the day of the Lord." Further, there would be an illogical absence between what Jesus labels as a one-of-a-kind earthshaking period of tribulation in Matt. 24:21,29 and a time during which believers in Jesus' lordship will reign with Jesus on earth, I Cor. 6:2; II Tim. 2:12; Rev. 5:9-10. Immediately following the reference to the thousand-year period, there is to be a consummate judgment (noted in Rev. 20:11-15 as before the great white throne) followed by the establishment of a new Jerusalem wherein there will be no more sorrow of any kind. The twentieth and twenty-first chapters of Revelation constitute the conclusion of what the Lord wants mankind to know as of our time, I believe. It appears that God communicated much of his end-time plans in a rather small capsule, i.e., the last three chapters of the New Covenant. This short synopsis is so brief and somewhat sketchy that many Bible scholars want to put little importance in the information there, even to ruling out little or no credence to the thousand years. My chief reason for disagreeing with such a position is the belief in what constitutes "the day of the Lord" and especially as that day relates to God's eternal promise to his specially called Jewish Nation, Rom. 11:25-26. Most of the Old Testament prophets either end with or include in their prophecies the promise of God to restore the Jewish Nation and Jerusalem's becoming the seat of the Lord's government, Isa. 60; 66:5ff; Ezek. 39:21-29; Dan. 7:9-22; Hosea 14:1-9; Joel 3:1-11; Amos 9:11-15; Obad. 21; Micah 7:15-20; Zech. 8:18-23; 14:9-21.

II. A further word should perhaps be stated about how Bible scholars are divided on when and how the millennium fits into the divine sequence in end-time events. There are four main categories of beliefs: The premillennial view, the premillennial/posttribulation view, the postmillennial view, and the amillennial view. The premillennialists believe that Jesus will return before the millennium interpreting Rev. 20 literally. All believers will be with Jesus and will therefore escape the tribulation period on earth. They hold that Christ will reign on earth for a lengthy period (characterized by 1000 years). The premillennial/posttribulationists assert that Christ will return at the end of the seven-year tribulation to establish a millennial kingdom. This kingdom will end with

a rebellion by the forces of evil followed by the final judgment and eternal reign of Christ. The postmillennialists view is that the millennial is the present age of blessedness (grace) on the earth, a period of indefinite length. They expect Christ's visible return after the millennium, and look for God to use the church's teaching and preaching to usher in a lengthy period of peace and righteousness before Christ's return. From our discussion last Sunday, you will recognize my position to be with the premillennials. The amillennialists interpret Christ's millennial reign in an ideal or spiritual sense. While believing in the second coming, they reject the idea of a literal thousand-year reign on earth. Some see Christ's reign as having begun during his earthly ministry or at the time of his resurrection. God's promise to Israel is one applying to the church age, or to the eternal existence in the new heavens and the new earth.

III. After Paul sent his first letter to the Thessalonian believers, false doctrine was introduced there disallowing the apostle's teaching concerning Jesus' return. False teachers had apparently taught that Paul was right about the second coming, except that Jesus had already come, and, as believers, they were to live from the labor of others. God had made them "chosen people" to be served by others rather than to serve others. But before Paul reopens the events surrounding Jesus' return, he again extends words of thanksgiving, encouragement, and word of his continuing to intercede with God on their behalf. He states at the outset that Silas and Timothy were still with him in Corinth which means that he was writing the second letter not long after sending the first letter (a few months). Paul pronounced God's and the Lord Jesus Christ's grace upon them along with the Lord's peace. He stated that it was appropriate to thank God for their growth in their faith in Jesus, their love for one another, and their patience in spite of the persecutions and tribulations they were being forced to endure. Their spiritual stamina was justifiable evidence of their worthiness to be among the citizens of God's kingdom. That stamina was precisely why they were being persecuted. Their trouble should be quieted by their knowledge that, "when Jesus is revealed from heaven with his mighty angels in flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God, and obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ," vss. 7-8. Their punishment will be that they will be banished from the presence and glory of the power of our Lord. He will come and be glorified through his believers as well as admired by them in "that day," vss. 9-10. Paul wanted the Thessalonian believers to be aware of the fact that he, Silas and Timothy were in continuous prayer to God for them concerning their election and the true worthiness associated with their fulfilling God's purpose there in Thessalonica. Above all the apostle prayed that the new believers would bring glory to the Lord Jesus even as they were glorified through their bearing his name. Only God's grace had made their new relationship with the heavenly Father possible through his Son, Jesus Christ. Everything else is beneath the excellence of holding on to their trust in Jesus Savior. We too must, with B. B. McKinney:

Have faith in God when your pathway is lonely, he sees and knows all the way you have trod. Never alone are the least of his children; have faith in God.

WA

June 5, 1994

"Above All, Trust Jesus Christ"
II Thess. 1

Couples Class
Wendell Alford,
Teacher

I. Because of the question last Sunday concerning the "millennium" concept in Scripture, we probably should take some time to consider it. Bible students refer to the thousand-year period noted in Rev. 20:2,3,4,5,6,7 (six times) as the millennium. The word "millennium" is a compound of the two Latin words, mille and ennium, with the first meaning "one thousand" and the latter "year." We often use the word "biennium" which means two years, for example. The period of one thousand years related to end-time events in human history is mentioned explicitly nowhere else in Scripture. However, implicitly it is associated elsewhere with the time of terrible trouble for the nation of Israel, e.g., all of Isaiah and Zephaniah 3:8-20. Its absence from our Revelation 20 would leave an unusual gap in the chronology of the events following the destructive happenings which begin "the day of the Lord." Further, there would be an illogical absence between what Jesus labels as a one-of-a-kind earthshaking period of tribulation in Matt. 24:21,29 and a time during which believers in Jesus' lordship will reign with Jesus on earth, I Cor. 6:2; II Tim. 2:12; Rev. 5:9-10. ^{Rev. 20:4} Immediately following the reference to the thousand-year period, there is to be a consummate judgment (noted in Rev. 20:11-15 as before the great white throne) followed by the establishment of a new Jerusalem wherein there will be no more sorrow of any kind. The twentieth and twenty-first chapters of Revelation constitute the conclusion of what the Lord wants mankind to know as of our time, I believe. It appears that God communicated much of his end-time plans in a rather small capsule, i.e., the last three chapters of the New Covenant. This short synopsis is so brief and somewhat sketchy that many Bible scholars want to put little importance in the information there, even to ruling out little or no credence to the thousand years. My chief reason for disagreeing with such a position is the belief in what constitutes "the day of the Lord" and especially as that day relates to God's eternal promise to his specially called Jewish Nation, Rom. 11:25-26. Most of the Old Testament prophets either end with or include in their prophecies the promise of God to restore the Jewish Nation and Jerusalem's becoming the seat of the Lord's government, Isa. 60; 66:5ff; Ezek. 39:21-29; Dan. 7:9-22; Hosea 14:1-9; Joel 3:1-11; Amos 9:11-15; Obad. 21; Micah 7:15-20; Zech. 8:18-23; 14:9-21.

14:26-28
ch 15:
12

introduce here

quoted in ch 15:16-17

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III. After Paul sent his first letter to the Thessalonian believers, false doctrine was introduced there disallowing the apostle's teaching concerning Jesus' return. False teachers had apparently taught that Paul was right about the second coming, except that Jesus had already come, and, as believers, they were to live from the labor of others. God had made them "chosen people" to be served by others rather than to serve others. But before Paul reopens the events surrounding Jesus' return, he again extends words of thanksgiving, encouragement, and word of his continuing to intercede with God on their behalf. He states at the outset that Silas and Timothy were still with him in Corinth which means that he was writing the second letter not long after sending the first letter (a few months). Paul pronounced God's and the Lord Jesus Christ's grace upon them along with the Lord's peace. He stated that it was appropriate to thank God for their growth in their faith in Jesus, their love for one another, and their patience in spite of the persecutions and tribulations they were being forced to endure. Their spiritual stamina was justifiable evidence of their worthiness to be among the citizens of God's kingdom. That stamina was precisely why they were being persecuted. Their trouble should be quieted by their knowledge that, "when Jesus is revealed from heaven with his mighty angels in flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God, and obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ," vss. 7-8. Their punishment will be that they will be banished from the presence and glory of the power of our Lord. He will come and be glorified through his believers as well as admired by them in "that day," vss. 9-10. Paul wanted the Thessalonian believers to be aware of the fact that he, Silas and Timothy were in continuous prayer to God for them concerning their election and the true worthiness associated with their fulfilling God's purpose there in Thessalonica. Above all the apostle prayed that the new believers would bring glory to the Lord Jesus even as they were glorified through their bearing his name. Only God's grace had made their new relationship with the heavenly Father possible through his Son, Jesus Christ. Everything else is beneath the excellence of holding on to their trust in Jesus Savior. We too must, with B. B. McKinney:

34:19
3:12
5:10-11

Have faith in God when your pathway is lonely, he sees and knows all the way you have trod. Never alone are the least of his children; have faith in God.

June 12, 1994

"Waiting for the Day"
II Thess. 2

Couples Class
Wendell Alford,
Teacher

I. This chapter of Paul's second letter to the new believers at Thessalonica makes a unique revelation of God to mankind concerning Jesus' second coming to earth. In no other place in the Old or New Covenants is the information with the same precise revelation as that given in II Tesssalonians 2. The reason God gave Paul (and us) the details clarifying their misunderstanding grew out of false teaching which had crept into the new church there. The false information grew out of the reaction to severe persecutions the new believers were experiencing. Paul's first letter had noted (5:2-3) that there would be severe persecution when the day of the Lord came. Since the believers were, in fact, undergoing persecution, they related their troubles to Jesus' arrival. Paul now (in Letter Two) assures them that that time was not now occurring and would not happen while the believers were still on earth. The chapter begins with Paul's relating Jesus' second coming with believers' "gathering together unto him." Further, they were not to be frightened either by any spirit (as someone asserting that "God's Spirit revealed such and such to me, etc.," note Gal. 1:8-9), by oral communication, or by letter purportedly from Paul to the effect that the day of Christ (the Lord) is now happening. The Thessalonians were troubled, because the new information conflicted with what Paul had disclosed to them when he was there with them. In this part of Paul's second letter he utterly refutes that God had revealed any differently than what Paul had already told them, that any oral contradictory message was a false prophecy, and that any letter supposedly from the apostle was a forgery.

II. I have often referred to the terrible tribulation as the "beginning" of the day of the Lord. The horrible tribulation is the opening or beginning of "that day" which continues onward after the tribulation to and through the lengthy period (millenium) of Christ's reign on earth as outlined in I Thess. 5. The day of the Lord will end with the final judgment noted in Rev. 20:7-15. During that day of the Lord, Jesus Christ will rule with divine judgment over the entire planet earth, Psa. 2; Rev. 2:27. Isa. 11:10-12 notes that God will gather Israel at this time, and in Isa. 11:1-9 (relating to the same period) the prophet foretells that that one who is the Branch of Jesse (Jesus Christ) will judge over a period of peace and prosperity. In summary, the Day of the Lord will begin with Jesus taking all who have become trusters in his righteousness out of the world, purging the world of sin through a troublous tribulation, and thereafter reigning with his believers for a long period (millenium). The Thessalonians, and, as time has come and gone, all believers are to be aware that certain events are to happen before the Day of the Lord begins.

III. Remember that in I Thess. 5:4,9 Paul stated that the day of the Lord would not overtake believers as a thief, i.e., the general corrupt moral condition of the world would be understood by those led by God's Holy Spirit. [The exact time, however, only God the Father knows.] In vs. 3 God tells us through Paul that the day

of the Lord will not come until certain conditions prevail. We believers do not know the specific day or hour, but we can know the season, Matt. 24:32-33. The first evidence of the soon coming of the Lord Jesus is a lack of influence by God's Spirit in the affairs of mankind. This lack of Godly influence will prepare the world's population to look, not to God for guidance, but to a world leader, a human being. Paul (for God) here gives some characteristics of that world leader. He will be a "man of sin" who promotes attitudes and activities which are contrary to God's will (the Lordship of Jesus, God's Son). His status as a representative of Satan's power and will will be evident to those who know God, i.e., who are led by his Holy Spirit. The evil one and his purposes will be revealed to God's people (believers). One of the evidences which will make his position clear to believers is that he will oppose God's Son and exalt himself as God. This "son of perdition" will insist that he is God and that he alone is to be worshipped. Further, he will erect a seat of authority for himself which will be known as God's temple or throne and from there will announce to the whole world that he alone is the very God of the universe, vs. 4. In vs. 5 Paul parenthetically reminds the Thessalonians that he had told them these things during his three-week stay with them. In vss. 6-7 Paul refers to a "restrainer" who is holding the "man of sin" back. The restrainer is a person as noted by the male pronoun, "until he be taken out of the way." Many Bible students have conjectured who the restrainer is or was. Some have supposed him to have been the Roman emperor Nero; others say Satan himself who was or is biding his time until the times are just right for his advantage; and finally, many political and/or religious leaders have been so identified through the centuries. Paul makes it clear that the evil activities, which are to culminate in the coming of this ultimate personification of evil, were already being exercised. However, this "lawless one" will be controlled by God and finally destroyed by Jesus when the Lord comes. Satan has always been leashed by God and can only operate within God's limits. (Remember God's control of Satan as relating to God's servant Job.) I conclude that the Restrainer is God himself in the person of his Holy Spirit. Jesus promised in John 14:16-21, 26-29; 15:26 that God's Spirit would abide with a believer for ever, John 14:16, and review Rom. 11:25. In vs. 13 Paul assures the Thessalonian believers that they had been sanctified by God's Spirit (set aside for God's purposes) and that they should "stand fast" even in spite of those who would trouble them and seek to make them feel that their spiritual salvation was in jeopardy. In vs. 16 the apostle reminds them that both God the Father and Jesus Christ, God's Savior, loved them and "had given us (believers) everlasting consolation and good hope through (God's own) grace (unmerited favor)." Believers, because of God's unfulfilling promise, are to be comfortable in their faith in Jesus Christ and settle down to please the Lord with their good attitude and activities [whether persecuted or not]. With Louisa Stead let's affirm:

'Tis so sweet to trust in Jesus, just to take him at his word.
Just to rest upon his promise, just to know, "Thus saith the Lord."
Jesus, Jesus, how I trust him; how I've proved him o'er and o'er!
Jesus, Jesus, precious Jesus! O for grace to trust him more!

The legislature came & went quickly
next wk SBC meets in Orlando

WA

June 12, 1994

"Waiting for the Day"
II Thess. 2

Couples Class
Wendell Alford,
Teacher

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John 13:2
John
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Matt.
20:25
28
Matt 27
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Roman
tradition
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to all
3. Islam
not human
quest &
religion

Read
John
16:13

'Tis so sweet to trust in Jesus, just to take him at his word.
Just to rest upon his promise, just to know, "Thus saith the Lord."
Jesus, Jesus, how I trust him; how I've proved him o'er and o'er!
Jesus, Jesus, precious Jesus! O for grace to trust him more!

WA

June 19, 1994

"While We Wait for the Day"
II Thess. 3

Couples Class
Wendell Alford,
Teacher

I. Both of the Thessalonian letters are composed like a sandwich. Paul is very careful not to forget the daily bread along with the meat, tomatoes and lettuce. He did not want to arouse sole interest in the climax of the Christian Era and leave these new believers without the joys of everyday life while maintaining and relishing the lifelong hope of cherishing the glorious wedding of the Lord and his bride, all the trusters in God's eternal promise, Matt. 9:14-17; Rev. 21:2,9; 22:17. In other words, Paul wanted them to know, along with the privileges of being a child of God through faith in Jesus Christ, that there are likewise serious responsibilities for believers while they wait for "that Day." First, Paul encouraged the Thessalonian believers to pray for him as a missionary dedicated to taking God's Good News that Jesus saves throughout the area, even as he had brought it to Thessalonica. God's communication about Christ (the Word) would be exalted and glorified as it then was in Thessalonica. Fully aware that Paul and his companions, Silas and Timothy, would continue to be hindered everywhere, the apostle wanted the Thessalonians to include in their prayers safety for them from unreasonable and wicked persons, for not all (in fact, at that time, not many) were guided by God's Holy Spirit with faith in Jesus as Savior. At this point in this second letter Paul reiterates the faithfulness of God to keep his promise to the believers that the evil one would not only not be able to prevent these new believers from growing in their faith in Jesus Christ ("shall stablish you"), but also, if Jesus should return, they, in that event, would be kept safely ("keep you from the evil one"). The apostle here encourages them further by expressing his confidence that their lives were and would continue to follow Paul's example while with them. They were to, above all, follow the Lord's Spirit into lives reflecting God's love, and as they served him, demonstrate the patience exemplified by Christ himself, Matt. 26:39,41; Phili. 2:5-8.

II. In vs. 6 Paul divulges a knowledge of what apparently was a problem for the Thessalonian believers. There were some among them who were conducting themselves "disorderly." These disorderly ones were to be noted and identified as those who were not following true fellowship practices. Paul stated that his activities were to be emulated. The nature of these disorderly activities involved two distinct problems, and those two were interrelated. The first we noted two weeks ago; some were interpreting Paul's details regarding Jesus' second coming as having already taken place, or that he would be arriving momentarily. If his return were here already, then they could order their lives entirely on a short-time basis. There would be no need for training youngsters for lifetime vocations or trades, and no need for storing food and clothing for off-season months (winter?). In fact, there was little or no need to work at all. Evidently, what was being proposed or practiced was that life's necessities owned by those in better condition materially were being used commonly. In vs. 7 Paul suggested that his own conduct was fitting, for was he not among the elect to be "taken

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up" when Jesus returned? He reminded them that during the three weeks he was with them, he did not shirk working for his own keep. He did not eat or lodge at others expense, but rather practiced his own trade (tentmaking, Acts 18:1-3) to support himself. (One would assume that he also supported Silas and Timothy unless they also practiced a trade.) In order to understand Paul's position more fully about his opinion regarding believers' supporting those who serve them in their spiritual needs, we should examine his first letter to the believers at Corinth, 9:1-19. He relates his Thessalonian experience as one in which he worked regularly at his trade and afterwards at teaching believers, "night and day." As an apostle he could reasonably expect material support from the believers, but he specifically wanted to add emphasis to his spreading the Gospel by not taking their monetary support. Paul's instruction to them was singular and direct: "- - if any would not work, neither should he eat," vs. 10.

III. Paul's information about their situation was that some of them were not only refraining from gainful occupations, but were using the idle time to tend to other people's business as busybodies! Therein was the second interrelated problem associated with their misinterpretation of Paul's first letter. He instructed the congregation to disassociate with such people, i.e., not to consider them to be members in good standing. Such activities destroyed their effectiveness as witnesses to the goodness of God's grace through Jesus Christ. They were wrong in misinterpreting Paul's teaching in the way they had. The problems so created, resulted not only in theological error, but produced an immediate social problem as well. They were told to correct the problems, and "with quietness eat their own bread." As they were waiting for the Lord to return, they were to maintain a constant vigil in their faith and "be not weary in well doing." The wrongdoers were to be reprimanded according to Paul's instructions but were not to be thought of as enemies. They were to be considered members of the church family still. Paul's ultimate persuasion was not an appeal to his own authority but the Lord Jesus himself, vs. 12. That emphasis is basic to the individual believer and should never be overlooked when considering ones prime allegiance in making choices. The Holy Spirit will lead a believer in making correct choices if he or she asks in faith, Matt. 7:7-11; Jam. 1:5-8; 4:2-3. As Paul concludes this second letter, note especially how he did so. His salutation of grace and peace were, of course, included, but note that he called attention especially to the fact that he was signing it with his own handwriting. Remember that in II Thess. 2:2 he noted that there was the possibility of someone other than Paul sending letters to the churches and claiming Paul to be the author. At the end of this second letter to the Thessalonians, he makes sure that they knew by his own hand that he was indeed the author. The practice of authenticating ones own authorship is still practiced today, but one would do so by registering the work with the national copyright office. Paul, of course, did not have that possibility available to him. *"while we wait for the day."*

Ready to go, ready to stay; Ready my place to fill;
Ready for service, lowly or great; Ready to do his will.

June 26, 1994

"Avoiding False Teachers"
Jude

Couples Class
Wendell Alford,
Teacher

I. To understand God's message to us in Jude, we should keep in mind a thought which we considered in II Thess. 2:7. There Paul relates that, although a specific "man of sin" will appear on earth at the time of the grievous period of tribulation (after the trusters in Jesus Christ as Savior have been taken from the earth along with the Holy Spirit of God), there were, even at that time (c. 51 AD), false teachers who had eased themselves in among the believers and that the forces which would eventually culminate in the "man of sin's" rise against God had begun. Those forces will enable the "man of sin" to lead the world's people away from God's will, i.e., to believe and proclaim Jesus as God's only Savior and thereby be made alive spiritually and be at one with God, the Creator, forever. In other words, God's Word makes the point clearly that the progression of evil in the world, which was beginning as early as 51 AD, would grow worse and worse until it reaches a crescendo climax just as the "Day of the Lord" begins with the tribulation. Paul reveals this truth to us also in II Tim. 3:13; 4:3-4. During this evil progression period, many events will take place as outlined by Jesus in Matt. 24:4-14. The message of Jude gives us many details of the immoral conditions promoted either by omission or commission by those who claim to represent God's will as the time nears the period to which Jesus referred in Matt. 24:14 as "then shall the end come." Jude was written about fourteen years after II Thess. by Jude who was the brother of James and the half-brother of our Lord Jesus. The theme of Jude's relatively short letter is that the end-time apostasy (trending away from God's will that Jesus is God's only Lord and Savior, and, finally, complete departure in substance but not in form, II Tim. 3:1-7) is to be the result of the teaching and leadership of those who claim to be speaking for God, but their message is false (or truth mixed with falsehoods which can be worse than lies alone, cf. Dan. 2:28,40-44). The theme further admonishes God's called ones (vs. 1) to distinguish between the lies and half-truths of these false teachers, and the purity of God's unmerited favor (grace), God's promise to those who trust the righteousness of Jesus Christ and follow his teachings, Matt. 7:21-23; Rom. 5:1-2; 8:1-3; Gal. 2:16-21; Eph. 2:4-10.

II. Jude's salutation gives three characteristics of believers to whom he addressed this letter. Believers (trusters) in Jesus Christ are: 1) sanctified, i.e., set apart by God the Father; 2) preserved, i.e., kept eternally safe through Jesus Christ, and 3) called, i.e., to be saints or children of God and citizens of God's kingdom, Rom. 1:7. In vs. 3 Jude gives the reason he felt the urgent reason for putting in writing his thoughts to the believers. There is only one valid common denominator, "common salvation," upon which any person can rely for eternal, spiritual life, and further, it is essential that all believers "earnestly contend" (accept alone at the exclusion of all alternatives) for the faith which was presented as a final ("once and for all") revelation given Jesus and the apostles. The problem which Jude considered as especially menacing was that certain men who had "crept" (sneaked) into the circle

of believers and were changing God's grace into a position denying that Jesus' sacrifice was sufficient to cleanse completely a human spirit sinfully separated from his of her loving Heavenly Father. In subtracting from Jesus' sacrifice (or adding to it), the false teachers were either, reducing ones gratitude to God for completely saving him or her, or leaving in doubt the permanency of ones relationship to God through Jesus Christ. A believer abides by the teachings of Jesus because of love for what Jesus has done for him or her, not for fear, II Tim. 1:7-9; I John 4:18-19. Actually, it was God's love for us that made him will to give his only begotten Son in sacrifice, John 3:16, for our salvation. Therefore, when we follow Jesus' teachings we are returning God's love, being Godly, in other words, Matt. 5:48; John 14:23-24. The false teachers were teaching that one can believe in Jesus as the Messiah (Savior) but disregard moral restraints of the Holy Spirit's leading (licentious). There can be ample punitive retribution while still in the flesh even for a believer if that believer grieves God's Holy Spirit, Eph. 4:23-32.

III. Many Bible students examine the illustrations in which Jude refers to several Old Covenant situations to make his points, and believe he wrote this primarily to Jewish believers. He calls his readers' attention to the flight of God's people, the Israelites, from Egyptian slavery under the power of Jehovah God. God saved those who began the trek but afterwards destroyed those who would not believe in God's power and willingness to save them in the promised land. Secondly, some of God's angels (messengers) were rebellious by leaving the area God had assigned them. Their lot was to be taken out of service, chained in prison, and judged unfit for God's purposes and reserved for final judgment at the great judgment day, and note all of II Pet. chapters two and three; Rev. 20:2-3,8-10. Thirdly, the inhabitants of Sodom and Gomorrah who were sexually immoral (homosexuals) and whom God destroyed (punished) with an everlasting fire, Gen. 19:5,24; Rom. 1:18-28. Present-day false teachers are also presenting God in a false way, making his will into a lie. Even Michael, God's archangel, would not make a fuss about Moses' body after death, but simply told the devil, "The Lord rebuke (reprimand) you." All of these rebellious ones were guided by their natural (fleshly) selves and disregarded their own spiritual natures, even like lower animals which have no spirits (God's image). Jude then cites Cain (Gen. 4:3-8), Balaam (Numb. 22), and Core (Numb. 16:1-4) as people who rebelled against God's leadership. They were self-willed, unafraid persons who utterly disregarded God's claims on their lives. The results of these false teachers are always hindrances for God's kingdom, taking the Lord's Supper with out regard to its real significance; clouds without water; fruit trees which produce no fruit, twice dead, and pulled from the earth, roots and all; disordered ocean winds and stars; and all are destined to darkness forever. The way for a believer to detect and refute false teaching is to give heed to the apostles whom Jesus commissioned to witness the establishment of the ecclesia or assembly of believers by the Holy Spirit, Matt.16:17-18; Lk 24:49; Acts 2:17-18. The author reminds the believers that the apostles had written (told you) that in the last times there would be emotion-based decisions (without God's Spirit's direction). Jude then relates that this message is given on behalf of "him who is able to keep you from falling, and to present you faultless before the presence of his glory - - - the only wise God, our Savior."

Sept. 25, 1994

"The Kingdom of God"
Isaiah 25-27

Couples Class
Wendell Alford,
Teacher

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

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

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

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

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

won't meet again until after election - Vote!
assignment today: Chaps. 31-33 + on New 13 Chaps. 34-36

YA

Oct. 30, 1994

"The Shadow of the Rock"
Isaiah 31-33

Couples Class
Wendell Alford,
Teacher

I. Chap. 31 continues the woe (condemnation) of God upon the Jews who, in their fear of Assyria to their east, turn to Egypt to their west for help. Isaiah's admonition was that Israel's salvation was really a spiritual problem, not physical might. Jesus said that God is Spirit, and those who worship (honor God's will) him must do so in spirit, unflinchingly, John 4:24. The Jews were, according to Isaiah, depending upon their own ingenuity for strength against Assyria. They were literally playing both ends against one another to protect the middle, themselves. God's people (us) are not to depend upon their (our) own strength even though they (we) have nuclear armament. All of the physical strength mankind can muster is less than a pittance and not to be compared with the Creator's who made them. Humanity stands completely vulnerable to the Jehovah God who made them and holds them accountable to be and function according to his own design and will, Rom. 9:6-33.^{vs. 13-21} This context couches Isaiah's pronouncement that "Now the Egyptians are men, and not God; and their horses flesh, and not Spirit. When the Lord shall stretch out his hand, both he that helps shall fall, and he that is helping shall fall down, and they all shall fall together," 31:3. Isaiah goes on to quote the Lord: When a lion with hungry offspring comes for a sheep for food, a host of shepherds cannot deter the beast with loud noises. If only the Jews would yield to the Lord's strength, the Lord of hosts would come down to uphold their cause, i.e., if their cause were equal to their Lord's cause, 31:4-5; Lk 11:13; John 14:13; 15:16; I John 5:14. The plea of the Lord is that his people will return to him, and thereafter he will protect them and pass over them with protection, 30:5. Then Isaiah glimpses again to "in that day" when all, every man, shall turn from idols of their own making and God's people's enemies will be brought low, 31:7-9; II Kings 19:32-37.
→ Col. 3:5

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

Read
32:2

Read
32:7

Go to end
+
Read

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

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

Isa. 5-16 and 14-25 - a series of verses from Isaiah from Isaiah

person with responsibility

Isa. 23:1-5

E. Johnson in Rock that is my shadow Stanzas 2 Elizabeth C. Stephens Beneath the Cross of Jesus Stanzas 1 & 3

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

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

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

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

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

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