

June 8, 1997

"Jesus Enters Jerusalem"  
Matt. 21

Couples Class  
Wendell Alford,  
Teacher

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

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

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

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

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

Aug. 31, 1997

"God Created All"  
Gen. 1

Couples Class  
Wendell Alford,  
Teacher

I. Chap. 1 of the Book of Genesis (Beginnings) covers an account of the only God's exclusively creating the world on which we humans were created and live by the same, the only God. No human death (separation) is evident in this chapter. The evidence of the world's being a part of (having a relationship with other heavenly bodies), what we call the universe, occurs on Day Four. That evidence, however, does not necessarily extend beyond our own galaxy. Vs. 16 includes "the stars also," and these stars could have been of other solar systems than ours but still in our galaxy. If stars of other galaxies are intended, such information is not explicit in the text. The sequence of Days (light) succeeded by Nights (darkness) occurs in Day One, but our sun and our moon, as such, were not created by God until Day Four, vs. 16. The progression of the complexity of God's creation agrees generally with most of today's scientists' positions. Where there is a difference, I believe God's position to be the correct one! Vs. 2 states plainly that the agent of God in creating the earth was God in his person of the Holy Spirit. We know from later revelation from God's Word that God and his Spirit are one with God's Son (Logos - Word, John 1:1,14; 10:30; 15:26), and we refer to our God, through our faith in Jesus Christ, as the Trinity or Godhead, Matt. 28:19; Rom. 1:20; Col. 2:8-10. The orderly progression of God's creating the earth began by the Creator producing all of the elements, at the beginning, from nothing. The earth's elements when God first created them were without form and void, i.e., they had no coherence because of the manner in which they were spaced. In a beginning physics course I learned that matter can not be created nor destroyed, and I still believe that axiom when it circumscribes human ability. However, today I do not believe God is limited to that proposition, nor has he ever been. So, on Day One God created from nothing the matter which, over time, took the forms we experience in our day, including mankind's physical nature. Only through faith in God's Word can one believe (know) what God did in Day One, that our Creator God can bring into existence matter from nothing, Heb. 11:3.

II. On Day Two our God's creative process took some of the created elements noted above and began to relate them to one another so that the planet earth took a unique form and was separated from the other elements. One should note that our God did these acts by simply saying the words, vss. 3,6,9,11,14,20,24,26, and 29, and again note Heb. 11:3. In our day we have design engineers, architects, etc., who conceive ideas and who then depict those ideas through blueprints, schematics, etc. Mechanical, electronic, etc., engineers implement the ideas by constructing what has been designed and communicated to them. There is an element of that same process in the way the Godhead created the earth, its contents, and its atmosphere (heavens). God the Father sent his Spirit to implement his creative concepts, vs. 2. When human beings, part of God's creation, introduced acts unacceptable to God (sin), the Father sent his only Son, Jesus the Christ, to earth in the form of a human being to create a way (truth and life) for mankind to reestablish

mankind's perfect relationship with his Creator, through faith in his Son's sacrificial death, burial and resurrection, II Cor. 5:19.

III. On Day Three God arranged the earth's surface so that the water and earth (soil) were separated. The soil at God's command brought forth simple plants characterized as grass. Following simple plants, God said that the earth should bring forth herbs (shrubs) and trees. These plants were to produce seeds which would in turn reproduce their own kind. On Day Four God related the earth to other heavenly bodies so as to produce different seasons. Among those other heavenly bodies were our sun and our moon, the earth's only satellite. From the beginning God's creative acts pleased him, vs. 4,10,12,18,21,25. On the last day, Day Six, the Bible states that when mankind was created in God's image, with the potential for God's likeness, God beheld that that day was very good, vs. 31. On Day Five God created in the waters living creatures and flying creatures in the atmosphere (heavens). The water creatures developed into very large animals, whales, vs. 21. With God's blessings and the ability to multiply, the fish and fowl multiplied extensively, vs. 21-22. Beginning with Day Six the complexity and sophistication of the creatures which God was creating reached their apex. These creatures are characterized as cattle but included "everything that creepeth (is locomotive) upon the earth," vs. 25. These creatures could reproduce their own kind as could the plants. After God's creative acts through the creation of complex animals (designated cattle), God was still not satisfied that his earthly creation had reached the ultimate summit of his plan. In vs. 26 God, in consultation with himself in his threefold nature (Father, Son, and Holy Spirit), said, "Let us make a creature to be designated man, in our image, after[wards in] our likeness, and permit those beings to have dominion over the fish in the sea, the fowl of the air, the cattle, and every other creeping thing [lower animals] over the entire earth." Man was to be a unique creation, for God first created the elements (inanimate matter), then plant life, then the lower animals, and finally God created an animal of the dust (like the lower animals), who had a personality, and a free will to make autonomous choices. In God's image mankind was distinctive with ability to project himself mentally and logically in time and space. In fact, they were made up of body, a superior mind, and we will see next week in Chap. 2 an added feature (God's likeness) which will give humanity an eternal spirit and which makes him united with God in fellowship (spiritually alive). What we are saying is that man was a distinct creation as was the inanimate elements (inorganic), as was the plants, and later the lower animals (without God's image or potential to attain God's likeness, i.e., eternal, spiritual life). Vss. 27-31 relate the remainder of Day Six of initial creation. Vs. 27 stresses the point that God at this time had created the distinct creature, man, who was at first created with God's image. In this stage of creation he was able and was told to multiply even as the lower animals were created and encouraged. Mankind at this stage had the ability to procreate his own kind, i.e., there were males and females of the species man, vs. 27. In fact, God admonished mankind to "be fruitful, multiply, and populate the entire earth," vs. 28. The Creator even provided food without labor for their nutritional sustenance. And so God blessed mankind and his environment at the end of Day Six after God had finished his creation and rested. He assessed the results of his creation as "VERY GOOD!"

Sept. 7, 1997

"God's Ultimate Gift, A Soul"  
Gen. 2

Couples Class  
Wendell Alford,  
Teacher

I. Chap. 1 of Genesis relates an account of God's (the only God) creation of the earth, its relation to other heavenly bodies, plant life on the earth, animal life on the earth, and lastly, man in God's own image with the potential to become like God in having incorporated into his (man's) being a living, eternal soul. In Chap. 2 God adds further details which occurred during Day Seven in which the Bible states that God rested "from all his work which God created and made," vs. 2. This second chapter gives information which, I believe, is essential to the understanding of mankind's relationship with his or her Creator. God tells us that after his six days of creative activities, the earth and its environment (heavens) were finished. Basic matter (inorganic) was created; plants (organic) were created along with their recurring reproduction; the lower animals (not in God's image) were created with the ability to procreate. And finally, mankind (in God's image) were especially created with physical (male and female) reproductive ability. Man was the crown of all of God's creative process. Chap. 2:1 relates a broad synopsis of what God did in Chap. 1 as noted immediately above. Beginning in vss. 2-3 God introduces Day Seven stating that this Day of Rest was and is to be hallowed as a special day. Some Bible students believe that Chap. 2 involves what they call "the law of recurrence" whereby the information is simply a retelling of Chap. 1, but in a different way. I cannot subscribe to that theory because of the importance and newness of what occurred in Chap. 2. God gave special significance to Day Seven, for God rested on that day, sanctified it, and especially blessed it, vss. 2-3. That day, the seventh day of every seven, has been considered sacred (holy) by God from the finishing of his creation in six days to the present time. Special recognition of the seventh day (Sabbath) was incorporated into the Law given to Moses on Mt. Sinai as one of the Ten Commandments (No. 4, Exod. 20:8-11; Deut. 5:13-15). Why was the seventh day so special to God and therefore to his people? Because our Creator had at this time finished his physical creation of the earth and heavens and "all the host of them," vs. 1, and God changed man's spiritual status by making a man in his (God's) likeness so that the man was not only physical but spiritual (eternal) like God, vs. 7. Mankind before God gave him a soul had a physical body like the lower animals (made from earth, dust). He also had a mind, not only like the lower animals (both had brains which controlled their bodily sensory systems so that physical pain and pleasure were experienced), but man's intellect uniquely had a cognizance or awareness of what thoughts and actions represent what we call wisdom or folly. Further, mankind alone had the necessary physical organs and necessary intelligence to produce and use sounds which represent physical and/or mental concepts, speech. These unique abilities enabled man to comply with God's command to "have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over every living thing that moves about upon the earth," Gen. 1:28. Another uniqueness of mankind over the lower animals was and is an individual perception of self as a unique being, a unique personality.

II. In vs. 7 when God tells us that he not only had made mankind physically (of the dust of the ground), but now in Day Seven, God "breathed into a man [a male] the breath of [spiritual, eternal] life, and that man became a living [spiritual] soul." How important Day Seven is to the man whom God had made like himself, eternal! This man was placed in Eden to the east by God where God had planted a special garden. We must realize that when God gave this man an eternal spirit, the man was able for the first time to commune (have fellowship) with God and had a conscience to know that God was his Creator. In other words, this man had, for the first time, the ability of a physical animal to sense his obligation to do God's bidding (will). To test the man's will, I believe, God planted in the special garden two special trees which bore edible fruit. God told the man Adam (first named in vs. 19 - "the man") that he could eat the fruit of one of the two trees, the one which God's Word calls, "the tree of [which sustains spiritual] life," vs. 9. The other special tree bore fruit which Adam was told by God would cause him to die (spiritually) if he ate it. This latter tree God called "the tree of the knowledge of good and evil," vs. 9. The lesson learned from the choice which Adam was permitted to make as an eternal being (with a soul) was that eternal, spiritual life is dependent upon a human being's doing God's will. In vss. 10-14 God's Word describes the geography (physical location) of the four streams and the lands adjacent to them where Eden was situated. The Lord God put the man Adam in the Garden of Eden to cultivate and tend it. As he placed Adam there he strictly commanded him to eat the fruits of every tree in the special garden except "the tree of the knowledge of good and evil." In other words, until Adam knowingly disobeyed God his Creator, he was innocent as a newborn child is today. Until an innocent child is aware (has reached the age of accountability) of his or her spiritual condition before God, he or she is spiritually alive, but thereafter spiritually dead (separated from God), II Sam. 12:19-23; Matt. 18:2-3.

III. One of the great mysteries in the Bible to me is why God did not take one of the female humankind (in God's image) as he did the male Adam and breathe into her a living soul, but he did not. Rather, he involved Adam in a very special way to create a human female (in God's likeness) with a soul. The need for the spiritually alive female for Adam happened in an unusual way also. God gave Adam the task of naming every one of the lower animals so that Adam might find a soul-mate, vs. 18. Adam meticulously noted and named every animal which God had created, but there was in Adam's spiritual (Godlikeness) nature something that displeased Adam about every animal, including the females there with God's image but without his likeness. So God created, in Day Seven, a female human being incorporating a part (rib) of Adam, and she did satisfy Adam, vss. 23-25. It was a woman, Mary, who gave birth to God's only begotten Son. Also, it was that Son who told Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews, one night that all human beings, to be under the Lordship of God (in his Kingdom), he or she must be reborn from above (spiritually) even to see (recognize) God's Lordship, i.e., to please the Creator God, John 3:5-6, 10-18; 6:44. When Jesus first talked with Nicodemus that night, the latter had been made in God's image, but Jesus told him that he did not have God's likeness, that he must be reborn by God's Spirit, i.e. from above.

Sept. 7, 1997

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II. In vs. 7 when God tells us that he not only had made mankind physically (of the dust of the ground), but now in Day Seven, God "breathed into a man [a male] the breath of [spiritual, eternal] life, and that man became a living [spiritual] soul." How important Day Seven is to the man whom God had made like himself, eternal! This man was placed in Eden to the east by God where God had planted a special garden. We must realize that when God gave this man an eternal spirit, the man was able for the first time to commune (have fellowship) with God and had a conscience to know that God was his Creator. In other words, this man had, for the first time, the ability of a physical animal to sense his obligation to do God's bidding (will). To test the man's will, I believe, God planted in the special garden two special trees which bore edible fruit. God told the man Adam (first named in vs. 19 - "the man") that he could eat the fruit of one of the two trees, the one which God's Word calls, "the tree of [which sustains spiritual] life," vs. 9. The other special tree bore fruit which Adam was told by God would cause him to die (spiritually) if he ate it. This latter tree God called "the tree of the knowledge of good and evil," vs. 9. The lesson learned from the choice which Adam was permitted to make as an eternal being (with a soul) was that eternal, spiritual life is dependent upon a human being's doing God's will. In vss. 10-14 God's Word describes the geography (physical location) of the four streams and the lands adjacent to them where Eden was situated. The Lord God put the man Adam in the Garden of Eden to cultivate and tend it. As he placed Adam there he strictly commanded him to eat the fruits of every tree in the special garden except "the tree of the knowledge of good and evil." In other words, until Adam knowingly disobeyed God his Creator, he was innocent as a newborn child is today. Until an innocent child is aware (has reached the age of accountability) of his or her spiritual condition before God, he or she is spiritually alive, but thereafter spiritually dead (separated from God), II Sam. 12:19-23; Matt. 18:2-3.

III. One of the great mysteries in the Bible to me is why God did not take one of the female humankind (in God's image) as he did the male Adam and breathe into her a living soul, but he did not. Rather, he involved Adam in a very special way to create a human female (in God's likeness) with a soul. The need for the spiritually alive female for Adam happened in an unusual way also. God gave Adam the task of naming every one of the lower animals so that Adam might find a soul-mate, vs. 18. Adam meticulously noted and named every animal which God had created, but there was in Adam's spiritual (Godlikeness) nature something that displeased Adam about every animal, including the females there with God's image but without his likeness. So God created, in Day Seven, a female human being incorporating a part (rib) of Adam, and she did satisfy Adam, vss. 23-25. It was a woman, Mary, who gave birth to God's only begotten Son. Also, it was that Son who told Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews, one night that all human beings, to be under the Lordship of God (in his Kingdom), he or she must be reborn from above (spiritually) even to see (recognize) God's Lordship, i.e., to please the Creator God, John 3:5-6, 10-18; 6:44. When Jesus first talked with Nicodemus that night, the latter had been made in God's image, but Jesus told him that he did not have God's likeness.



I. Chap. 2 of Genesis related the first time that mankind was innocent and did not know from practice what pleased or displeased his Creator God. We are not told explicitly what Adam and Eve were to do to displease God and thereby become separated from God (spiritually dead) except that Adam had been told by God not to eat of a certain fruit in the "midst of the garden." Some believe that the eating of that certain fruit is only representative of some physical act, and that the actual activity involved the procreative process. Therefore, they conclude that human sexual activity is inherently contrary to God's will, evil. I believe that this position is incorrect, but the original evil was disobeying God's Word. God had given specific instruction to Adam not to eat a certain fruit which was pleasant to taste, to see, and to make one wise like God, i.e., to know what is good and what is evil (Jam. 4:17). The sin of eating of the forbidden fruit, then, was that such an act expressed unbelief in God's Word. What constitutes sin in our day? Disbelieving God's Word by not accepting, through faith, God the Father's Son, Jesus as Savior and Lord, when God's Holy Spirit presents that Son as the only spiritual Savior.

II. Without any introduction whatsoever the first verse of Chap. 3 states that the serpent (Satan) was more subtle (cunning) than any of the creatures which God had made on earth. Close attention to the language of vs. 1 gives no hint that God created or did not create Satan. We do know that Satan is one of the angelic beings of which we know only sparingly from Scriptures. Jesus said at Lk 10:18 that he had witnessed Satan's fall from heaven as lightning. The adversary Satan is mentioned as one "going to and fro in the earth" at Job 1:7; 2:2. In these two chapters the Scripture presents a dialogue between God and Satan concerning Job's loyalty to God. God allowed Satan in this instance to torture Job but not to take Job's life. Biblical evidence is that Satan will continue to aggravate mankind to distrust God's Word until God finally takes God's and mankind's adversary away after Jesus comes again and rules the earth, Rev. 20:10. But before that, Satan, who will have a place in heaven, will be thrown out of heaven with his fellow fallen angels onto earth, Rev. 12:7-12, where and when the sacrificial blood of the Lamb will overcome Satan. See also, Isa. 14:12-15; Ezek. 28:13-19; Lk 22:3; II Cor. 11:13-15; II Thes. 2:3-4; Rev. 13:11-15.

III. It is interesting to observe how a master deceiver operates to fool others. Satan did not approach Adam whom God had told personally not to eat the fruit of the "tree of knowledge of good and evil" before God had created Eve. Obviously Eve had been told by Adam about God's Word concerning the forbidden fruit. Satan said to Eve, "Yea [What I am about to introduce to you is very important!], has God said, 'You are not to eat of every tree of the garden?'" Eve answered Satan, "We are allowed to eat the fruit from every tree in the garden except from the tree in the middle of the garden. God has said, 'You shall not eat of it, neither shall you touch it, lest you die [spiritually],'" vss. 2-3. At this point

Satan substituted his own words, "And the Serpent [Satan] said to Eve, 'You shall not [really] surely die [physically], for God knows that in the day you eat [the forbidden fruit] thereof, then your eyes will be opened, and you shall be as God, knowing good from evil, [no longer be innocent],'" vss. 4-5. Satan was, in effect, calling God a liar, i.e., expressing disbelief in God's Word. (Rom. 1:24-25; Heb. 6:17-18) This communication interchange presented mankind with the first temptation, i.e., to disobey God's Word. How would the tempted person react to the first temptation? The woman looked at the forbidden (by God) fruit which was desirable in appearance, mentally and spiritually appealing (To defy God's Word was tantalizing.). She ate the fruit from the tree in the midst of the garden. Note the consistency of the master deceiver's temptation of Eve with that of his tempting our Lord in the wilderness just before Jesus' public service began, food (flesh), authority (political influence), and security (religious, will God keep his Word?). Satan practices the same approach today with us, before and after we are God's children through personal faith in Jesus. God's Word states, "For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life is not of the Father, but is of the world," i.e., temporary and passes away, but "the one who does the will of God abideth forever," John 1:12-13; 11:25-26; I John 2:16-17.

IV. Not only did Eve eat the fruit, but she influenced her husband Adam who likewise ate, yielding to the temptation to disobey God's Word. The immediate effect of their disobeying God's Word was that they wanted to shield themselves from God. To do so they made themselves coverings of fig leaves to separate themselves from God's presence. God sought them out (John 15:16) in the garden, and Adam explained their feeble efforts to separate themselves from God. God asked, "Who told you you needed a shield from me? Have you eaten of the fruit which I commanded that you not eat?" Adam blamed Eve, and attempted to shift the blame upon God, "The woman whom you gave to be with me, gave the fruit to me, and I did eat," vs. 12. The Lord God then asked Eve, "What have you done?" The woman, in turn, blamed Satan, "The serpent (Satan) deceived me, and I did eat," vs. 13. At this juncture God passed judgment on the serpent first, then Eve, and lastly Adam. We should note that neither Adam nor Eve admitted that he or she had disobeyed God's command (sinned). Further, they attempted to cover their trespasses by their own works with fig leaves rather than ask for God's forgiveness. Satan was relegated to the lowest status among the earth's creatures which God had created. Most importantly God promised to put enmity (antagonism) between Satan and Eve's seed (Jesus Christ, Gal. 3:16), vs. 15. God's judgment on Eve and all women was that she would suffer in conceiving and bearing offspring as well as to be subject to her husband. Adam's judgment was that he and all men would have to work for sustenance and die physically, vss. 17-19. Instead of the fig leaves, which the humans had made for themselves, God made coats of animal skins to cover their separation from God (blood was shed, Heb. 9:12-28). In mercy God drove Adam and Eve away from the tree of life so that they would not live fleshly lives forever separated from God (spiritually dead), vss. 22-24; Rev. 22:14.

Sep. 21, 1997

"The Results of Disobedience"  
Gen. 4

Couples Class  
Wendell Alford,  
Teacher

I. The first two human beings (spiritually alive), Adam and Eve, in exercising their choices which God had given them, chose to disobey God's Word. The result of their evil choice was far-reaching in that every person who has lived since has suffered physical death, except see II Kin. 2:11; Heb. 11:5. I confess that I do not fully understand this arrangement, but well into the New Covenant text God reveals explicitly that in Adam (the result of his and Eve's disobedience) all die (physically and spiritually). However, through faith in Jesus Christ all (anyone) can be made alive (spiritually only), I Cor. 15:20-28. The mystery is in the fact that every human being must die (physically) because of the state-of-being which Adam's disobedience brought upon everyone (including himself) of his issue, all humanity. The only plausible explanation which occurs to me is that God drove Adam and Eve out of the Garden of Eden and away from the tree of life, and this arrangement meant that the first human couple (and all following) would not continue indefinitely in sinful misery spiritually separated (dead) from God. Jehovah God is perfect and cannot tolerate sin, Deut. 32:4. For any person (all are sinful, Rom. 3:21-28) to approach Almighty God there must be a Mediator. That requirement was satisfied by God himself through his only Son, Jesus the Messiah. That is why faith in his Son is the best Good News that mankind can hear and accept, I Tim. 2:5.

II. In the package of sin, apart from the two deaths involved (physical and spiritual), is included strife and unhappiness. The nature of mankind changed from one of childlike innocence to one of greed and selfishness. It is the latter nature that Adam's choice passed to all his offspring, including us. The bitter fight and struggle which face every person in life is treated by Paul in his letter to the believers in the first century of Christianity. In Rom. 7 the apostle outlines how he, a believer in the Lordship of Jesus as Savior, struggled daily with his Adamic nature. Paul's conclusion in that chapter is that only through Christ can a believer accomplish victory over daily intrusions into one's desire to live for God, "O wretched man that I am. Who can deliver me from this body of death? I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord. So then, with the mind [spiritual determination] I myself serve the law of God, but with the flesh the law of sin," Rom. 7:24-25. Adamic weakness is ever present, but now God has made it possible for anyone to know God's love, forgiveness, mercy and grace through faith in his only Son, Jesus the Savior. Jesus, our Lord himself, said, "- - the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh [Adamic] is weak," Matt. 26:41. Evidence throughout Scripture makes obvious the awful, far-reaching results of sin to all humanity. When Eve first conceived and bore a son (Cain, whom I have acquired from God), she must have thought that, now God is keeping his promise, a seed from me will "bruise Satan's heel," Gen. 3:15. But such was not to occur for many thousands of years when Mary conceived and bore our Lord Jesus. God is not only patient but potent, Lk 1:34-35,37. After Eve gave birth to Cain, she soon gave birth to another son,

Abel (breath from nothing). Both sons apparently learned about God from their parents, for both worshiped the Lord at a given place and at a given time. Abel became a rancher while Cain became a dirt farmer. From the product of their labors, they each brought offerings to Jehovah. We are not told a specific reason why God accepted Abel's offering of firstlings (choice, fattest) of his flock, nor why God was not pleased with Cain's offering of his "fruit of the ground," vs. 3. The offerings, per se, were not what brought about God's displeasure or pleasure, I believe, but note that God had "respect unto Able and to his offering," vs. 4. The person's attitude was evidently also involved. In this regard, note Jesus' assessment of offerings made to God at Mk 12:38-44. The offerings there were not the important part of the gifts to God, but rather the attitudes of the givers. The gifts of the Jewish leaders were self-applauding, show and pretense, but the widow gave her two mites (copper coins) simply out of a love for God's blessings. The Bible states that "unto Cain and his offering, he [God] had not respect," vs. 5. Taking into account what Jesus said and what God's Word at Heb. 11:4 states into account, I believe that Cain did not consider that God had been the giver of the crop from which he brought his offering, i.e., Cain gave to God what Cain himself had supplied. Abel, however, gave an offering as a return to God of what God himself had supplied. Abel's act of faith God's word states, "by it [Abel's offering] he [Abel] although dead, still speaks [to us]," Heb. 11:4. When God's Law came later, the Jews came, over time, to believe that by keeping that Law, people could earn for themselves God's favor after which God was obligated to those people to do their bidding. Many people today who profess to be Christians at the same time believe that their good works must be combined with Jesus' sacrifice to earn eternal life. God has been entirely consistent with mankind since Abel's and Cain's time, for God's Word applicable to us believers today is: "For by [God's] grace you have been saved through faith [in Jesus]; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God: not of works, lest anyone should boast. For we [who are pleasing God by trusting Jesus] are his [God's] workmanship, [re]created, [John 3:3-7], in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God had before prepared that we should walk in them," Eph. 2:8-10. (italics mine - WA)

III. Cain took God's displeasure very seriously. He walked around with a long face and hated Abel even after God had told Cain that a change of attitude [Cain's] would rectify God's position. Cain defied God by killing Abel. When God asked Cain where Abel was, the older brother lied and answered God with another question, "I do not know. Am I my brother's keeper?" God knew of Cain's act, that he had shed Abel's blood (taken his life, Lev. 17:11). God passed judgment upon Cain by assigning him to be a fugitive among his people and reducing the productivity of the soil for his crops. Cain complained, and God declared (by a special mark) that anyone who would kill Cain would receive a sevenfold retribution thereby. Nonetheless, Cain left Eden to the east to Nod (Wandering), married, sired a son, Enoch, built a city and named it after his son, Enoch. Vs. 18 notes six generations of Cain, the last head of which married two wives, Adah and Zillah. Adah bore Jabal, a nomad who became a herdsman. Jabel's brother, Jubal, became a musician. Zillah bore Tubalcain who became a metal craftsman. Lamech told his wives that he, like Cain, had murdered. Twice he had killed in self-defence making him eleven times more displeasing than Cain, his forefather. Sin was rampant in Cain's posterity.

Sep. 28, 1997

"The Genealogy of Adam"  
Gen. 5

Couples Class  
Wendell Alford,  
Teacher

I. To some people Chap. 5 of Genesis is the first of many such passages in the Bible which they refer to as "begat and died" chapters. Vs. 1 of Chap. 5 states that "This is the book of the generations [genealogy] of Adam." However, a very pertinent part of that genealogy begins at Gen. 4:25, and, therefore I have chosen to include the last two verses of Chap. 4 with Chap. 5. Adam and Eve engaged in sexual intercourse, and Eve bore a son whom she called Seth (the appointed one). This name she gave her newborn son, because she said, "For God has appointed me another seed instead of Abel whom Cain killed," Gen. 4:25. In 4:26 God tells us that Adam and Eve's son Seth fathered a son Enos (Heb. Enosh, and Gk Enos). When Adam's grandson was born, it became necessary for Enos to pray to God rather than speak personally to God as Adam and Eve did originally, Gen. 2:8. We should remember that not only did Adam's son Seth have a son named Enos, and several generations later Jared had a son named Enoch, the same name as Cain's first son. Many Bible students have wrestled with this apparent duplication of names in the first section of Genesis. One of the "solutions" has been to assume the answer to be in the different sources which Moses used in writing the Genesis account. In this case the Yahweh (P) and Elohim (E) have somehow been noted twice with a resulting degree of confusion. Those who subscribe to this approach are left with an unsolvable mystery without patching and piecing together different sections of the Genesis text. I do not subscribe to the Autruc-Graf-Wellhausen Hypothesis (the JEDP, so called "Scientific Criticism") and have another reason for the duplication, of course. Remember that Cain chose to leave his family and the presence of God because of God's judgment against him for killing his brother Abel, Gen. 4:16. I believe that, because of his separation from Adam and Eve and their other offspring, the names Enos, Enoch, etc., perhaps meant "firstborn," etc. Other names in Cain's and Seth's genealogies were perhaps likewise duplicated. For example, note Methusael and Lamech (Gen. 4:18) and Methusalah and Lamech (Gen. 5:25). If you have ever attempted to trace your own genealogy back a few generations you no doubt have found names duplicated (John, Mary, etc.) which can cause confusion.

II. Chap. 5 begins with a synoptical reference to God's having created mankind male and female and called their name Adam. They were both one as indicated by their name Adam. They were both created in God's likeness (with eternal souls). At age 130 Adam fathered Seth, his first son after Abel and Cain. Adam lived for 800 years after Seth was born, "and he begat [other] sons and daughters," vs. 4. We can affirm from several biblical citations that both Cain and Jared fathered Enochs (Gen. 4:17; 5:18; Lk 3:37; Jude 14). A very important difference between these two Enochs should be made. Cain's son Enoch is not described as one who was begotten, as Seth was, in Adam's "own likeness, [and] after his image," cf. Gen. 4:17 with Gen. 5:3. To me this difference distinguishes between the lineage through whom our Lord Jesus Christ will come. That purity of our Lord's lineage follows after Noah's family (Shem, not Ham

or Japheth), and after Abraham's family (Isaac, not Ishmael), Isaac's family (Jacob, not Esau), and Jacob's family (Judah, not one of the other eleven). This process of lineage selection by God bothered Paul, God's apostle, and he was enlightened by God's Holy Spirit in Paul's letter (God's Word) to the first century believers in Rome. At Rom. 9 Paul was grieved that many of his own people according to fleshly lineage were unwilling to accept God's Messiah, Jesus. In Rom. 9:6-8 God's Word states, "Neither, because they are [physical] seed of Abraham, are they children [spiritually speaking]; but 'In Isaac shall thy seed be called.' That is, they which are the children of the flesh, these are not the children of God, but the children of the promise are counted as [spiritual] seed," John 8:44,47,52-59. This spiritual lineage reveals a mystery in God's decisions, but Rom. 9 concludes that the secret is contained in God's sovereignty, Rom. 9:14-29. God is the Potter, people are the clay. If you are trusting Jesus as your personal Savior and Lord, God has molded you into his likeness, John 3:6,16-18.

III. Adam lived to the age of 930, and then he died. Adam's son Seth fathered a son when he was 105 years old, but lived until he was 912. Seth's son Enos' first son was Cainan, but Enos had other sons and daughters, vs. 10. At age 70 Cainan fathered Mahalaleel who lived 895 years after fathering Jared at age 65 along with other children. Jared was 162 years old when his son Enoch was born. Jared died at age 962. Enoch lived 65 years and fathered Methuselah. In the midst of all this "begatting and dying" a peculiar thing happened! After Methuselah was born, Enoch "walked with God" for three hundred years and did not die! Why did he not die? Because "God took him," vs. 24. Why did God take him? Because he had been walking with God for 300 years. Enoch only lived 365 years which was a relatively short time for the period. His son Methuselah lived for 969 years, for example. His son's birth must have had a profound effect upon Enoch, for it was at that time that Enoch began his long (eternal) walk with his Creator. Enoch was translated which means that he was taken directly to heaven by God without having experienced physical or mortal death. Only one other person in the Bible was translated to heaven. The other person was Elijah, II Kings 2:11. This interesting and glorious process of taking mortals directly from earth to heaven is, I believe, the same process promised by God for those who are (or have trusted) trusting Jesus when the Lord returns to earth for us, his ecclesia. That promise God makes to us at I Cor. 15:51-58 and I Thess. 4:13-18. "Behold I show you a mystery: we shall not all sleep [die physically], but we shall all be changed. In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump, for the trumpet will sound, the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we [believers who are still physically alive] shall be changed [translated] - - - Thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ," I Cor. 15:51-52,57-58. "Then [when Jesus returns] we who are alive [physically] and remain [on earth] shall be caught up together with them [believers who have died] in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so shall we ever [eternally] be with the Lord," I Thess. 4:17. Sin was rampant in Noah's day as it will be when the Lord Jesus returns for us, Gen. 6:5; Matt. 24:37-44; I Pet. 3:20.

Oct. 5, 1997

"God's Grief And Grace"  
Gen. 6

Couples Class  
Wendell Alford,  
Teacher

I. Last week in outlining "the generations of Adam" we began with the last two verses of Chapter Four and continued on through Gen. 5:27 when Lamech was born to Methuselah who then died. I made this break within Chapter Five deliberately because of what happened at 5:28. In 5:28 Lamech fathered a son who had a notable impact on human history. That son was Noah which means "Rest" and which is akin to the term "Sabbath." The use of the need to rest in this latter instance appears, in retrospect, to be a second rest for a spiritual reason as God had rested after completing his physical creation of the physical world and its environs (heavens). But mankind beginning with Adam and Eve and after God had breathed into them his eternal Spirit (spiritual life), became exceedingly evil (sinful) in God's sight. It happened this way: "When men began to multiply [greatly] on the face [surface] of the earth, and daughters were born unto them, that the sons of God saw the daughters of men that they were fair (physically desirable); and they took them wives of all which they chose," vs. 1-2. To Bible students through the years this phenomenon has been a paradox. A number of those students concluded that the "sons of God" were angelic in nature but were still able to cohabit with "the daughters of men." Other students believe that "the daughters of men" were the descendants of Cain who had moved eastward away from Seth whom we remember from Gen. 5:3 as a son of Adam and who carried the image and likeness of his father Adam. A third theory having to do with "the daughters of men" refers back to the creation of mankind before God breathed into Adam God's eternal Spirit. For this last theory to be practical, a biological procreative possibility for cross-breeding would be necessary between those men with God's image and those men with God's image and with God's likeness, Gen. 1:27 and Gen. 2:7. Mankind with only God's image, created by God before he especially created Eve, had only the potential for God's likeness. Therefore, "the daughters of men" could have been different biologically (because of the time element) from the daughters of the "Sons of God", vs. 2. Still, I believe that crossbreeding did take place, and the result was a group of people of immense physical bodies (giants), vs. 4; Num. 13:33; Deut. 1:28. They were probably also covered with more body hair than the "sons of God." This hairy covering stayed in the lineage in the offspring of "the sons of God" even as late as one of Isaac's twins, Esau, Gen. 25:25. When Esau and Jacob were born, God did not like Esau, and, even though he was the firstborn of Isaac, God chose Jacob to inherit the promises of God, Mal. 1:2-3; Rom. 9:13. Of the three theories concerning "the sons of God" and "the daughters of men," (angelic sons, Cain's sons, and sons with God's image but not God's likeness), I believe the last, because, in my opinion, that theory maintains Biblical integrity from Genesis through the New Covenant, John 8:44.

II. There can be no doubt that the mongrelization of "the sons of God" with the "daughters of men" brought about spiritual havoc upon the entire earth. This awful condition of mankind's spiritual status before God is given explicitly in vs. 5, "And God saw that



the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination [thought and intent] of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually." If that leaves any question in anyone's mind, hear further, "And it made the Lord sorry that he had made man upon the earth, and it grieved him in his heart. And the Lord said, 'I will destroy man - - from the face of the earth; both man and beast, and lower animals and birds, for I am sorry that I made them,' " vss. 6-7. But then, just as God was contemplating these actions, "Noah found grace in the eyes of the Lord," vs. 8. God's grace is ever ready to forgive when any person has faith in God's Word, Heb. 7:25; 11:7. Noah through faith in God's Word revered God and opposed the evil of the world's population in his day. Noah's faith made him righteous in God's sight. "Noah was a just man and blameless in his generations, and [as Enoch had done], Noah walked with God," vs. 9. Yes, in the midst of this spiritual morass Noah "walked with God," and he also fathered three sons, Shem, Ham, and Japheth. God chose this time to take the step which Noah's name means, a "rest," by eliminating all humankind on earth except Noah who was "walking with God" and his family, II Pet. 2:5.

III. To implement a new start for humanity, God chose to wash the earth clean with a flood. His action was not to destroy all life upon the earth, but only the ungodly were to be eliminated, only that which "before God was corrupt," vs. 11. "- - all flesh had corrupted his [God's] way upon the earth," vs. 12. God said to Noah, "The end of all flesh is come before me with the violence which they have caused, and now I will destroy them with the earth," vs. 13. God then instructed Noah to build a large water craft in which he, his family, and all desirable animals would escape a forthcoming flood over the earth. We should keep in mind that when God told Noah anything, he believed it. That belief in God's Word is what pleases the Lord. Just as today, putting ones eternal destiny through a simple, childlike faith in a Jewish carpenter who lived, taught, was humiliated by his own people, and who by his people in conjunction with the Roman political authority, was put to death in a most hurtful fashion, so now is human wisdom put to the ultimate test. "For the message of the cross is to them who are to perish foolishness; but unto us who are believers it is the power of God. For it is written [God has spoken.], "I will destroy the wisdom of the [worldly] wise, and will bring to nothing the understanding of the prudent. - - - God has made foolish the wisdom of this world. - - - Jesus Christ is the power of God, and the wisdom of God," I Cor. 1:18-2:5.

IV. Noah believed God's weather forecast, "And pay close attention, I, even I, am bringing a flood of waters upon the earth - - and everything that is in the earth shall die," vs. 17. However, God promised (made a covenant with) Noah to save him and his wife and his three sons and their wives, and the pairs of (male and female) every lower animal which he brought aboard the ark with them, vss. 18-19; I Pet. 3:20. The people were so spiritually corrupt in Noah's day that Jesus had proclaimed God's will to them through Noah, but they had refused to heed God's message. Peter (God's Word) wrote that they are now awaiting God's judgment in Hades, I Pet.3:19;

Oct. 5, 1997

"God's Grief And Grace"  
Gen. 6

Couples Class  
Wendell Alford,  
Teacher

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Oct. 12, 1997

"Noah's Bon Voyage"  
Gen. 7

Couples Class  
Wendell Alford,  
Teacher

I. In Chapter 6 we did not take time to examine the craft which Noah built to conform to God's Word to him. Through Noah's faith in God's command, he spent many years in designing and constructing to God's specifications (Gen. 6:14-16) the ship which would prevail during the coming flood and which God promised Noah would come upon the earth. The flood God said would kill upon the earth's surface all life except Noah and his family, eight souls in all, I Pet. 3:20, and the animals taken aboard the ark. We will now take the time to examine the mechanics of the ship which Noah built. The material of which the craft was constructed was given as gopher wood in Gen. 6:14. This instance is the only place in the Bible where this type of wood is mentioned. The word "gopher" means "resin" or "pitch," i.e., trees bearing such a substance such as conifers, pine, fir, or cypress. This wood would not only be permeated with pitch or resin but would also be a source of such substance which would not absorb water readily, nor would destructive bugs or vermin have eaten or attacked it for nesting, etc. Also, the pitch with which Noah and his workers were told to seal the cracks in the hull could have come from the same trees. God had told Noah, "And shall pitch it within and without with pitch [tar]," Gen. 6:14. God instructed Noah to build within the ship's hull compartments, rooms, and nests to accommodate the animals, his family, and store the supply of food for them all. Next God gives the dimensions of the ship. Given that a cubit is about eighteen inches in length, the length of the ship would have been about 450 feet from bow to stern or 300 cubits. To give ourselves a perspective of the length, we can note that a football field is 300 feet in length so that Noah's ark was as long as one and one-half times the length of a football field between goal lines. To continue the comparison, the ark's width was 50 cubits wide or 75 feet, and a football field is 160 feet wide. The height of the ark was 30 cubits or 45 feet. The ratio of the dimensions of the craft was roughly equivalent to an American battleship which are approximately 600 feet long, 100 feet wide, and 30 feet high (draft dimension). The ark was definitely not a big square box but rather sleek in overall shape. To follow God's instruction Noah would have to have been rather skilled in carpentry and geometric design. A window was built high along the top for ventilation, oxygen in and putrid air fumes out. The ship had tiered levels with three in all. I believe that there was only one door into the ship, probably about midway between bow and stern. Since the ark is compared to a haven to sustain the remnant of all mankind in a spiritual sense, the one door fits nicely (I Pet. 3:20) into Jesus' statement that, "Truthfully, truthfully, I say to you, I am the door of the sheep. All that ever came before me are thieves and robbers, but the sheep did not hear them. I am the door: by me if any man enter in, he shall be saved [be spiritually alive with God], and shall go in and out, and find pasture [spiritual sustenance]," John 10:7-9.

II. I want us to note especially in Gen. 6:20 that God's Word states that the animals were not caught or forced to enter the ship, but

rather, "[they] shall come unto thee [Noah]." They must have volunteered! The time had come for Noah, his family, and the animals to enter the rescue vessel. We should note and stress that of all the people living on earth, only eight, Noah and his immediate family, were worthy of salvation. Jesus said, "But as the days of Noah were, so shall also [the moral climate] the coming of the Son of man be," Matt., 24:37-39; I Cor. 15:51-52. When the Lord gave the order for Noah and the others on the passenger list to board the ark, God gave again the reason for their qualifications for being thus saved, "for thee have I seen righteous before me in this generation," vs. 1. And what makes us today eligible to be called by God, righteous? We are told by God at John 3:16-18; Rom. 3:21-4:8; 5:1. Noah had faith in what God told him (God's Word), and that faith saved him, Heb. 11:7.

III. A man once offered a reward to anyone who could prove a contradiction in the Bible. Someone submitted that contradiction exists between Gen. 6:19 and Gen. 7:2, because the former citation called for only two of each kind of animal whereas the latter called for seven. A court case determined that there was no contradiction, because of the distinction made that the seven were of two kinds of animals both clean and unclean, Gen. 8:20; Lev. 10:10; 11. God called for all of the ark's passengers to enter the ship seven days before the rains were to begin, vs. 4. Noah was 600 years of age at this time, and he had been a long time building the ark. He had been proclaiming God's promise of a flood during this time in word and in deed. No doubt all the people in the area scoffed at Noah about his "obsession" with God's Word, II Pet. 3:1-7. Now he and his family are safe in the ship for a full seven days waiting for the rains to begin. I believe that if even one of the scoffers had knocked on the door (Matt. 7:8; Rev. 3:20) and told Noah that he/she had changed his or her mind, Noah would have let the person in, and God would have blessed the conversion. But not one did. They went about their daily schedules disallowing Noah's proclamation of God's Word. Poor old Noah with his curious viewpoint! After the seven days of grace had come and gone, the rains began, and note in vs. 11 that, not only did water come down from the sky, but also the "fountains of the great deep were opened." At this time God had "shut them in [the ship]," vs. 16. For forty days and forty nights the water level came up and so did the ship which Noah had sealed with pitch inside and out as God had told him. The water covered the whole earth even rising above hills and then, higher and higher above the tallest mountains, vss. 19-20. The ark continued to stay afloat above the rising tide. Some believe that the flood covered only the Near East, but that would have required a miracle by God to have piled the water up contrary to the basic law of physics, water maintains its own level. Also, the Biblical evidence does not claim such a miracle, as such. All life on earth was killed. However, no such mention is made of the sea creatures. But of other fleshly beings only Noah and his family and the animals on the ark remained alive, vs. 23. The waters covered the entire earth for 150 days (five months) after the forty days and nights of rain, vss. 12, 24. We must remember that in a deluge of sin upon the earth, there is God's promise of deliverance.

Oct. 19, 1997

"God Remembered Noah"  
Gen. 8

Couples Class  
Wendell Alford,  
Teacher

I. In Chap. 7 we learned that "the waters prevailed upon the earth an hundred and fifty days," plus it had rained before that for "forty days and forty nights." If one adds the seven days which Noah and his family stayed in the ark before the rains began, Noah, his family and the animal entourage were aboard the ark for a total of  $7+40+150$  or 197 days. Then after that long time the flood waters were "assuaging" or subsiding for another approximately four months. A rough calculation would put the ark afloat for about five months and on the mountain for another seven months. One must remember that the Jewish calendar is based on a lunar month of twenty-eight days each. The total period in which Noah was in the ark was one year and seventeen days given a thirty-day month as we calculate months. The mountains on which they finally landed was in the Ararat Range. Ararat is the word meaning "high or holy ground" from which the modern term Armenia is derived. The peak which has come to be known as Ararat is called Massis by the Armenians themselves and is actually a mountain with two peaks, the higher of which rises to about 17,260 feet above sea level and the other peak about 4,000 feet lower (13,260 feet). The Araxes River flows around the mountain and onward to the Caspian Sea to the east. Mount Ararat is on the border between Iran and Turkey and is called Noah's Mountain by the Iranians. The mountain (Ararat) on which Noah landed is about 500 miles to the north of where he began in the Tigris-Euphrates Rivers area. We should not leave a study of Ararat without noting that the prophet Jeremiah pronounced a "Thus saith the Lord" against Babylon in "the day of trouble." At Jer. 51:27 the prophet refers to those kingdoms against Babylon (cf. Rev. 17-18) will be the kingdoms of Ararat, Minni, and Ashchenaz. Ararat is the central area with tentacles reaching out to Russia, Turkey, and Iran (Persia). Minni refers to the source area of the Euphrates River (Ham's area?), and Ashchenaz (Ashkenaz) refers to a great grandson of Noah, i.e., Japheth's son's (Gomer) son, I Chron. 1:6. I believe that Japheth's people eventually settled the Orient.

II. Noah was for over a year under rather cramped circumstances undergoing the results of his having obeyed God's Word. The famous sailor could have during this long, trying period become discouraged and given up on God's promise. God has forgotten me and my family! And what about all these animals which God told me to tend, they can not remain alive much longer. Perhaps just as Noah was about to give up, "God remembered Noah and every living thing, and all the cattle (animals) that were with him in the ark: and God made a wind to pass over the earth, and the water assuaged (subsided or abated)," vs. 1. The rains stopped and the springs no longer flowed from the earth's depths. For 150 days as the flood waters slowly subsided, the ark, ever so slowly, lowered and settled upon the mountain of Ararat. After the ark came to rest on the mountain peak, Noah could see only the tops of the mountains. He waited another forty days and opened the window for a better view of their surroundings. Through the open window he released a raven (crow), and the raven did not return. Ravens are scavengers and, I believe,

that with all the dead animals about, he would have found ample food to devour. When the crow did not return to the ship, Noah released a dove through the window. Unlike the crow the dove found no food about, so she returned to the ark. Noah put his hand out and the dove was taken back into safety. After another week, he released the dove again, and this time the dove returned the same day with a fresh plucked olive leaf in her mouth. With this evidence Noah knew that the waters were sufficiently abated to accommodate their departure from the ark. However, for good measure, he waited another week and released the dove the third time. This time the dove did not return at all to the ark which was a definite sign that Noah could remove the covering from the ark and wait for further Word from God. "And God spoke to Noah, saying, 'Leave the ark, you, your wife, and your sons and their wives with you. Take also with you every living thing that you brought - - that they may breed abundantly on the earth, and be fruitful and multiply,' " vss. 16-17. It was Noah's nature to follow God's Word explicitly.

III. What was Noah's first action when he and his family and the animals were safely off the ark? He "built an altar unto the Lord; and took every clean beast, and every clean fowl, and offered [them as] burnt offerings on the altar," vs. 20. Recall that Noah had followed God's instruction when assembling the animals before embarking upon the voyage to include extra animals which were clean. The reason for the extras, we here learn, were for this sacrifice when God had kept his promise to Noah. Noah's recognition of God's using him in this way for implementing this one-time spiritual rest for all life upon the earth, pleased God. When the clean animals were burnt for an offering (recognition) to God, "the Lord smelled a soothing aroma, and the Lord said in his heart, 'I will never curse the ground any more for man's sake although the imagination (intent and thought) of man's heart is evil from his youth (from the age of accountability); neither will I again smite any more every thing living as I have done,' " vs. 21. Further, God promised that as long as the earth remains, seed time and harvest, and cold and heat, summer and winter, and day and night will continue, vs. 22. In other words, God will maintain his natural pattern so that mankind can plan his affairs. This promise of God to maintain his faith in mankind even though he recognized that mankind is universally, innately inclined to disobey the will of the God who creates them, is a singularly, very significant relationship which God has announced in his eternal Word to his created human beings, John 3:14-17; Acts 4:10-12; Rom. 3:23; Gal. 3:6-14. As we follow God's relations with mankind throughout his Word, Old and New Covenants, this arrangement of God's perpetual offering of forgiveness continues until the master deceiver (Satan) is delivered from the earth, Rev. 20:10. But as in our day, not everyone has been/is willing to accept God's plan (believe his Word) of spiritual salvation. That plan is that a person (anyone) receive God's only begotten Son, Jesus the Savior, as his or her personal Savior and Lord of life through faith in God's promise in his Word, John 6:35-40. Noah had faith in God's Word and thereby "became heir of God's righteousness," Heb. 11:7. Noah was faithful and patient to receive God's promise, Heb. 11:39-40; I Pet. 3:18-20; II Pet. 2:5. Thank God for his grace!



I. After Noah and his family disembarked from the ark and made an offering to the Lord, God blessed them and told them to be fruitful, and replenish the earth. A significant change happened as mankind related to the lower animals. Thereafter the animals would fear and dread mankind. Remember that when Noah was bringing the lower animals into the ark, we learned (Gen. 6:20) that they did not fear Noah but voluntarily came into him? Now, in vs. 2, the Lord said that this arrangement was changed. This new fear and dread of the animals for humankind was universal, i.e., beasts, fowl, and even the fish in the sea were afraid. The Lord said that they were to be at the disposal of (given or delivered to) mankind. Before the flood men and animals ate only vegetation (Gen. 1:29-30), but after the deluge mankind were told by the Lord that they were free to make food of the animals as well as the plants, "Every moving thing that liveth shall be food for you, even as the green herb have I given you, everything," vs. 3. Some current animal enthusiasts have taken this passage to mean that mankind was originally told by God to be vegetarians, and, people are better without eating other animals. My reaction to such a proposition is that morally all mankind, with the exception of only eight persons (Noah, his wife, his three sons and their wives), were totally evil, "And God saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination (intent and thought) of the thoughts of his heart were only evil continually," Gen. 6:5. Whether one should make the direct connection of ones food to ones spiritual condition is interpretive. However, the fact that the lower animals became fearful and dreadful of people after they became human food is more obvious. There was one condition which God laid down before people were to eat meat. They were not to eat meat while it contained its own blood. Such meat according to orthodox Judaism was and is not koshered, i.e., suitable for human food. There are two reasons for not eating slaughtered animals containing their own blood, I believe. First, killing animals by spilling their blood is less painful and more merciful for the animals. This method of slaying involves rapidly opening a main artery such as the aorta at the neck. Secondly, the blood is considered the life of an organism. This position is evident throughout the Bible. In vs. 4 God states that a body's life and that same body's blood are synonymous. We should note that at Acts 15:13-20; 21:25 the eating of blood was considered inappropriate even for Gentile believers, but compare this position with Rom. 14:13-23 and I Cor. 8:8-13; 10:24-25; I Tim. 4:1-5. When we believers say that our Lord Jesus shed his blood for our sins, we are saying, at the same time, that Jesus gave his mortal, physical life for our spiritual salvation. We are being redeemed by the loss of his life, his blood, Isa. 53:3-11; Matt. 20:28; 26:28; John 10:11; Rom. 5:1-21; I John 3:16. It is, therefore, our faith in Jesus' shed blood (the taking of Jesus' life) that makes us acceptable to God, and just as Jesus was raised from the dead, so will we believers be raised to life eternal.

II. In vss. 5-6 God's Word continues to emphasize the relationship

of a live body and the blood which sustains that life. A person should not shed the blood of another person, and if an animal kills a human, that animal should be killed. When a person is murdered by another person or killed by a lower animal, the act is an affront to the Creator who made that dead person in his own image. Because of that fact, human life is precious in God's sight. "Who sheddeth man's blood, by man shall his blood be shed: for in the image of God made he man," vss. 5-6. Capital punishment for murder is God's requirement here. I believe that at present the government in which a person lives has the obligation to exercise capital punishment upon those murderers who are incorrigible and uncivilly present danger to others. Jesus' position about murder is given in Matt. 5:20-22. Murder follows hate and at that stage persons should exercise self-discipline. Continuing to call the hated person bad names only intensifies the separation between the two. One's goal should be reconciliation, not murder. Such reconciliation typifies what God has made possible for all mankind through the shed blood of his only begotten Son, Jesus the Messiah (Savior). While we were yet sinners, God sent Jesus to die for all who will trust him, Rom. 5:3-8.

III. In vs. 7 God again admonishes Noah and his family to be fruitful and multiply, bringing forth abundantly in the earth. God spoke to Noah and his sons telling them that he was then establishing a covenant with him and all of his descendants (us). The covenant also includes the lower animals which came through the flood period. Never again would God destroy with a flood as in the immediate past diluvial episode, vs. 11. Further, the sign of the permanency of God's covenant will be that rainbows would appear at times when clouds gather for rain. These bows are not only to remind mankind of God's promise but God also, vs. 16.

IV. The rest of the chapter, vss. 18-29, relate what Noah and his family did as they began to populate the entire earth as God had told them to do. Noah chose farming as his vocation and planted a vineyard of grapes. The valleys in the Ararat Range were very fertile due, in part, to the settling of large amounts of humus (mulch) following the flood. Noah's vineyard must have produced a bumper crop, and with a portion of the grapes he made wine. He overindulged and in a drunken state he undressed in his tent and became unconscious. We are not told why, but his son Ham entered the tent while his father was drunk and nude. He saw his father's condition and apparently observed, with some interest, Noah's nakedness. Ham must have snickered and told his brothers Shem and Japheth about his father's sin. They carefully, discreetly covered Noah with a blanket without looking at him. After Noah sobered and learned what had happened to him, note that he did not curse Ham but rather Ham's son, Canaan, the descendants of whom Moses and the Israelites were about to engage when Moses wrote Genesis. Noah stated that his curse would cause Canaan and his descendants to be subservient to the descendants of Shem and Japheth. Noah stated that Shem's Lord is God, and we remember that through Shem's lineage Jesus our Lord came, Lk 3:36. Noah died after reaching the age of 950 years.

I. When Noah was 600 years of age, the flood came as God had promised, and the world was renewed spiritually. The world's most noteworthy sailor lived another 350 years after the flood, for he died at the age of 950, Gen. 9:28-29. After relating these facts, God's Word tells us how Noah's sons, Shem, Ham, and Japheth kept God's command, with their wives of course, to repopulate (replenish) the earth with humankind. As people were born of the three couples, their descendants became the different nations of the earth's population. The academic fields given to a study of how mankind developed during this period and later is ethnology/anthropology. The information given in this chapter is very important in understanding the later development of all humanity and how the peoples were relating to one another. It is here that all of Noah's posterity was gathering into groups, but there continued to be coherence among them all because of the language commonality. We should note that the Bible's treatment of all of humanity (See also I Chron. 1-5.) begins with the peoples of Ham and Japheth but immediately bypasses their posterity specifically and continues the lineage of Shem. The reason for this treatment is, I believe, because Shem's line is the peoples through whom God the Father's Messiah will come, the Lord Jesus Christ. In fact, the Biblical evidence appears to give the picture that, immediately following the flood, Ham's and Japheth's offspring were the primary and dominant peoples, especially Ham's.

II. Japheth's sons were Gomer, Magog, Madai, Javan, Tubal, Meshech, and Tiras. From these seven sons came seven grandsons of Japheth by Gomer and Javan. We are not told of the offspring of the other five sons of Japheth, but we do know from vs. 5 that they were all Gentiles (not descendants of Shem) who settled along the coastlines of bodies of water. Some anthropologists and ethnologists who have studied and analyzed, primarily from the linguistic perspective, the genealogy of these peoples, say that from Magog came the Slavs, Russians, Poles, Croatians, and others in northern Europe and East Asia. Japheth's grandson Javan fathered the lineage which included the Medes, Persians, Afghans and Kurds. Javan's offspring included the Greeks and Romans from whom came the French, Spanish, Portuguese, and Italians. From Tiras came the Germans, Scandinavians, and the Anglo-Saxon races. When North, Central, and South America were settled initially, most of the new settlers came from the descendants of Japheth-Tiras (English) and Japheth-Javan (Spanish and French). It is my opinion that the Orient was settled at the beginning by one of Japheth's sons (Madai?) who journeyed very early to the Far East area and was the progenitor of the current day Orientals. They have been the most prolific, as God commanded, of all the sons of Noah, for today over half of the earth's population consists of Chinese, Japanese, Indian (even American Indians, Native Americans, could have been from the Orient through Alaska, etc.), Pakistanians, and other Orientals. In regard to the world's total population, demographers are amazed by the world population increase. In 1960 the world had about three billion inhabitants. The demographers predicted then that the earth's population would double in

forty years, in 2001, to six billion. The current world population is 5,869,671,805 which means that we are at this time ahead of the 1960 estimate.

III. Ham had four sons, Cush, Mizraim, Phut, and Canaan. Recall that it was the last son of Ham, Canaan, whom Noah cursed when Noah's son Ham violated his father's privacy. The mystery of why a generation was skipped for the curse to apply remains unknown. We do know that when Moses wrote Genesis, the Israelites were about to engage the Canaanites to claim the promised land west of the Jordan River. The descendants of Ham's son Cush were the peoples who moved to Egypt, Libya, Ethiopia, and southward into Africa. Of Cush's son, Nimrod, the Word states, "he began to be a mighty one in the earth," vs. 8. Further, the Lord noted that Nimrod was "a mighty hunter," vs. 9. This reference is not to one who hunted wild game, but rather means that he sought out men to be his followers. We would call him today a politician or statesman. He attempted to organize all people under his own leadership and was quite successful. The Word explains what is meant by Nimrod's being "a mighty hunter" in vs. 10. "And the beginning of his (Nimrod's) kingdom was Babel, Erech, Accad, and Calneh in the land [area] of Shinar [Babylon]. Out of that [he] went to Asshur [Assyria] and built other cities, Nineveh, Rehoboth, and Caleh which was the main city, i.e., the capital." It is evident from the Bible account here that Nimrod, Ham's grandson, was a person with an intense political ambition. He was a king (had a kingdom), and from what followed at Babel, he demonstrated what we would call today, I believe, an absolute monarch or dictator. In any case, his activity became known as that which constitutes rebellion against the Lord God, spiritual confusion (Babylon), Rev. 18:1 - 19:6. Ham's descendants were, immediately following the flood, the most politically powerful of all of Noah's offspring. Ham's people established the first of what we call today a civilization. After the flood the people of darker pigmentation were the most prominent people on earth in the sense of human leadership. The peoples of the northern regions who today are Caucasian (white) were not to reach their prominence until millennia later. By fleshly racial status, the race who will eventually rule the entire world will be a descendant (humanly speaking) of Shem, Jer. 23:5-6; Lk 1:34-35; 3:23,36; Rom. 9:5; I Cor. 15:24-28.

IV. In the Genesis account of the history of mankind, after vs. 20 the Bible's attention is given primarily to the descendants of Shem. After that, all peoples apart from Shem's people are enemies of God's people, because, I believe, God's main purpose was to prepare a people by whom will be born God's Son, the Savior of all people everywhere who will believe God's Word. When that Savior came to earth, the relationship between God and his creatures constituting humanity changed so that, spiritually speaking, there is no racial differences among all peoples of the earth, Rom. 3:22,29-30; 10:12. After God raised his Savior, Jesus, from physical death, he sent his Holy Spirit at the next celebration of Pentecost to speak to a gathering of Jews and Jewish proselytes in Jerusalem. The Holy Spirit spoke to the entire assembly in their various languages, "And they were all amazed and perplexed, saying to one another, 'What does this mean? [because] we do hear them speak in our tongues the wonderful works of God,'" Acts 2:11-12.

I. We noted in Chap. 10 that Ham's grandson Nimrod became a well-known politician shortly after the flood and organized the people who followed him. During this period of Nimrod's ascendancy, he was operating in the area immediately to the east of the Tigris River in what later became known as Persia and today is Iran-Iraq. A chief reason which expedited Nimrod's political influence was that all people's language was the same. Some of Nimrod's following traveled westward to Shinar. Shinar was the region containing the cities of Babel, Erech (Iraq?), Accad, and Calnek, Gen. 10:10. Here Nimrod established his kingdom headquarters at Babel although his political control extended on westward as we noted also in Chap. 10. In the area of Shinar building tall buildings was not possible, because of the lack of stone and rock. The only building materials available were clay for brick and slime (asphalt) for mortar. Shinar lay on the alluvial (sand and clay deposit) plain of Babylonia which for many centuries was perhaps the most fertile region on earth. This fertility produced food supplies which gave the inhabitants a superior advantage over the population in outlying areas. As a result, the people of Shinar became very affluent. Affluence is a hard taskmaster for a people who cannot meet the moral challenge such wealth presents. Our Lord Jesus said of wealth, "Truly, I say to you that a rich man shall hardly enter into the kingdom of heaven [be subject to the will of God]." When his disciples heard what Jesus had said, they were amazed and asked, "Who then can be saved [be spiritually quickened, made eternally alive]?" Jesus' response was, "With men this is impossible, but with God all things are possible," Matt. 19:23-26. The citizens of the United States of America are, I believe, on the precipice if a moral pitfall if we do not heed God's Word concerning the evil consequences of depending upon materialism as the supreme goal of life and of the nation. Jesus also said, "For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also," Matt. 6:21.

II. Under the leadership of Cush's son, Nimrod, the people of his rich kingdom decided to make brick and establish a city in which they would build a tower that would "have a top reaching to heaven." To us in the last years of the twentieth century, this notion seems ludicrous, even comical. But the problem with their thinking was not the mechanics of building a tower (ziggurat) to make them citizens of heaven, but these people under Nimrod's leadership were assuming that they could be equal to God by living where God lives. Their physical activity represented a rebellion against the Creator God. They were attempting to make themselves, not merely creatures of God, but rather, by their own efforts, equal to God. They were attempting to bypass the need to have faith in God, and justify themselves by their own efforts. They said, "Let us build a tower which top may reach unto heaven, and let us make us a name [equal to God's name], for ourselves lest we be scattered [weakened] abroad over the whole earth," vs. 4. Of course God knew what these people were attempting and noted the city and tower which his creatures, "children of men" were doing. God said, "Behold, the people is

one, and they have one language; this [rebellion against God] they begin to do; and now nothing will they be restrained from doing which they have proposed (imagined) to do," vs. 6. God then proceeded to "confound their language" so that they would not be able to coordinate their projects. Further, the Lord scattered the people about the entire earth. This dispersion halted the building of the city and the tower. The name of the city was Babylon or Babel which in Hebrew means "confusion." The confusion was the result of God's confounding mankind's language (into many) and scattering them all over the earth, vs. 9. We are not given the details of exactly how God did these two things, but last week we noted how God miraculously, on the first Pentecost after the Lord's ascension, enabled various people who knew only their own languages to understand the good news being proclaimed as Jesus' disciples spoke in their (the disciples') tongue which was Aramaic (Assyrian dialect of Hebrew). As William Cowper once said, "God works in mysterious ways, his wonders to perform."

III. As we have noted earlier, God's Word relates information about all peoples of the earth, but the majority of the Scriptures are given to the lineage of Shem from whom our Lord Jesus Christ came. That lineage is given at Matt. 1:1-17 and Lk 3:23-38. From the beginning of creation when God saw that mankind would, by nature, refuse to obey God's will for him, the Lord made provision for a Savior who would redeem sinful mankind, Gen. 3:15; I John 2:1-2, and be forgiving of mankind's weaknesses, Gen. 8:21; I John 1:8-10.

IV. Now we turn from the rebellious offspring of Ham and Japheth, two sons of Noah, to his third son, Shem. (The spiritual condition of Ham's and Japheth's descendants [Gentiles] is given in God's Word at Rom. 1:18-32.) Shem was 100 years old and fathered a son Arphaxad just two years after leaving the ark. Shem lived another 500 years during which he begat other sons and daughters. The heads of each subsequent family after Noah's son Shem were: Arphaxad, Salah, Eber, Peleg, Reru, Serug, Nahor, and Terah. When we reach Terah, we learn that Terah had three sons, Abram, Nahor, and Haran. Terah and his family lived in Ur in Chaldea. Chaldea was a country which bordered on the Persian Gulf and constituted the southern part of Babylonia. Here the river deposits of the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers made agriculture most profitable. Babylon was the capital of Chaldea. One of Terah's sons, Haran, died before Terah and his family left Ur for a distant land promised to Abram. Before they left Ur, Abram married Sarai and Nahor married Milcah, his brother Haran's daughter. Sarai was Abram's wife and the daughter of Abram's father, Terah, but not of Abram's mother. Hence, Abram was Sarai's half brother, Gen. 20:12-13. From today's perspective, we could say that this intermarriage involves incest and was contrary to God's Law. However, a close examination of the time it happened discloses that: 1) Abram had a belief in the one true God but lived among a people who followed evil gods and practices, and 2) God's Law had not been given nor codified until for over 430 years later, Gal.3:6-18. I believe that intermarriage was the only way Abram and his family could have followed God's leading.

Nov. 16, 1997

"God's Covenant With Abram"  
Gen. 12

Couples Class  
Wendell Alford,  
Teacher

I. Our attention now turns away from all of the descendants of Noah's two sons Ham and Japheth to the offspring of Noah's other son, Shem. We have noted earlier that the remainder of the Bible is devoted to the people (Shem and his descendants) who are the lineage of God's coming from heaven to earth as a human being, Jesus the Son of Mary and God himself, Matt. 1:18-25; II Cor. 5:19. At this point in our study of God's Word, we should keep in mind that our perspective of chronology slows to a more even pace. In the first eleven chapters, and especially the early section, the time elements were not easily followed. God's creation of first the elements, then the simple plant life, followed by the lower animals, and finally sophisticated animals with their pinnacle being humankind, involved time spans which we cannot determine with absolute certainty. Our best scientific judgment is based upon such things as the carbon fourteen testing. But when God created something physical from nothing (Heb. 11:3), he could have started with something old when it first appeared. For example, a man in God's likeness was created by taking a man in God's image and breathing into him an eternal spirit (Gen. 1:26; 2:7). How old was Adam when God made him eternal (with God's likeness)? Also, how old was Eve when God created her by involving Adam in her creation, Gen. 2:21-23? Answers to these questions we are not given in the Bible. Therefore, we are limited in our knowledge and left with a mystery which only the Creator understands. We did learn in Gen. 1-11 that mankind did not meet God's expectations for them. Adam and Eve themselves violated his command for them. One of their sons murdered another son. Through the following generations until Noah was born only one, Enoch, "walked with God" (pleased the Lord). People universally turned from God's will until Noah "found grace in the eyes of the Lord," Gen. 6:8. God was so displeased with mankind generally that, "it repented the Lord that he had made man on the earth," Gen. 6:6. Mankind, "grieved him (the Lord) at his heart." Because Noah and his family (eight souls in all) pleased God, they were spared God's cleansing of the entire earth by water, a flood. Thereafter, the sons of Noah multiplied and those descendants, organized under Ham's grandson, Nimrod, openly rebelled against the Lord God by seeking to become equal to God in heaven. Even though God's patience was tried by man's rebellion, the Lord continued to be forgiving and prepared, ever so gradually, for the appearance of his final solution to man's overcoming, through faith in his Son, Jesus Christ, the evil interruption of God's plan for humanity. That solution would be his coming to earth personally to remedy mankind's spiritual plight by defeating Satan, the deceiver of God's creation, Rev. 20:10.

II. In Chap. 12 we see God's beginning that long preparation of human salvation by choosing a man who was born amidst the earth's evil population who were ignoring God. But in Abram God found a man of faith who was willing to sacrifice his own goals for God's way. From this man of faith came Judaism, Islam, and Christianity. It is evident that multitudes have chosen Abram's faith as a founda-



tion for pleasing God. Abram's faith was counted by God as righteousness, Gen. 15:6; Rom. 4:3. Humanly speaking all of God's Word was given through Abram's posterity. God appeared to Abram and promised him three things, and God laid down one condition: Abram was to leave his homeland and his father's household and proceed to another place where God would lead him. God would: 1) give to Abram and his seed after him the land where God would lead him, 2) make Abram's name great and of Abram and his descendants a great nation, and 3) bless all who would bless Abram and his descendants, and curse all who would curse Abram and his descendants, and through Abram bring a blessing to all families of the earth, vss. 1-3. Thus, the Lord made a covenant with Abram.

III. Some Bible students have noted what for them is a problem regarding whether Abram left Ur in Chaldea as commanded by God, or did he simply follow his father Terah north to Charan (Haran)? In other words, was leaving Ur the choice of Terah or Abram? When Stephen (one of the first deacons) at Acts 7:2-4 addressed the Jewish council in Jerusalem, he said that Abram was called by God "when he was in Mesopotamia (Chaldea), before he lived in Charan. - - - from there, when his father was dead, he moved into the land [Palestine], wherein you [the Jews] now live." I believe God's Word at Acts 7:2-4 although at Gen. 11:31 it is stated, "Terah took Abram his son - - - and they went from Ur - - - to go to the land of Canaan." There Abram's father Terah was given the position of leadership (through seniority) in this account, I believe. However, I believe that the idea to leave Ur was Abram's answer to God's call. Why was God wanting Abram to leave the Chaldeans? The proper answer is given at Josh. 24:2 where Joshua told all the assembled Israelites, "Thus saith the Lord God, '[When] Your fathers dwelt [in Ur] even Terah the father of Abram, and the father of Na[c]hor, served other gods, and I [God] took your father Abram and led him throughout all the land of Canaan.'"

IV. Abram did not follow God's command explicitly when he left Charan after Terah died. Abram at age seventy-five took his nephew Lot with him to Canaan which meant that he did not leave every member of his father's family when he left for Canaan. He took Sarai, Lot and all their possessions, and left Charan, "and into the land of Canaan they came," vs. 5. Again, the Lord appeared to Abram after he journeyed to Shechem on the Moreh Plain where the Canaanites had settled (descendants of Ham). The Canaanites were barbaric and uncivilized. Finally Abram, under instructions from God, reached the land which the Lord had promised him. The Lord appeared again to Abram, and he erected an altar to God and worshiped to recognize God's leadership in what he was doing. He left Shechem and went to a mountain just east of Bethel (house of God) about twelve miles north of Jerusalem. There Abram pitched his tent, built another altar to God, and worshiped. He then traveled to the south and began to experience a severe famine. In what constituted a lack of faith, Abram went into Egypt to avoid the drought for food. He instructed Sarai, because of her outstanding beauty, to tell the Egyptians that she was his sister for his own safety. The Pharaoh did discover and take Sarai into his household to be his wife. The Egyptian ruler lavished gifts upon Abram while planning to take Sarai to be his bride. God plagued the Pharaoh who learned of Abram's trick, and who chided Abram and sent them out of Egypt, even with the gifts which he had given Abram.

I. At the end of Chap. 12 we learned that Abram, his wife Sarai, and his nephew Lot were literally driven out of Egypt by the Pharaoh. Pharaoh was planning to marry Sarai until he learned that Abram had tricked him by declaring that Sarai was only Abram's sister, not his wife. But recall that during the time that Pharaoh was courting Sarai, the Egyptian ruler lavished upon Abram what amounted to a sizable dowry. The amazing aspect of this temporary arrangement between Pharaoh and Sarai was that when the Egyptian became what was perhaps disgusted, he sent (forced) Abram out of Egypt apparently with the entire dowry. Is this position (that Abram became rich in the process) really correct, a safe assumption? The facts cannot be otherwise when we examine the opening of Chap. 13. There we learn that when "Abram went up out of Egypt, he, his wife, and all that he had, and Lot with him to Negev [south of the area of the Salt (Dead) Sea]. And Abram was very rich in cattle, in silver, and in gold," (my italics-WA) vs. 1-2. The Pharaoh must have been extremely generous! From the desert area in the south, Abram journeyed with his entourage on north to between Ai and Bethel, about twelve miles north of Jerusalem. He returned there, because that place was where he had first built an altar and set up his tent upon reaching the land of the Canaanites on his original journey from Charran (Haran). This place was where Abram first called upon the name of the Lord after the Lord had appeared unto him.

II. Lot was the son of Haran, Abram's brother, and Lot's sisters were Milcah, the wife of Nahor, Abram's brother, and Iscah, the daughter of Haran (redundancy intended). At any rate, Lot must have been a favorite relative of Abram, because he appears to have been a "father" to him after Haran, Lot's father, brother of Abram, died. Haran evidently died when Lot was quite young, because Haran died even before the family left Ur in Chaldea to go to Charran. The evidence is that Lot did accept Abram's Lord as his own, also. Recall that one of the reasons that God required Abram to leave the Chaldeans, his father Terah, and his grandfather, Nahor, all were worshipers of idols and not the Lord God, Josh. 24:2-3,14. For the above reasons, I believe, Abram kept Lot with him and protected him everywhere they went. Before they left Bethel originally and went down into Egypt, the rich land was able to support the stock (goats, sheep, and cattle) of both Lot and Abram. During their sojourn in Egypt the land had apparently deteriorated (The famine had taken its toll.) and was unable to support both of their flocks upon their return, vs. 6. We are not told of Lot's household status until later, but he was well-off in possessions. Abram and Lot were living in an area where the Canaanites (descendants of Ham) and Perizzites (rustic open country dwellers) lived, vs. 7. Both Abram and Lot owned or hired herdmen to tend their flocks, very likely because their herds were so large. These herdmen began to complain about the scarce feeding problems. Abram told Lot, "Let's not become antagonistic toward one another about the feeding ranges of our flocks, for we are family. I will tell you my position in the matter. There are ample ranges for our flocks if we choose

to expand. I will give to you your choice. Would you prefer to expand to the east along the Jordan valley or to the west farther into Canaan?" Abram's offer demonstrated his love for Lot and his (Abram's) utter generosity toward his nephew whom he had apparently reared, as noted above.

III. From where Abram and Lot were located when the former offered the choice of locations, Lot could see the large expanse of the Jordan River valley to the east, the large plain along the Jordan. The land lay all the way from the Jordan to the east to the area around the southern end of the of Dead Sea. Not only was the soil very fertile, but all of the land was amply watered. The Word tells us that the land around the end of the Dead Sea (at Zoar) was, at that time, as luscious in crop and stock production as had been "the garden of the Lord," the Garden of Eden. Further, crop production was bountiful as Abram and Lot had seen along the great Nile River basin in Egypt while they were there escaping the drought in Canaan. Lot did not hesitate to make his choice of land to the east, and Abram remained in Canaan. As Lot moved about with his flocks, he pitched his tent as far east as the town of Sodom. But Lot learned immediately that the inhabitants around and in Sodom "were wicked [backbiters of one another] and sinful [displeasing] before the Lord exceedingly," vs. 13.

IV. The Lord appeared to Abram, after Lot had moved eastward, and told him, "Lift up now your eyes, and look from the place where you stand northward, and southward, and eastward, and westward. For all the land which you can see, to you will I give it, and to your descendants forever. And I will make your descendants [as numerous] as the dust of the earth: so that if a man can number the [particles] of the earth's dust, then can your descendants be [counted] numbered. Arise, walk through the land in the length and width of it, for I will give it to thee," vss. 14-17. After this promise of the Lord to Abram, the patriarch moved southward to Hebron about nineteen miles southwest of Jerusalem toward Beersheba. Hebron has been known since the time of Abram for its old, huge oak trees. In fact, the area was known as the "plain of Mamre." "Mamre" used in vs. 18 means literally "strength," probably relating to the oaks which grew and still grow there. Abram built another altar just outside Hebron and worshiped the Lord there again. He lived the remainder of his life in the area of Hebron, and never actually owned land personally except a tract he purchased from Ephron of the children of Heth (Canaan's son) at Hebron, Gen. 23:16-20; Acts 7:5. In the Lord's calculation, however, Abram was the possessor of the land and his descendants who came after him, Gal. 3:10-14. We believers in Jesus Christ as citizens of God's kingdom will inherit the entire earth, including the Near East, Matt. 5:1-5; Rom. 4:1-5:2. The earth's real estate is here a figure of speech which includes the promise of God to all who have faith in the promises made by God, to all who believe the Lord's Word.

"Standing on the promises of Christ the Lord,  
Bound to him eternally by love's strong cord,  
Overcoming daily with the Spirit's Sword [Word],  
[I'm] standing on the promises of God my Savior."

I. Recall that in Chap. 11 all the peoples of the area on either side of the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers spoke the same language, and therefore, their efforts were concerted. Under these conditions the people rebelled against the will of God under Nimrod, Cush's son. Thereafter God confounded their efforts in two ways: language difference and geographical scattering. As Abram was growing up, this division of the people brought about clans of people into groups with common interests and pursuits. By the time of Abram's seventy-fifth year when he had left Charan (Haran), spent time in Egypt during the famine, and returned to Bethel, clans were living to the east of the Jordan River. These clans were led by kings as their chief leaders were called, and loyal citizens followed. (The people organized politically very much like the American Indians did when the Europeans arrived in the Americas in the thirteenth century AD. The various tribes were called "nations", and their leaders were "Chiefs.") At times, when several of these "kings" had a common interest or enemy, the kingly leaders would operate as a league against other groups of clans. The geographic areas commanded by the leaders would probably constitute what we would call a community or village today. In some instances certain leagues of these "nations" (Heb., "Goyim") were given general command or counsel by one leader. An example of this general leadership is noted in vss. 1,9, "Tidal king of nations." Groups of people settled their group differences in Abram's time exactly as humankind did and do as in WW I and II. A chief difference is the number of human lives involved and lost, and property destroyed. In WW I ten million military personnel were slain, and as a result of the general, sudden mix of the peoples of the world, a worldwide epidemic of influenza killed an additional twenty million, including 540,000 in the U. S. in 1918. In WW II the U. S. alone had a total of 16,353,659 military personnel serving with a total of 1,079,162 casualties, including 407,316 killed. We could consider such figures to overshadow the "small" wars noted in Gen. 14. However, if you take into account what was happening to our "father of faith," Abram, at that time, these "skirmishes" were of ultimate importance to the lineage of the Judeo-Christian faith.

II. Whether the war given in vss. 1-3 is the first war ever fought in human history we do not know for sure, but we do know that it is the first war recorded in the Bible. Four kings of Shinar (Chaldea or Babylonia), Ellasar (area south of Ur), Elam (area named for one of Shem's sons, Gen. 10:22), and the Tidal king mentioned above. These four kings made (declared) war against the five kings to the south around the southern end of the salt sea (Dead Sea). The latter five kings reigned at Sodom, Gomorrah, Admah, Zeboim, and Bela (Zoar). The five kings were captured by the four kings of Shinar, etc., listed above and were forced to pay tribute to them for twelve years. In the thirteenth year they rebelled against the tribes to the north. The next year a king Chedorlaomer, a Tidal king, leading the northern forces, marched south against the southern tribes of Sodom, etc., and slaughtered the inhabitants there. The

land in the Sodom area contained many slime (asphalt-crude petroleum) pits, and as the routed local inhabitants attempted to flee from the northern invaders, many of them were slain as they fell into the asphalt pits. Evidently, the subterranean crude oil was so abundant that it flowed from discharge openings in the earth. An aside: Is it possible that these petroleum deposits were so prolific that they, along with natural gas which often accompanies petroleum, were the fuel which Jehovah used later utterly to destroy Sodom and Gomorrah because of their citizens' sins against God? As the Sodomites either were killed in the oil pits or fled to the mountains (higher ground where there were no oil pits), the victorious invaders plundered the area and gathered the remaining people and all of their valuables, including food and livestock, and made preparation to take it all back home to the north. Among those captured were Abram's nephew Lot, his family, servants, and his livestock, for they, you will recall, had chosen to move to the Sodom area (Gen. 13:10-11), rather than stay with Abram in the land of Canaan.

III. As the victorious kings and their "troops" left for home, one of the Sodomites escaped. That escapee knew Lot's relationship with Abram over in Canaan, and proceeded to Canaan and tell Abram of Lot's circumstance. I have attempted to stress the affection and love Abram had for his nephew Lot. This profound devotion was put to the extreme test when Abram learned of Lot's capture. The action Abram took reveals to us also more about his material status. He was still encamped among the oaks of Mamre near the families of Eshcol and Aner, brothers of Mamre. But in Abram's household, which included his hired hands or slaves, were three hundred and eighteen men trained in mobile defensive weaponry. Abram's love for Lot made his defensive abilities also an offensive force. He took these trained men and pursued the kings from the north beginning at Dan. Using darkness of night in his strategy, he formed groups and defeated the northern alliance all the way to Hobah near Damascus. There Abram's opposition was completely overcome, and they gave up all the booty they had taken in the Sodom area. This booty included the men, women, children, and all the possessions (livestock, etc.). Abram and his victorious "troops" returned the inhabitants back to the Sodom area, including his nephew Lot. As they approached Sodom, the king there at his palace at Shaveh welcomed the triumphant Abram.

IV. A mysterious person, Melchizedek who was king of Salem, met Abram and blessed him in "the name of the most high God," vss. 18-19. Melchizedek "was the priest [one who relates humanity to God] of the possessor of heaven and earth." What makes Melchizedek so mysterious? Where did he learn that there is really only one God (monotheism)? Who were his ancestors? Why did he choose to celebrate being God's priest by offering Abram, God's faithful one, bread and wine? Genesis, the record of human genealogies does not even mention Melchizedek's parents! This unusual priest assured Abram that God himself had "delivered thine [Abram's] enemies into thy hand," vs. 20. To recognize Melchizedek's true priesthood under God, Abram gave him a tithe of all his material booty. God's Word at Hebrews, Chap. 5, likens Jesus as God's only priest (God's Son) who is entirely separated from all other priests such as the Aaronic priesthood. Jesus' priestly function can therefore be likened to Melchizedek's. Abram was so persuaded by Melchizedek's blessing that he refused to honor the Sodom king's offer to keep the people taken from Sodom and let Abram keep the goods.

I. Every person should have two plans for his or her life, one for immediate (today's) concerns and another for long-range goals. What are your plans for today and tomorrow, and what do you expect your condition and circumstance to be in five years, ten years, and beyond? Abram had God's promise that his contribution to God's plan would be substantial because of God's promise at Gen. 12:1-3, and Abram believed God's promise. When Abram chose to put his life in jeopardy in the war with the northern forces, he was aware that he could have been killed. He no doubt, experienced a fear during his time in battle, a fear that came to be known for our WW I forces in Europe as "fox hole" religion. Now in Chap. 15 Abram realized that he had been successful in rescuing his nephew and his family and goods from King Chedorlaomer, but God had promised him that his seed would become a mighty nation of an innumerable population. The patriarch was about eighty-five years of age, and nothing was happening to prove God's promise. His wife Sarai was already too old to be bearing a child, and apparently Abram felt that his long-range plans were just not being fulfilled.

II. Just after Abram's war experience, the word of the Lord came to him in a vision. Abram must have remembered God's priest, Melchizedek, blessing him in God's name and assuring him that it was God who had been with him in the recent war and kept him safe and successful. In the vision the Lord said to Abram, "Fear not, Abram, I am your shield [protector] and your exceeding great reward," vs. 1. I believe that Abram was a practical man, and, even though he had faith in God's promise, he was attempting to understand how he (Abram) would fit into God's plan. His response to God's assurance in the vision was to request a better understanding of what was to happen next. "And Abram said, 'Lord God, what will you give me, seeing I go [cannot have a child] childless, and even the heir of my estate [at present] is this Eliezer of Damascus?'" Eliezer was Abram's chief servant, and by local custom at the time, the person who would be heir of Abram's estate unless he had an offspring of his own. Eliezer was from Damascus which was some distance from Hebron, Abram's home. Abram must have found him to be very good at supervising and managing his (Abram's) affairs. Abram said further to God, "My perception is (Behold), to me you have given no seed, and, therefore my possessions will be taken from my posterity," vs. 3. Again, the Lord told Abram that, "This [Eliezer] is not to be your heir, but one [who] will come from your own bowels [body] shall be your heir," vs. 4. This vision evidently happened at night, for the Lord led him from his tent out into the night and under the stars. God told him to look up at the stars and note the myriad of heavenly bodies. Of course Abram could not count the array of stars, but God promised again that Abram's offspring would outnumber the plethora of all stars there. At this point in God's assurance, Abram's faith was reaffirmed, "And he believed the Lord [the Lord's promise], and he [the Lord] counted it [Abram's belief, faith] to him for righteousness," vs. 6. (Psa. 32:1-2; Rom. 4:3,9,16-5:1) Simply put, God was demonstrating his loving

mercy toward Abram, because Abram trusted God's promise under conditions which were, to Abram, impossible. Abram was rich in material possessions, but he felt a need for more which is only possible for God to supply. I am reminded here of what our Lord Jesus said to the rich young ruler of the Jews at Mk 10:17-27.

III. I stated above that I believe that Abram was very practical minded. We know from the above that Abram believed God's promise, but even after this belief had been completely affirmed (vs. 6), (Abram understood that it was, in fact, the Lord who had chosen and led him from Ur of the Chaldees to this new land away from his family), Abram sought further proof of God's direction in his life. God gave to him a sign, "And he [Abram] said, 'Lord God, whereby shall I know that I shall inherit it [the land which you have promised to me]," vs. 8. God then outlined a procedure which, in our day, would constitute a legal contract between two parties. In this connection we should recall Gideon's response to a similar situation. The children of Israel had sinned, and the angel of the Lord came and sat down with Gideon under an oak tree. God's messenger told Gideon that God would deliver the Israelites from their enemies under Gideon's leadership. Gideon asked God to be specific in the promise by making dew to collect on a fleece laid upon the ground. Then he wanted God to withhold the dew the following night. The Lord confirmed his promise as requested, and Gideon's troops were thereafter victorious under Gideon's leadership, Jud. 6:36-40. The Lord invites his followers to prove his promises. Another example, at Mal. 3:10 God told the Israelites to "prove [test] me now herewith saith the Lord of hosts, if I will not open the windows of heaven, and pour you out a blessing - -." Likewise, Elijah asked God to demonstrate that Elijah was indeed God's prophet at I Kings 18:36-40. Baal's "prophets" learned of God's truth in much sorrow. And how are we, who are trusting Jesus as our Lord and personal Savior for eternal life, to know that we are pleasing God? The answer is found at John 3:5,14-18; 14:1-7; Rom. 8:14-17, 31-39.

IV. Back to God's contract with Abram concerning the Lord's promise that Abram would indeed inherit the land of Palestine. God instructed Abram to, "Take me [God] a heifer, a female goat, a ram (all three to be three years old), a turtledove, and a young pigeon. Abram killed (shed blood) and dressed all except the fowl, cut them into halves, laid the pieces side by side, and kept the buzzards away until darkness came. As the sun was setting, a deep sleep (paralysis) fell upon Abram, and, his mind became profoundly fearful (filled with awe). The Lord spoke to Abram, "Your posterity (seed) will be in another land [Egypt] as strangers for many years (400), but God will judge those who enslave your people. They will return to your land with great possessions. Before that you will live a long life, die, and be buried, because the iniquity of the Amorites is not yet full (complete)," vss. 13-16. (Note the long range plan of God, which is similar to the promise to Abram, and for us today, Lk 21:24; Rom. 11:25; Heb. 11:39-40.) As God spoke, Abram saw a brilliant flame pass between the pieces of the sacrificed animals. The Lord assured Abram that his people (of faith in his God) would have and enjoy the land between the Nile in Egypt and the Euphrates in Iraq-Iran, vss. 17-21. I believe that this area will be the headquarters of the coming thousand-year reign of our Lord Jesus Christ in the kingdom of God on earth.



Dec. 14, 1997

"Sarai Becomes Impatient"  
Gen. 16

Couples Class  
Wendell Alford,  
Teacher

I. If the chapter we examine today does nothing else for us, it, beyond any doubt, proves to us that Abram, and especially Sarai, were as human as we are today. We sincerely want to believe God with our whole being, but there are times when our fleshly limitations tug and pull at us with almost relentless persuasion. Or, as God's Word relates our constant dilemma at I John 1:8, "If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us." But, "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. If we say that we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us," I John 1:9-10. Paul also in God's Word admitted that he (as we) believers and trusters in God's promise through faith in God's Son Jesus Christ have a continual challenge to follow God's Spirit and conform to God's perfect will for us, Rom. 7:18-24. Again, God's Word provides release from the clutches of sin for us believers in the concluding verse of Rom. 7, "I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord. So then with the mind I myself serve the law of God, but with the flesh the law of sin." The end result of, even those who trust Jesus, is mortal death. All have sinned, but we who believe in Christ will have everlasting, spiritual life. Because Christ was raised to life, even so we have assurance in God's Word that our groaning for perfection will be accomplished as God's Word promises, " - - even we ourselves groan within ourselves, as with birth pains looking forward to the redemption of our bodies. For we are saved by hope, but hope that is seen is not hope, for what a person sees, why would he/she need to hope for? But if we hope for that we see not, then we do with patience (eager anticipation) wait for it," Rom. 8:23b-25. God's Holy Spirit represents God to every member of the ecclesia, Rom. 8:26-29,35-39.

II. Abram did not have the direction and power of God's Holy Spirit who was not sent for believers until after God sent his Son to earth to be sacrificed. When Jesus was sacrificed and returned glorified to the Father God, only then did God send his Spirit in a special way, John 15:26; 16:7-15; Acts 2. I have given this rather lengthy introduction to Gen. 16, because we need to take into account God's long-range plan as given in his Word before we confuse Abram's relation to our Lord with our own relation with the same God. It is true that God had appeared to Abram several times (five) to prove or test Abram's faith in God's promise through Gen. 16, and one can see in Abram a growing maturity in his faith in God's promise through these five appearances. God first appeared to Abram when the latter was still living at his birthplace, Ur in Chaldea. Abram must have been impressed with God's first appearance to him, because he took action (He left his homeland.) as a result. After Abram arrived in the land where God called him, he showed human weakness by leaving that place when a famine threatened his subsistence. The third test for Abram was the riches which he was able to amass during and immediately following the journey to Egypt. Essentially

it was these riches which separated him from Lot whom he loved. (Their stock herds became so large.) Fourth, Abram was given the forces necessary and God's direction and protection (as a shield) to win the war against the kings from the north and rescue his nephew Lot.

III. In Chap. 16 today we come to the fifth test for Abram and Sarai after God had appeared to and promised them an heir, a son, who would assure Abram's greatness through his personal heritage, Gen. 12:1-5; 15:4. As we noted in Chap. 15:3, Abram was apprehensive because God was not quick to fulfill his promise to Abram concerning a promised son as heir. This lack of a sudden fulfillment of that promise slowly became an overwhelming attack upon Abram's faith in God's promise. Evidently he began to wonder if he (Abram) should take the initiative to implement God's plan. Perhaps Sarai was even more concerned about slow response to his (God's) promise than Abram. At that time and place the belief was that if there were no children born to a couple, the fault was with the female spouse. Also, Abram and Sarai grew up among the Chaldeans who lived under a different moral code than Abram's (and ours) Lord wants for his people. Sexual faithfulness to one's spouse was not considered wrong as a human activity. People, who are created in God's image, are no different than the lower animals! I believe that we live today in a society with a growing affinity with the same "lower animal morality!" And so it happened, when Abram was about eighty-five years old and Sarai was about seventy-five, she had lived barren until she was provoked by her own impatience (to wait for God's promise) and to "take matters into her own hands." When Abram and Sarai left Egypt, recall that they left very rich materially. They not only had goods, stock, gold and silver, but they also brought back to Canaan servants of Egyptian nationality. One of these servants, Sarai's personal maid, was apparently young, of child bearing age. Sarai, in her longing for a baby, approached Abram telling him that the Lord was responsible for her being barren after these long ten years in Canaan. The maid's name was Hagar, and Sarai gave her to Abram to be his wife (concubine). As noted above concubines were an acceptable arrangement then and there by people who were not following God's will. I do not believe that such activity was God's will then nor now, because God never changes, Heb. 13:8; Jam. 1:1-7. Mankind changes, but not our Lord. In other words, I do not believe that what Sarai suggested and with which Abram complied was what God wanted. Their worst sin by this action was not the physical act which they committed, but their disbelief in God's promise to Abram. Abram had sexual intercourse with Hagar, and Sarai immediately despised her when Hagar became pregnant with Abram's child. Sarai admitted that what she had done was wrong when Hagar became very arrogant toward Sarai. This spite was insignificant compared with the long-period results of the animosity between the son whom Hagar carried in her womb and his heirs, and the son of God's promise later born to Abram and Sarai and his heirs. Hagar, the Egyptian, ran away from Abram's household under the pressure of the hatred of Sarai. Hagar went far into the wilderness (desert), and near a spring she was approached by an angel of God. Hagar was surprised by being recognized by Abram's

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God's angel, but she believed him when he assured her that, if she would return to Abram's home and submit herself to Sarai, God would prosper her and her son whom he named "Ishmael." Her descendants would live in the same area, "in the presence of his brethern," [Abram's offspring] and become innumerable, Gen. 25:12-16. Ishmael "would be a wild man whose hand will be against every man, and every man's hand against him," Gen. 16:12. The current world scene with rampant terrorism is being initiated by some present-day followers of Muhammad, (570-632AD) Arab prophet and founder of Islam whose Supreme Being is Allah.

Dec. 14, 1997

"Sarai Becomes Impatient" ~~C~~  
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Teacher

I. If the chapter we examine today does nothing else for us, it, beyond any doubt, proves to us that Abram, and especially Sarai, were as human as we are today. We sincerely want to believe God with our whole being, but there are times when our fleshly limitations tug and pull at us with almost relentless persuasion. Or, as God's Word relates our constant dilemma at I John 1:8, "If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us." But, "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. If we say that we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us," I John 1:9-10. Paul also in God's Word admitted that he (as we) believers and trusters in God's promise through faith in God's Son Jesus Christ have a continual challenge to follow God's Spirit and conform to God's perfect will for us, Rom. 7:18-24. Again, God's Word provides release from the clutches of sin for us believers in the concluding verse of Rom. 7, "I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord. So then with the mind I myself serve the law of God, but with the flesh the law of sin." The end result of, even those who trust Jesus, is mortal death. All have sinned, but we who believe in Christ will have everlasting, spiritual life. Because Christ was raised to life, even so we have assurance in God's Word that our groaning for perfection will be accomplished as God's Word promises, " - - even we ourselves groan within ourselves, as with birth pains looking forward to the redemption of our bodies. For we are saved by hope, but hope that is seen is not hope, for what a person sees, why would he/she need to hope for? But if we hope for that we see not, then we do with patience (eager anticipation) wait for it," Rom. 8:23b-25. God's Holy Spirit represents God to all believers, Rom. 8:26-29,35-39.

II. Abram did not have the direction and power of God's Holy Spirit who was not sent for believers until after God sent his Son to earth to be sacrificed. When Jesus was sacrificed and returned glorified to the Father God, only then did God send his Spirit in a special way, John 15:26; 16:7-15; Acts 2. I have given this rather lengthy introduction to Gen. 16, because we need to take into account God's long-range plan as given in his Word before we confuse Abram's relation to our Lord with our own relation with the same God. It is true that God had appeared to Abram several times (five) to prove or test Abram's faith in God's promise through Gen. 16, and one can see in Abram a growing maturity in his faith in God's promise through these five appearances. God first appeared to Abram when the latter was still living at his birthplace, Ur in Chaldea. Abram must have been impressed with God's first appearance to him, because he took action (He left his homeland.) as a result. After Abram arrived in the land where God called him, he showed human weakness by leaving that place when a famine threatened his subsistence. The third test for Abram was the riches which he was able to amass during and immediately following the journey to Egypt. Essentially it was these riches which separated him from Lot whom he loved. (Their stock herds became so large.) Fourth, Abram was given the forces necessary and God's direction and protection (as a shield) to win the war against the kings from the north and rescue his nephew Lot.

III. In Chap. 16 today we come to the fifth test for Abram and Sarai after God had appeared to and promised them an heir, a son, who would assure Abram's greatness through his personal heritage, Gen. 12:1-5; 15:4. As we noted in Chap. 15:3, Abram was apprehensive because God was not quick to fulfill his promise to Abram concerning a promised son as heir. This lack of a sudden fulfillment of that promise slowly became an overwhelming attack upon Abram's faith in God's promise. Evidently he began to wonder if he (Abram) should take the initiative to implement God's plan. Perhaps Sarai was even more concerned about slow response to his (God's) promise than Abram. At that time and place the belief was that if there were no children born to a couple, the fault was with the female spouse. Also, Abram and Sarai grew up among the Chaldeans who lived under a different moral code than Abram's (and ours) Lord wants for his people. Sexual faithfulness to one's spouse was not considered wrong as a human activity. People, who are created in God's image, are no different than the lower animals! I believe that we live today in a society with a growing affinity with the same "lower animal morality!" And so it happened, when Abram was about eighty-five years old and Sarai was about seventy-five, she had lived barren until she was provoked by her own impatience (to wait for God's promise) and to "take matters into her own hands." When Abram and Sarai left Egypt, recall that they left very rich materially. They not only had goods, stock, gold and silver, but they also brought back to Canaan servants of Egyptian nationality. One of these servants, Sarai's personal maid, was apparently young, of child bearing age. Sarai, in her longing for a baby, approached Abram telling him that the Lord was responsible for her being barren after these long ten years in Canaan. The maid's name was Hagar, and Sarai gave her to Abram to be his wife (concubine). As noted above concubines were an acceptable arrangement then and there by people who were not following God's will. I do not believe that such activity was God's will then nor now, because God never changes, Heb. 13:8; Jam. 1:1-7. Mankind changes, but not our Lord. In other words, I do not believe that what Sarai suggested and with which Abram complied was what God wanted. Their worst sin by this action was not the physical act which they committed, but their disbelief in God's promise to Abram. Abram had sexual intercourse with Hagar, and Sarai immediately despised her when Hagar became pregnant with Abram's child. Sarai admitted that what she had done was wrong when Hagar became very arrogant toward Sarai. This spite was insignificant compared with the long-period results of the animosity between the son whom Hagar carried in her womb and his heirs, and the son of God's promise later born to Abram and Sarai and his heirs. Hagar, the Egyptian, ran away from Abram's household under the pressure of the hatred of Sarai. Hagar went far into the wilderness (desert), and near a spring she was approached by an angel of God. Hagar was surprised by being recognized by Abram's God, but she believed him when he assured her that, if she would return to Abram's home and submit herself to Sarai, God would prosper her and her son whom he named "Ishmael." Her descendants would live in the same area, "in the presence of his brethren," [Abram's offspring] and become innumerable. Ishmael "would be a wild man whose hand will be against every man, and every man's hand against him." And it has been so ever since.