

Jan. 4, 1998

"God's Covenant With Abram"
Gen. 17

Couples Class
Wendell Alford,
Teacher

I. In the last verse of Chap. 16 God's Word tells us that Abram was eighty-six years old when Hagar bore his son, Ishmael. Chap. 17 begins by telling us thirteen years later, when Abram was ninety-nine, he and Sarai were still without God's promised child. However, the Lord appeared to Abram and proclaimed himself to be, for the first time in Scripture, El Shaddai, Almighty God. Now Abram was to relate to God as the one and only Creator with all power, limited only by self-limitation, Titus 1:2. He therefore admonishes Abram to walk before him, El Shaddai, and be blameless (believe God's Word without wavering, Matt. 5:48). As Abram walks with God, God will "make a covenant between me and thee, and will multiply thee exceedingly," vs. 2. Abram fell prostrate before the Lord, and God continued his communication, "As for me, my covenant is with thee, and thou shall be a father of a multitude of nations," vs. 4. Then God told him that his name would no longer be "Abram, Exalted (High) Father," but "Abraham, Father of a Multitude, (many nations)," vs. 5.

II. The theme of Chap. 17 is that God Almighty is announcing and emphasizing God's position regarding his own special relationship with Abram due to Abram's faith. The results of this covenant involves promises (an ultimate and solemn arrangement) of God to Abram (now Abraham). The two promises were that Abraham would bear a child with Sarai, and that the geographic portion of the earth's surface belonging to Abraham and his offspring would be that area between "the river of Egypt [Nile], unto the great river Euphrates," as a covenant, making the land-possession part of God's fifth test of Abraham which we noted in our Gen. 16 outline at II. After the waywardness of Abram (and Sarai) in Chap. 16 (resulting in the birth of Ishmael who was half-Egyptian), it appears that God saw how in need of maturing Abram's faith was in believing that God really could bring things to pass which were humanly (naturally) impossible, i.e., to make Sarai's "dead" womb produce an offspring. Evidently, to prove God's ability to perform a miracle, God waited another thirteen years before the promised child was born! God's Word indicates how profoundly God wanted Abraham impressed that he (God) would, in fact, keep his promise concerning an offspring and possession of the land. The word "covenant" in vss. 2,4,7,10,13,19, and 21 reveals that God wanted it understood that he was instigating the covenant of his own initiative which he emphasizes was being made by, the one and only "Almighty God," El Shaddai, vs. 1, John 6:41-44.

III. In order to make sure that Abraham did not forget as long as he lived and his descendants after him that God had made this covenant sure and everlasting, God prescribed a token or sign to bring to mind God's covenant. (My italics-WA) Every male born to him would be circumcised upon attaining eight days of age. Abraham was to begin fulfilling this prescription by circumcising himself, his thirteen-year-old Ishmael, and every male born in his house or who had become a part of his household through purchase,

vss. 10-14. After prescribing this sign of the covenant, God told Abraham that Sarai's name likewise would be changed. No longer would she be named Sarai, "My (Abraham's) Princess" but Sarah, "Princess" to the entire Jewish race, vs. 15. "I will bless her (make her happy) by giving her a son of thy (Abraham's) seed by whom she will become the "mother of nations, kings of people shall be of her," vs. 16. After God again promising Abraham (c. 100 years of age), a son by Sarah (c. 90 years of age), the audacity of God's promise "hit Abraham 'like a ton of bricks.'" We can easily identify with Abraham's humanness when he "fell over laughing" as he thought to himself, in his heart, how can anyone be rational and believe God's promise!? Here I am, a centenarian and my wife with a "dead womb" at age ninety, and God Almighty is still promising us a child. That is preposterous, unnatural! How can such be? (Note John 3:4.) I am reminded, when I read God's Word of Abraham's wonder, of God's Word also at II Pet. 3:3-10. "Know this first, that there shall come in the last days [now, I believe] scoffers (mockers) walking after (according to) their own lusts (unnatural desires), and saying, 'Where is the promise of his coming? for since (for thousands of years) the Old Covenant prophets [and the first believers in Christ began to proclaim God's promise about the lordship of Jesus Christ and his promise to return to establish the kingdom of God on earth], nothing like that has happened. Natural law prevails today just as it has since the world was first created,' - - - but, dear ones, [believers in the Lord Jesus Christ and his promise to return to earth], be not ignorant of this one thing - - - the Lord is not slack concerning his promises - - - but he is long-suffering - - -," and see also Matt. 24:27-31; John 14:1-3; Rev. 4:1; 22:7,12. We believers today feel full of wonder about God's promise to us through his Son, our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, and we have faith that God will, in fact, keep his promise to return for us, even if we experience physical death before his coming again, I Cor. 1:9; 15:50-58; I Thes. 4:13-18.

IV. In the elation of God's covenant promise, Abraham remembered his son of thirteen years, Ishmael, and how he had come to love him. He said to God, "O that Ishmael might live before thee!" [that you could keep my son Ishmael in mind, not forget him]. God replied, "[My plan is,] Sarah shall indeed bear you a son, and you shall name him Isaac (Laughter), and it is through him and his descendants that my covenant with you is to be continued. But as for Ishmael, I have heard your concern for his welfare, and, be assured, he will be blessed with a large posterity; he will be fruitful and multiply exceedingly. In fact, he will father twelve princes (male leaders) who will make him a great nation," vs. 20. That promise was fulfilled exactly as promised and is noted explicitly at Gen. 25:12-15. After assuring Abraham that Ishmael will be cared for, God made the fact very clear that the covenant made with Abraham's descendants would be fulfilled through Isaac, Sarah's and Abraham's son, not through Ishmael, Hagar's and Abraham's son, Gen. 21:12; Rom. 9:7; Heb. 11:18. Before "God went up away from Abraham," he informed the patriarch that Sarah would bear Isaac "the next year," vss. 21-22. Then Abraham, Ishmael, and all the other males of his household were circumcised as God had commanded.

Jan. 11, 1998

"Abraham And God's Messengers"
Gen. 18

Couples Class
Wendell Alford,
Teacher

I. Chaps. 18 and 19 appear to be parenthetical in the narrative of Abraham and Sarah at this point in Genesis. The reason for this treatment of the story, I believe, is to contrast the morals of God's people, Abraham's and Lot's families, with the dreadful, unGodly life styles of the other peoples at the southern end of the Dead Sea, Sodom and Gomorrah. This contrast of values between God's people and those living without regard to God's will is referred to throughout the Old and New Covenants. One can see the disparity at Rom. 1:18-24. In that passage God's Word states in Rom. 1:24 that, "God also gave them up (my italics - WA) to uncleanness through the lusts of their own hearts, to dishonor their own bodies between themselves." Being "given up by God" is the very worst condition that a human being can have. NonJews for the most part were floundering around in unGodly evil until God sent his Son Jesus Christ to "even the playing field." When Jesus, on the cross, said, "It is finished," God thereafter sent his Holy Spirit and "old things are passed away," II Cor. 5:17; Heb. 8:7-13. " - - There is no difference - - for all have sinned and come short of God's glory," Rom. 3:22-23. Every person who accepts Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior is made whole (at one with the Creator God), for, "There is neither Jew nor Greek [all nonJews], there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female: for you [believers] are all one [the same] in Christ Jesus," Gal. 3:28. What love (agape) the Lord God has demonstrated to all mankind who will believe through Jesus, our Lord and Savior!

II. The Lord appeared to Abraham in the form of three persons while Abraham was at home in his tent pitched among the oak trees at Mamre. He sat in the door of the tent where he could escape the heat of the day. As the three representatives of God were approaching in the distance, Abraham ran out to meet them, fearing that they could pass by and not stop. Bowing himself to the ground in respect, Abraham begged them to stop, sit in the shade of a tree and let him wash their feet while they rested. Further, he promised them food to refresh their bodies as they visited with their servant (Abraham). It pleased Abraham exceedingly when they agreed to stop by and accept his hospitality. As is so often the case, Abraham ran inside to his wife Sarah and asked her to prepare quickly "three portions of her best meal, knead it, and make cakes upon the hearth," vs. 6. As Sarah was preparing the bread, Abraham ran out to the cow pen, chose his best young, tender calf, dressed it, prepared it for eating, and placed it, with butter and milk, before his three guests out under the shade tree. They inquired of Abraham about his wife Sarah. Abraham told them that she was in the tent (women were not brazen before strange men in that place at that time). Evidently, the place where they were eating was near the tent, and Sarah was dutifully eavesdropping on the four men's conversation outside the tent. One of the men reiterated God's promise concerning Sarah's forthcoming delivery of a male child. God's Word restates the old age of Abraham and Sarah, and especially the fact that Sarah was long past childbearing age. When Sarah heard "the same old

promise" of God, she "laughed within herself saying, 'At my age shall I enjoy sexual union with my Abraham who is also very old?'" (vs. 12) The Lord (through one of his three messengers, angels) said to Abraham, "Why did Sarah laugh, questioning whether she could bear a child at her age? Is there anything too difficult for the Lord? At the appropriate time [in God's own time] I will return, and Sarah shall have a son." By this time Sarah's brazenness had worn away, evidently, and she had joined the group. Nevertheless, she was afraid and denied that she had laughed. The Lord assured her that he was aware that she did, in fact, laugh at the repeat of his promise. The Lord knew of Sarah's skepticism about his promise of a son.

III. The three men made preparation to leave and indicated that they were going from Abraham's place eastward to Sodom. Abraham went with them for a distance to send them on their way and wish them well. As they walked along, the men were discussing where they were going (to Sodom) and their purpose for visiting the people there. The Lord said that they should not keep from Abraham why they were going to Sodom, because Abraham was to become well-known throughout the earth as all nations are to be blessed in and through him. The Lord said that he knew that Abraham would command his people to do righteously and justly, keeping the way of the Lord. The Lord said, "Because the cry of Sodom and Gomorrah is great, and because their sin is very grievous; I will go down, and see whether, [in practice], they are as immoral as their reputation has become, and, if not, I will know," vs. 20-21. After concluding this stark revelation to Abraham, they went onward toward Sodom and Gomorrah. Abraham, as he realized what would happen (because he knew of those cities' awful sinfulness, see Gen. 13:13), ran and caught up with God's angels and asked them a very important question: "Will you destroy the righteous with the wicked?" (vs. 23) I believe that Abraham's question was prompted precisely, because he knew that his nephew Lot lived in the city of Sodom near Gomorrah. To give specificity to his question, Abraham gave a "for instance" in vs. 24. "Suppose there are fifty righteous people within the city [Sodom], will you spare the place for the righteous fifty? Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?" The Lord said, "If I find in Sodom fifty righteous within the city, then I will spare all the place for their sakes," vs. 26. Thus encouraged, Abraham, who admitted that he was made of dust, grew somewhat bolder in his request of the Lord. The principle which the Lord is giving to Abraham, I believe, is exactly what will happen at the end time when God is unhappy with the overwhelming portion of all humanity. Only the physically alive ecclesia, a rather small minority of the earth's population, will not be destroyed or punished. God's elect, the ecclesia (all believers), will be taken from the earth before the great tribulation, Gen. 19:22; Matt. 24:21-22, I Cor. 15: 51-52; I Thes. 4:13-5:11; Rev. 4:1. In Abraham's fellowship with the Lord, the patriarch asked if forty-five, forty, thirty, twenty, and finally only ten were righteous in Sodom, would the Lord spare the city? The Lord agreed to spare the city if only ten were righteous and went on toward Sodom. Abraham returned home to Mamre believing that the Lord would spare his beloved Lot.

Jan. 18, 1998

"Abraham Tells A Half Truth"
Gen. 20

Couples Class
Wendell Alford,
Teacher

I. There is considerable disagreement among Bible students exactly as to where Gerar is, or was, located. In vs. 1 God's Word states that Abraham moved from thence, apparently Mamre (place where stood a large grove of huge, old oaks) in Hebron (Gen. 13:18; 14:13; 18:1). Hebron was, and is, about thirty miles south and slightly west of Jerusalem. From Mamre Abraham traveled on southwesterly to Gerar near Egypt's (Mizraim) eastern border at that time. We do not know why Abraham moved from Mamre to Gerar. We can speculate, of course. Did Abraham fear a further devastation of the entire area as God did to the cities (including Sodom and Gomorrah) of the plains around the southern end of the Dead Sea? Did God want Abraham to resolve this sin of claiming Sarah to be only his half sister as he had done before in Egypt at Gen. 12:9-20? Was settling this sin of lying deceit a prerequisite before Isaac could be born? At any rate, Abraham felt a need to move his residence from Mamre to Gerar (south of Kadesh-Barnea) where the patriarch believed that, "Surely the fear of God is not in this place," vs. 11.

II. When Abraham and Sarah reached Gerar to set up housekeeping (probably in a tent), he told around that Sarah was his sister. The ruler of the area, Abimelech, learned of the new residents and was very attracted to Sarah. I believe that this, what was evidently physical attraction (or was it her cooking ability, Gen. 18:6?) is very mysterious since, at this time, Sarah is about ninety years of age! Female attraction is still a major consideration, for even some of our major department stores devote entire floors to cosmetics. Sarah was evidently very attractive since Abraham was still falsely refusing to say he was her husband, but only her brother. He felt guilty about his lie, and his confession in vs. 11 (cited above), that he was not where God's presence was, must have been ample reason in Abraham's thinking to do that which he knew displeased the Lord. Sure enough, Abimelech the king of Gerar, sent and took Sarah to his household. But God intervened by appearing to the king in a dream and disclosed the dire circumstance he was creating. The Lord said to Abimelech, "Behold you are a dead man, for the woman (Sarah) whom you have taken is married to a husband," vs. 3. Abimelech's reply to the Lord indicates a king who honored God's right to influence his life. Further, he relayed to God the truth about the situation. Abimelech told God that both Abraham and Sarah had attested to their relationship as brother and sister, (a half truth). Abimelech confessed to God, "In the integrity of my heart and in innocence have I done this," vs. 5. The Lord then agreed with Abimelech that the king was innocent and had not sinned up to this time concerning Sarah. The Lord said that, indeed, he himself had kept the king from sinning against God, because he had not permitted Abimelech to have her physically.

III. The Lord told Abimelech to restore Sarah to Abraham, "for he is a prophet, he will pray for you, and you shall live. Otherwise, you will die and all your people," vs. 7. Early the next morning after Abimelech's dream, the king gathered his servants

around him and told them of his dream and the implications involved. They were very frightened, because their lives also were threatened. The next action Abimelech took was to summon Abraham and confront him with the truth. You have placed me in a position which you ought not to have done. What have I done that produced such disrespect? What was in your mind? Abraham's excuse was that he thought God was not in control in this place (Gerar), and therefore, his own life was in danger because of Sarah's beauty. "Actually," Abraham told the king, "Sarah is my sister, the daughter of my own father, but not the daughter of my mother, but we are married," vs. 12. Then Abraham subtly implicates God in his reason for lying about Sarah. "As it happened, when God caused me to wander from my father's household [where people did not know my background], I told Sarah to tell everyone that we were only siblings, not married," vs. 13.

IV. After Abraham told Abimelech the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, the king did much as the ruler had in Egypt in Gen. 12:16. Besides restoring Sarah to Abraham, Abimelech gave him sheep, oxen, male and female servants, and a thousand pieces of silver. Further, Abimelech told Sarah that he held nothing against her; she was there among his people with a good reputation and a good wife to Abraham. As God had promised Abimelech, Abraham prayed to God for the king, his wife, and maidservants. God thereafter healed the entire household so that they were able to conceive and bear children. When Sarah had been taken into Abimelech's household, God had sealed the womb of all the females, vss. 17-18.

V. When one examines Chap. 20:16-18 and then notes the first verse of Chap. 21, a relationship with Sarah's barrenness can be sensed. Abraham's humble confession of his lie to the apparently humble King Abimelech appears to have renewed Abraham's spirit. He certainly realized that the fear of God was in Gerar even though he had not erected an altar as he had done, Gen. 12:7; 13:4; 22:9, to sense God's presence. And what is the application for properly relating to God by people in our day, the last years of the twentieth century? First, one's spirit must be reborn from above [by God in heaven] through faith (belief) in God's only Son and Messiah (Savior), Jesus, according to God's Word, John 3:3,14-18; 6:37,44. The function of one's spirit which corresponds to Abraham's humbling himself is known as repenting, or, admitting that one needs, but cannot on his or her own, make oneself pleasing to the Creator God. Only faith in God's own goodness can accomplish that oneness with God's perfect (complete) will. Abraham believed God's promise of a Savior and died physically with that live faith, Lk 10:24; John 8:41-59; Heb. 11:13,39-40. Just as in our day, Abraham was justified by God through exercising personal faith in God's promise, not because he had earned justification by his own merits, Rom. 4:1-8,15-5:1. Second, what about our displeasing God (sinning) after we have eternal spiritual life (oneness with God). Some religious leaders who profess Jesus as Lord hold these later sins against believers for temporary control. I believe God's Word at I John 1:1-4,8-2:2. "If we [believers] confess our sins [directly to the Lord], he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness," I John 1:9. Praise God for all his blessings!

I. We should note that in Chap. 18 God's Word at vs. 2 indicates that there were three men involved in the appearance of the Lord to Abraham, Gen. 18:1. In Gen. 18:13 at least one of the three men who were on their way to Sodom is referred to as "the Lord." Likewise in Gen. 18:17,20,22,26,27,30, and 33 the men conferring with Abraham are given as "the Lord." Furthermore, in Gen. 18:20,21, and 26 it is made clear that these three men representing "the Lord" were on their way to judge the inhabitants of Sodom with the possibility of destroying the place, unless they found ten righteous people there. I have gone into this detail to note with you that when the representatives of the Lord arrived in Sodom in Chap. 19, there are only two beings noted, and they are there more explicitly referred to as angels (messengers or representatives of God). I called the three men who visited Abraham "representatives of God" in the outline of Chap. 18 at II, Line 4. I believe that the two angels in Chap. 19 are two of the same three men who visited Abraham in Chap. 18. However, I cannot explain the difference between the three in Chap. 18 and the two in Chap. 19. Perhaps a need for the third angel elsewhere accounts for the difference.

II. I stated in the Chap. 18 outline at I, Lines 6-8, that the contrast of values between God's people (Abraham and Lot) who seek to do God's will and those denying God's influence over their lives is referred to "throughout the Old and New Covenants." Specifically, the evil attitude and actions of the people of Sodom is related directly to the practice of what we refer to today as sodomy, or, intimate sexual activity between people of the same sex, homosexuality. Jesus said that there is only one sin which separates persons from God more surely than that sin which was practiced at Sodom and Gomorrah in Abraham's and Lot's day, and that worse sin is refusing to accept the message that the kingdom of heaven is ready for citizens to enter into it. That kingdom is to have one Lord and King, Jesus, the Messiah (Savior) of the Heavenly Father, Matt. 10:7,14-15; 11:23-24; Mk 6:11-12. I have quoted our Lord first in this regard since his thoughts on homosexuality are the most pertinent to us who are trusting him for eternal life. But to justify my position that the entire Bible uses sodomy (homosexuality) as a sure condition which demonstrates mankind's disregard for God's being the Creator and humanity his creation, I continue. All people who practice homosexuality are described in God's Word as "unclean," which comes from the result of the "lusts of their own hearts (will)." They dishonor their own bodies between themselves. They are those who "change the truth (proper human sexuality) of God for a lie [homosexuality], worship and serve God's creatures [themselves] more than the Creator, i.e., they follow their own wills rather than God's. This homosexual activity is a "vile (repulsive, disgusting, contemptible) affection." The Word is very specific in what constitutes the activity we refer to as homosexuality. It is, "women exchange the natural [as God created and intended that people should perform (Matt. 19:4)] use into that which is against [God's created] nature. And likewise also the males leaving

the natural use of the female, burn in their own lust [intense desire] one [male] toward another male, males with other males practicing that which is shameful [before God] and receiving in themselves [by their own action] that penalty of their error [sin against God] which is due [as declared by God's Word]. These homosexuals do not like to retain God in their knowledge [conscience]. God gives them over to a reprobate [debased] mind to do those things which are not appropriate [according to God's Word, will and pleasure]," Rom. 1:24-28. Many who disregard God's will for them not only practice homosexuality but also many other like evil things as listed in God's Word following the above citation relating to homosexuality at Rom. 1:29-32. We simply do not have time to amplify all Bible references to homosexuality as practiced at Sodom, but here are most of them: Gen. 13:13; 18:20,26,32; 19:5,7,24-25,29; Lev. 18:22; 20:13; Deut. 23:17; 29:23; 32:28-32; Judg. 19:22-23; I Kings 14:24; 15:12 22:46; II Kings 23:7; Isa. 1:9-10; 3:9; 13:19; Jer. 23:14; 49:18; 50:40; Lam. 4:6; Ezek. 16:49-50,53-59; Amos 4:11; Zeph. 2:9; (Matt. 10:15; 11:23-24 - cited above); Mk 6:11; Lk 10:10-12; (Rom. 1:18-32 - partially cited above); 9:29; I Cor. 6:9-11; II Pet. 2:4-9; Jude 7; and Rev. 11:8. I believe that these numerous references in God's Word to the evil nature of homosexuality leaves no doubt as to God's deep hatred of mankind's practice of sexuality contrary to God's creation of people as male and female creatures. God intended that only a male and female be joined together for sexual intimacies as indicated at Matt. 19:4-6. There, in vs. 6, Jesus said, "Wherefore they are no more two, but one flesh. What therefore God hath joined together [male and female] let not mankind put asunder [change]."

III. Chap. 19:1-29 gives an explicit account of the evil nature of "the men of the city (Sodom), both young and old from every quarter (section)." These sinful Sodomite citizens demanded of Lot that he turn over to them the two male messengers of God, who were enjoying Lot's hospitality, to satisfy their homosexual lusts, "that we may know [the King James term for "know them carnally"] them," vs. 5. The two men of God were saved only by their own miracle whereby the evil citizens were stricken with blindness so that they were no longer able to see the entrance to Lot's home. The angels told Lot to take his family and leave Sodom immediately, for they had concluded that they should destroy the city. Evidently, Lot could persuade only his wife and two daughters to escape with him. Even then Lot begged not to have to flee to the mountains, but that he go only as far as the nearby town of Zoar. By sunup Lot, his wife and two daughters had reached Zoar, but as God destroyed the cities of the plain, Lot's family fled onward toward the higher land. As Lot's wife hesitated to go forward, she was killed and turned to (was covered with) salt from the Dead Sea. Abraham could see the plain and what had occurred there. Lot took his two daughters up to the mountains where he established a home in a cave. The two daughters, especially the elder, took matters into their own hands as Eve and Sarai did before them. The elder convinced the younger that they would never bear a child unless they had sexual intercourse with the only male available, their father. Lot let himself be a party to the arrangement by becoming drunk with wine two nights in succession during which he impregnated both of his daughters. They each bore a son, the two of whom became the father of the Moabites and Ammonites, enemies of Israel, II Chron. 20. This incest was contrary to God's will, Lev. 18:1,6-7; 20:19.

18 "For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of mankind, who suppress the truth in unrighteousness, 19 because that which may be known is evident among them; for God hath showed it unto them. 20 For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and divine nature so that they are without excuse; 21 Because when they knew God, they glorified him not as God, neither were they thankful but became futile in their thoughts and their foolish hearts were darkened. 22 Professing themselves to be wise, they became fools. 23 And changed the glory of the incorruptible God into an image made like perishable mankind, and to birds, and four-footed beasts, and creeping things. 24 Wherefore God also gave them up to uncleanness through the lusts of their own hearts [wills], to dishonor their own bodies between themselves. 25 Who exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshipped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed for ever. So be it. 26 For this cause God gave them up unto vile affections; for even their women did exchange the natural use for that which is against nature. 27 And likewise also the males leaving the natural use of the female burned in their own lust one toward another; male with male working that which is shameful and receiving in themselves that penalty of their error which was due. 28 And even as they did not like to retain God in their knowledge, God gave them over to a debased mind, to do those things which are not appropriate, 29 Being filled with all unrighteousness, fornication, wickedness, covetousness, maliciousness; full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, evil mindedness, whisperers, 30 Backbiters, haters of God, violent, proud, boasters, inventors of evil things, disobedient to parents, without natural affection, unforgiving, unmerciful; 32 Who knowing the righteous judgment of God, that they which commit such things are worthy of death, not only do the same, but approve of them that do them.

I. Three significant episodes occur in this chapter: Isaac's birth, the casting from Abraham's household Hagar and Ishmael, and an agreement (covenant) sworn to by Abraham and Abimelech, king of Gerar. The Lord visited Sarah as he had promised (Gen. 18:14), and she and Abraham were given a son by the Lord. Notice carefully how unusual this birth was; the couple "were given" a son. This birth was unnatural, i.e., contrary to the laws of nature. Only God's miracle could have brought this birth to pass. Just as Jesus' birth by Mary was a unique, one of a kind event, so was Isaac's birth. The one overwhelming difference was that Jesus had no earthly father, but God's Holy Spirit was Jesus' Father (Matt. 1:20; Lk 1:35). I make this comparison because both births were God's special doing and in God's own due time, Gen. 18:14; 21:2; Gal. 4:4. Mary was a virgin, and Abraham and Sarah were both well beyond child bearing ages, Abraham 100 and Sarah 90. Abraham circumcised Isaac on his eighth day as God had commanded him, Gen. 17:9-14, 23-27. In vs. 6 we can see a different reason for why Sarah and Abraham laughed (Gen. 17:17; 18:12) concerning the birth of their only child, a son. People laugh for four principle reasons: in scorn, in pleasure or joy, in nervousness, or in comic response to an idea or event one considers funny or amusing. I believe Sarah and Abraham laughed for the second reason. Just imagine, longing for about eight decades, or so, for a child of your own, and then to experience the hope of your lifetime fulfilled! Even the idea had made them laugh with sheer pleasure and joy. Therefore, in naming the child Isaac, "Laughter," God had in mind "Joy," I believe, Gen. 17:19; 21:3. God was happy also, because his Son Jesus the Christ was to come from the lineage of Isaac, Matt. 1:2; Lk 3:34.

II. Sarah was as astounded by the birth of Isaac as she was by being able to nurse a child at the age of ninety. She said, "Who would have said unto Abraham that Sarah would have nursed a child by Abraham in his old age," vs. 7. Sarah was a good mother, for "the child grew" and was weaned in the normal way. Abraham was so pleased about the whole affair that he gave a gala feast to celebrate the weaning of Isaac. At this time a child would nurse a mother for about three years. No doubt Abraham invited all his friends to rejoice with him and Sarah. But for Sarah all did not go well at the gala, for "Sarah saw the son of Hagar (Ishmael), the Egyptian, which she had born unto Abraham, scoffing or laughing at the three-year-old Isaac," vs. 9. This laughing was to express scorn or disdain for Ishmael's little half brother. Because of this indiscretion of Ishmael, Sarah confronted Abraham immediately. She said, "Cast out this bondwoman [slave] and her son [Ishmael]: for the son of this bondwoman shall not be heir with my son, even with Isaac," vs. 10. This demand of Sarah distressed Abraham, and he "went over her head" to God himself for direction. "And God said unto Abraham, 'Let it not be grievous in thy sight because of the lad [Ishmael was then about fourteen years old, Gen. 16:16; 21:5.], and because of thy bondwoman; in all that Sarah hath said unto you, hearken unto her voice; for in Isaac shall thy seed [pos-

terity] be called," vs. 12. Then God repeated to Abraham the promise he had made at Gen. 17:18-21. Note God's fulfillment of his promise concerning Ishmael at Gen. 25:12-16. Further, God told Abraham that he was blessing Ishmael because he was also Abraham's son, vs. 13. To comply with God's instructions, Abraham arose early the following day, took bread, a skin of water, slung them over Hagar's and Ishmael's shoulders, and sent them away out into the desert of Beersheba. When Hagar and Ishmael had exhausted the water and food, she despaired of their plight. Recall this as Hagar's second such experience, for at Gen. 16:1-8 Sarai, with Abram's permission, had harassed her maid Hagar until she ran away. However, an angel of God told Hagar to return and live by Sarai's demands, and the Lord would, in time, reward her displeasure. Now, here in the desert Hagar is alone, this time with no food and a starving teen-age son. She feared for her son's death and did not want to witness the agony of his dying. She told him to stay under the shade of a shrub and went herself some distance away and wept. Again, God heard her son's cry and addressed Hagar through his angel. He told her not to fear, because God had heard her distress in Ishmael's cry. The angel promised Hagar again that through Ishmael God would make a great nation. At that point God's messenger "opened her eyes," and she saw a well of water nearby where she refilled her skin (container), and gave Ishmael life-saving drink. Hagar reestablished herself in the desert of Paran and reared her son Ishmael to become a skilled hunter (archer), and his mother "took him a wife out of the land of Egypt," her native land.

III. At vs. 22 Abimelech, the king of Gerar, again enters into Abraham's affairs. The king with his military leader spoke to Abraham. He confessed that Abraham represented God, and therefore he asked the patriarch to take an oath in God's name that he (Abraham) would, as he lived in Gerar, deal fairly with the king and his subjects. Abraham called Abimelech's attention to the fact that the local citizens had forcefully taken over a well which Abraham had dug. To seal the agreement Abimelech admitted that he was unaware of his people's infringing upon Abraham's well, and Abraham gave Abimelech seven ewe lambs. They both swore to the covenant (to "coexist" there) and named the place Beersheba which means, "Well of the Oath," or "Well of the Seven" (lambs). Abraham lived there among the Philistines for a long time, planted a grove of palm trees around the well, and "called there upon the Lord, the everlasting God," vss. 33-34. The well became a holy place.

IV. The details above give the historical narrative surrounding the birth of Isaac, Hagar's and Ishmael's expulsion from Abraham's home, and provision for the patriarch's family to provide for themselves in Abimelech's domain, including Hagar and her posterity. The significance of these episodes in the plan of God for the peoples of the earth in the millennia to follow is extremely important. The Lord through Paul (God's Word) relates the relationship of Isaac and Ishmael as much more than a family dispute. In his Roman letter Paul gives God's revelation of that relationship as to what makes individuals right with the Heavenly Father, our Creator. Further, at Rom. 4:13, 16-5:2; 7:13-8:1, and Gal. 2:21; 4:21-5:1, 16-18, we believers are revealed to be living lives of constant, daily challenges. God's Spirit lives within us (John 14:17; I Cor. 3:16; I John 2:27) and directs our lives, but we must daily depend upon God's grace and not our own ability to keep God's Law. Our Law is Love, Matt. 22:36-40; John 15:12, 17; Rom. 13:10.

Feb. 8, 1998

"Abraham's Final Exam"
Gen. 2 2

Couples Class
Wendell Alford,
Teacher

I. Up to this chapter we have come to see Abraham as a man of profound faith in God. When God told him to leave his homeland and family to go to another, Abraham made arrangements to do just that. By this action Abraham passed his first test of faith. However, he did not make this move without some reservation, for his father Terah left Ur in Chaldea and went with Abraham as far as Haran to the north. There Terah died and Abraham took Sarah his wife and Lot his nephew and left Haran to go, "unto a land that I will show you," Gen. 12:1. Abraham was, at his departure from Haran, seventy-five years old and Sarah was sixty-five. Before the three left Haran, God signified the beginning of his covenant with Abraham. God promised, "to make of him a great nation, to bless him and make him a blessing to all families of the earth, to bless those who bless Abraham and curse those who curse Abraham," Gen. 12:2-4. The patriarch's second test of faith in God's watch-care came when his nephew Lot, whom he loved dearly, left him to live to the east in Sodom. A third test of Abraham's reliance upon God was when he had come to love his son Ishmael and was told by God to send him away with his mother Hagar. Abraham so wanted Ishmael to be blessed by God, because this son too was Abraham's. God promised this man of faith that he would, indeed, bless Ishmael over time. God kept his promise, but the Lord told Hagar, Ishmael's mother, that "he [Ishmael] will be a wild man; his hand will be against every man, and every man's hand against him; and he shall live among all his kin [brothers, Abraham's offspring]," Gen. 16:10-12. These three tests of Abraham's faith were far less traumatic than the fourth and final exam of Abraham's faith in God's promise. I am reminded here of Jesus' final exam for his apostles at Matt. 16:15 when the Lord Jesus asked them, "But who do you say that I am?" They answered that he was (is) God's Messiah (Savior), and Jesus confided that the Heavenly Father had revealed this truth to them, and see also Matt. 14:33.

II. Chap. 22 explains in detail the fourth, final exam by God of Abraham's faith. I believe that in Abraham's life experiences he had witnessed among the peoples living near him at various places, a religious phenomenon which supposedly tested parents' faith in their pagan gods. That phenomenon involved expressing ones ultimate, profound devotion to ones god by sacrificing his or her child or children to that god. (Today's abortion?) God had promised Abraham that through his son Isaac would Abraham's posterity (seed) be called, Gen. 21:12; Gal. 3:16-18, and now in vss. 1-2 the Lord God commanded Abraham to take his only son and sacrifice (kill) him for God. (Note here that Ishmael is not counted for Abraham's posterity according to God's promise at Gen. 17:19,21.) The King James text in vs. 1 uses the word "tempt" and is incorrect, I believe, but should be "test." My belief is based upon God's Word at Jam. 1:13, "Let no man say when he is tempted, 'I am tempted of God,' for God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth he any man." Mentioning James' letter as a portion of God's Holy Word, reminds me of what could appear to be a conflict between

James' (Jam. 2:21-24) emphasis on actions performed (works) and Paul's emphasis on faith in God's Word at Rom. 4:1-5; 9:30-33. I believe that they are both right, of course. James' question was, "Was not Abraham our father [in the flesh] justified by works, when he had offered Isaac his son upon the altar?" Jam. 2:21,22-24. Abraham offered but did not perform the sacrifice; he only agreed to, i.e., he demonstrated his willingness to follow God's command. Furthermore, James' letter was addressed to believing Jews who were being influenced by those (Judaizers) who were trying to mix God's grace through Jesus the Messiah and keeping the Law simultaneously. Some of the new Jewish believers in Christ Jesus were wavering in trusting Jesus completely for eternal life. James was pastor of the Jerusalem congregation and had constant pressure from the Judaizers to make believers feel guilty by trusting God's grace alone in the Christ of God. At times Peter also had trouble, especially in the social implications of God's grace, as noted by Paul in Gal. 2:2-21. James' position is especially interesting since he was Jesus' brother, another of Mary's sons, Gal. 1:18-19. On the other hand, Paul's emphasis at Rom. 4:1-5 stresses the absolute completeness of faith in Jesus' sacrifice for eternal life which faith is equivalent to Abraham's willingness to sacrifice his only son, for his faith was accounted by God as righteousness as is our faith in Jesus, John 3:14-18.

III. To carry out the command of God to Abraham to sacrifice Isaac, Abraham presented himself to God without reservation, "Behold, here I am," vs. 1. God noted the father's love for his only son and then asked him to travel to Moriah and offer Isaac as a human sacrifice by burning. I believe that Moriah is the site of Solomon's Temple at Jerusalem built many years later. (Followers of Muhammed [offspring of Ishmael, an Arab] believe that Abraham was asked to sacrifice Ishmael, not Isaac.) From Gerar where Abraham lived then, Moriah was about sixty miles as one would have had to go by donkey. The terrain was rocky, dry, hilly and/or mountainous, and Abraham left early one morning. On the third day Moriah appeared off in the distance. Abraham dismounted from his donkey, took the wood for the sacrifice, and told his two servants to wait there while he and Isaac went to Moriah to worship. Isaac took the wood, and Abraham took the fire along with a knife. On their way it occurred to Isaac that his father had forgotten the most important item needed, a lamb to be sacrificed. Abraham said, "My son, God will provide himself a lamb for a burnt offering." The two of them went together to the place where God had chosen. Abraham built an altar, laid the wood thereon, bound Isaac, and placed him on the wood on the altar. Abraham took the knife and raised his hand to slay his only son Isaac. The Lord's messenger (angel) stayed Abraham's hand and stated that Abraham had passed God's exam for genuine, sincere faith. The patriarch looked and saw a ram caught in the brush nearby which he used for the burnt offering. Abraham's willingness to sacrifice Isaac portrayed God's ultimate Lamb sacrificed for the sins of all who would trust him, the Lord Jesus, God's only Son and the Messiah, John 1:36. God then repeated his covenant with Abraham, vss. 15-18. Abraham then returned to Beer-sheba well pleased with his son, Isaac. God was (is) well pleased with his only Son, Matt. 3:17; 12:18; 17:5; Mk:1:11; Lk 3:22; II Pet. 1:15-18, as are we believers!

Feb. 15, 1998 "Sarah Dies; Abraham Buys Burial Plot" Couples Class
Gen. 23 Wendell Alford,
Teacher

I. Sarah was ninety years old when her only child Isaac was born. Now we learn in vs. 1 that Sarah died when she was one-hundred and twenty-seven which meant that Isaac would have been thirty-seven when she died. At the time of her death Abraham's household was back in Hebron (Kirjath-arba). The latter name was the city's name before Hebron. The town today is still Hebron, and it is one of the oldest municipalities, which has been continuously inhabited, on earth. Hebron is located nineteen miles southwest of Jerusalem on the road to Beer-sheba. Throughout recorded history the shallow valley around the city has produced choice grapes. The spies returned to Moses with Caleb saying that the men there were giants and the crops were luscious. In fact, the spies brought back a cluster of grapes so large that two men were required to carry it, Numb. 13:22-23. No doubt the fertility of the soil there is the reason Abraham grazed his herds in that area.

II. In outlining Chap. 22 I ended the chapter with vs. 19, because I believe the person who broke the Old Covenant into chapters and verses should have done so. The reason for Gen. 22:20-24 is to update genealogical information about Abraham's family back in Mesopotamia (Ur and Haran). We last noted his family background at Gen. 11:22-32. There we learned that one Terah had three sons, Abram, Nahor, and Haran, and two of them married within the family of Terah. Abram married his half-sister Sarai while Nahor married his brother Haran's daughter, Milcah, Nahor's niece. Milcah and Lot were siblings. At Gen. 22:20-24 we discovered that, in some way, Abraham learned what had happened to his family back in Mesopotamia. Milcah and Nahor had eight children. Their youngest son Bethuel had a daughter named Rebekah, a person who appears in a prominent role beginning in Gen. 24.

III. In Gen. 22:19 Abraham returned to Beer-sheba to live after offering Isaac in sacrifice, and in Gen. 23:2 it is stated that Sarah died in Hebron, "and Abraham came [to Hebron?] to mourn for Sarah, and to weep for her." Is it possible that when Sarah died in Hebron, Abraham was living in or visiting Beer-sheba? At any rate, Abraham was in an uneasy situation in that his wife Sarah had died, and he owned no property on which to inter her body. He announced to the owners of nearby property his dilemma. In retrospect, this situation appears strange to us. God had promised Abraham (Gen. 15:18; 17:8) all of this land, and not only to him, but to his seed after him. Even after this covenant, Abraham has nowhere to bury his beloved wife Sarah. So he turns to the sons of Heth who had legal possession of the land there. Now Heth was the great-grandson of Noah through Ham and Canaan (Gen. 10:6,15) The progenitors of Heth were known as Hittites and Canaanites. In recent decades through archaeologists' discoveries, evidence has been found which indicates that the Hittites were an influential people northward even as far as modern Turkey. Their rank among the early empires was roughly equivalent to Egypt and Mesopotamia. The demise of the Hittite Empire was due primarily to moral laxity.

In fact, the Greek goddess Artemis (Roman Diana) worshiped by the Ephesians in Acts 19:23-41 represented a remnant of the religion of the Hittites which the Phoenicians and Canaanites had earlier called Ashtareth and Baal, Judg. 2:11-23; 3:5-7. In retrospect, we can believe that Abraham was reluctant to accept freely the land offered by "the sons of Heth, the Hittites." Remember that Abraham, likewise, had refused to accept the "generosity" of the king of Sodom after rescuing Lot from the north country, Gen. 14:21-24.

IV. In vs.4 Abraham stood by the body of his beloved wife Sarah, and publicly before the sons of Heth said, "I am a stranger and sojourner with you; give [provide] me property as a burying place with you that I may bury my dead out of my sight." The Hittites were very amicable toward Abraham and told him that they considered him to be the prince of God among them, i.e., not their enemy. "None of the Hittites will prohibit your burial of your family," they said. Abraham cordially returned their friendship by bowing before them and spoke communally with them. He asked them to confer with Zohar's son Ephron about a tract of land adjoining a cultivated field. This land included a cave named Machpelah (double or multiple) which means that there were several caves located there. We will learn as we study further in Genesis that Abraham (Gen. 25:9), Isaac, Rebekah, Leah, and Jacob were also buried there (Gen. 49:30-32). In vs. 9 we learn that Abraham told Ephron to figure the worth of the site where the caves were, and he would pay its price to hold it by legal title. Ephron responded by declaring publicly, in the "audience of the men of Heth in the gate of the city [the town council], 'Nay, my Lord, listen, the field give I thee; and the cave that is therein I give it thee; bury your dead,'" vs. 10. But Abraham, again showing deep respect by bowing before the group, told Ephron that he would feel free to use the property only if he paid for it. Ephron understood Abraham's firm position and quoted a price of four hundred shekels of silver (about ten pounds, worth today about \$985.60). Even after the quote, Ephron told Abraham that the land was his free of any charges, but Abraham publicly weighed out the silver and paid Ephron. So the field and caves were deeded to Abraham in the city gate. Abraham then buried Sarah his wife in the cave of Machpelah near Mamre (Hebron) in the land of Canaan. Some interpretation, I believe, is necessary to understand why Abraham did not buy real property on a more permanent basis. It is obvious that he had the means to do so, Gen. 13:2; 20:14; 24:35. The Bible gives no evidence that he actually owned any property by deed other than the field and caves listed here in Chap. 23. Why? God had promised Abraham the total area from the Nile in Egypt eastward to the river Euphrates, Gen. 15:18. Abraham, our spiritual forefather in faith (Gal. 3:6-9), believed God who had promised that this land would be his, but God did not say when. I believe that that land will be Abraham's and his seed in the flesh (the Jews) when Jesus returns for us believers. We will be taken up to the New Jerusalem (Rev. 21:2), but the Jews, including Abraham, will reign with Jesus' power from Jerusalem a thousand years (Rev. 20:4). We believers will get new bodies fitted for heaven, and the Old Covenant saints will be brought back to life, Ezek. 37:9-14; Matt. 27:45-53; Rom. 11:25-32; I Cor. 15:51-52; Heb. 11:39-40.

Feb. 22, 1998

"A Bride For Isaac"
Gen. 24

Couples Class
Wendell Alford,
Teacher

I. Reading Chap. 23 opens the door into many details of marriage customs and associated values in Abraham's day. We determined in the last chapter that Isaac was about thirty-seven years old when his mother Sarah died. Immediately following her death and burial, Abraham realized that his son Isaac would need a spouse to fulfill the promise that God had made to Abraham to make him the "father of many nations" through Isaac, Gen. 17:19. Now at the beginning of Chap. 24 Abraham is getting old and is living as a sojourner (Gen. 23:4) in a land where none of his own people (descendants of Shem, Noah's son, Gen. 11:10-26) lived. Unless other arrangements were made Isaac would be marrying a local woman, a Canaanite (descendants of Ham, through Canaan, Gen. 10:6). Abraham was determined not to let Isaac marry a Canaanite woman. To implement Abraham's (and I believe God's) determination, he called his eldest (chief) servant to him. This servant "ruled over (managed) all of Abraham's affairs," vs. 2. The servant's position as a corroborator of Abraham's will and purpose was so complete that his name is not given, but he is referred to without exception simply as "the servant" of Abraham. This servant was a firm believer in prayer to "the Lord God of my master Abraham," vs. 12.

II. The Word makes very plain that Abraham trusted his chief servant in his business affairs, but to emphasize the uniqueness and grave importance of the mission to which Abraham was about to send him, the servant was commissioned in a distinct manner. The Bible gives several methods of oath-taking. We saw in Gen. 21:22-24 how Abraham and Abimelech in which the former swore to the latter that Abraham would "swear unto me by God that thou will not deal falsely with me." Sometimes oaths were attested to by the slaying of an animal, dividing it into two parts, and passing between the two pieces, Gen. 15:6-10,17-18. Paul at Gal. 1:20 swore "before God [concerning] the things I write to you, note especially, I lie not." Jesus taught that oath-taking for trivial religious assertions made those so swearing, fools and blind, Matt. 23:16-22. In the "Lesson on the Mount" Jesus taught his followers to let their word be as a bond (truth or oath), i.e., truthful when standing alone without an oath, Matt. 5:33-37. Abraham wanted his servant to know beyond any shadow of a doubt that finding a bride for Isaac among Abraham's own people was his and God's will, vs. 7. Abraham asked his servant to "take an oath by the Lord, the God of heaven" not to take a wife for Isaac from the daughters of the Canaanites, vs. 3. The servant took the oath while placing his hand under Abraham's thigh. To be sure that he understood the oath correctly, the servant asked what he should do if, when he went to Abraham's people, no woman agreed to the request to come and marry Isaac. In that instance should I take Isaac back to Mesopotamia? Which takes top priority? Abraham was so sure that his desire was also God's that he assured the servant that God would send a messenger to the right woman to implement fully God's plan. Do not even consider Isaac's leaving Palestine. As a last resort, if a woman cannot be found, you are released from your oath to me, but leave Isaac here.

III. Abraham's servant took a safari of ten camels, a complement of supplies including jewelry (good things), and some men as servants to help on the journey. He set out for the city of Nahor in Mesopotamia. When he arrived and while his camels knelt down for water at the well just outside the city, the servant prayed to Abraham's God for success in his mission. He prayed, "Let it happen that I may speak to one of the women who come for water this evening and who will give me water to drink when I ask." While the servant was still praying, Rebekah came to the well with a water pitcher on her shoulder. She went down into the well, filled her pitcher, and the servant ran over to her and asked her for a drink. She immediately took the pitcher from her shoulder and let him drink. Rebekah even offered to bring up water from the well and fill a trough there for the ten camels to drink! The Word gives some facts about Rebekah: she was the daughter of Bethuel, the youngest son of Milcah and Nahor, Abraham's brother. Milcah was also the daughter of Haran, Abraham's other brother. She was a young person of marriageable age (a virgin) and had never had sexual relations with a male. She was very beautiful. Rebekah was, therefore, the daughter of Abraham's brother's son, Bethuel, making Rebekah Isaac's second cousin. Rebekah's father was also Isaac's first cousin. These relationships certainly satisfied Abraham's (and God's) desire that Isaac marry into Abraham's own people! The servant's first act to complete his mission for his master was to give Rebekah a half-ounce gold nose ring and two gold bracelets of two ounces each. Then he asked her about her family and whether her family had room for him to stay. Rebekah answered him courteously that they did have lodging for his entourage. The servant worshiped the Lord God of Abraham and thanked him for leading him to the family of his master. Rebekah ran ahead to her home where her parents and her brother Laban greeted her. The Bible states that Laban noticed the gold jewelry immediately which the servant had given Rebekah, evidently assuming that the servant's master was a man of considerable means. Therefore, Laban made the servant very welcome. The servant's, and the other men with him, feet were washed for courtesy, and food was served to both the guests and the camels. The servant would not even eat until he had outlined his mission for Abraham. Among the information he gave to Laban and Bethuel was that Abraham had been blessed by the Lord greatly. "He has become great, and the Lord has given him flocks, herds, silver, gold, menservants, maidservants, camels, and donkeys. Further, Sarah bore Abraham a son in their old age, and he is their only heir. Abraham has given to his only child Isaac all that he has, vss. 35-36. Abraham will not permit Isaac to marry a Canaanite, but insists that he wed one of his own people." With this information Bethuel, and especially Laban, agreed that Rebekah should return with the servant. However, the next morning when the servant was ready to leave, the mother begged for a few more days (perhaps ten) with Rebekah. The servant lavished upon Rebekah's family gold and silver jewelry and fancy clothing. They decided to leave the departure time up to Rebekah. Rebekah decided upon an immediate departure! Rebekah took her nurse (maid), and they left for Isaac's place. Isaac was outside when they arrived, saw her, loved her, married her, and took her into Sarah's tent.

Mar. 1, 1998

"Abraham Dies, Isaac Fathers Twins"
Gen. 25

Couples Class
Wendell Alford,
Teacher

I. In Chap. 24 Rebekah and her family were told by the servant of Abraham that Abraham, "has given unto him (Isaac) all that he has," Gen. 24:35-36. But now we are told by God's Word that after this, Abraham took another wife whose name was Keturah. And not only that, but she bore him six children. Notice, however, vs. 5 that Abraham's promise to Isaac is repeated, "and gave all that he had unto Isaac." I believe that Abraham's preference was Isaac, because God had made his son by Sarah to be the one through whom God's covenant was made (Gen. 17:19) and would be fulfilled. Poor Keturah and her children! This arrangement appears to us, in retrospect, to be cruel and arbitrary. This same principle is inherent in what God did for all of humanity when he instituted his New Covenant which rescinded the Old Covenant. The writer of Hebrews deals with this relationship in some detail in Heb. 8:7-13. God did not change but humanity did. God's Word states in that passage that God changed Covenants, "- - because they [all humanity, see Rom. 1:24 concerning the Gentiles, nonJews, and see Rom. 3:21-24; 9:30-33 concerning the Jews] continued not in my Covenant, and I regarded them not - - ." Further, in Heb. 8:13 God's Word concludes, "In that he [God, at Jer. 31:31-35 and repeated here in Heb. 8:7-13 saith, 'A New Covenant,' he hath made the first obsolete. Now that which is becoming obsolete and is growing old is ready to vanish away." In connection with what appears to be arbitrary, note also what Paul (God's Word) reveals in Rom. 9:6-29 about God's sovereignty. In this revelation he lays a premise that not all of Abraham's posterity by fleshly genealogy is the spiritual seed (children of God), but "the children of the promise are counted as the [spiritual] seed." A sure evidence of this truth is noted by Jesus our Lord at John 8:33,41-44,56-59 where he was addressing the Pharisees (John 8:13). Malachi addressed this same question at Mal. 2:10, "Have we not all one Father?" Jesus answered the question in John 8 as noted above. Paul's conclusion of what could be misconstrued by mankind is at Rom. 9:18-26, "Therefore has he mercy on whom he will have mercy, and whom he will he hardeneth. You will say to me, 'Why does he yet find fault [with anyone]? For who has resisted his will?' Do not say [question] that, O mortal man, who are you to reply against [question] God? Should the thing formed [created] say [be sassy] to the one [the Creator] who created it, 'Why have you made me thus [as you have]?' When a man creates a clay pot, does he not have the power to create one pot beautiful and/or practical and another pot ugly and/or with holes in it? So can God create as he pleases. God's creation is to demonstrate his grace. This grace [in the New Covenant] applies to Jews and nonJews, Gentiles, [in his Son Jesus the Messiah, Savior]." See also Rom. 5:1-2; Gal. 3:23-29. For further information regarding God's selection for spiritual salvation and growing in God's grace see also Matt. 9:10-13; John 6:44; Acts 2:39; Gal. 5:1,5-8; Phili. 2:12-13; II Pet. 3:18.

II. Keturah and her children by Abraham did not receive Abraham's inheritance, but he did give his concubines' sons gifts and sent

them away from Isaac. It would appear from the context and what follows in this chapter that Keturah's and Hagar's children were considered Abraham's offspring through concubines. Abraham lived to be one hundred seventy-five. At that age, after living a good, full life, he was gathered to his people. Ishmael joined Isaac his brother in burying their father Abraham where Sarah was buried, in the cave Machpelah near Hebron. Then listed are the twelve sons of Ishmael and the villages where each ruled. Ishmael died at age one hundred thirty-seven with all his sons by his side. One of his sons was Midian whose land was near Egypt and from where Moses took a wife. These Midianites were the people who sold Joseph to the Egyptians, Gen. 37:36; Exod. 3:1.

III. The remainder of the chapter is given to the family of Isaac, vss. 19-34. No longer can we say that Isaac was Abraham's only son because of his marriage to Keturah, but we can say that Isaac alone is the messianic propagator. At forty years of age Isaac took Rebekah as his wife. She was the daughter of Bethuel and Milcah, the Syrians of Padanaram, and the sister of Laban. As his parents experienced before him, Isaac and Rebekah were unable to bear a child. Isaac made his concern known to God. Then, after twenty years, Rebekah conceived as a result of Isaac's prayer. After her pregnancy was under way for a few months, Rebekah also felt a need to pray, for strange activity was happening in her womb, a struggle was taking place there. Thinking that her pregnancy could be in trouble, she asked the Lord for an explanation. God told her, "Two nations are in your womb, and two types of people will be born to you; one shall be stronger than the other, and the elder shall serve the younger," vss. 22-23. The Lord's answer not only told Rebekah that she was to have twins, but also that they would have different personalities and philosophies. At the time of the twins' births, Isaac and Rebekah were further surprised by the strong difference in their appearances. The first boy was hairy over his entire body with red hair. Apparently there had been a quirk in gene inheritance, but he was the first born, the eldest. Next came another boy clutching the heel of the first. The first born was named Esau "Hairy," and the second was called Jacob, "Supplanter." Isaac was sixty when the twins were born. As they grew Esau became a great, skillful hunter of wild game, but Jacob was more diverse in his aptitudes and abilities. In vs. 28 we see the utter truthfulness of the Bible account when it is stated that Isaac loved Esau, but Rebekah loved Jacob. Such preference of parents for individual children today is considered unfair and inconsiderate. Esau was a sportsman and outdoors person. Jacob helped his mother around the home (tent). One reason Isaac loved Esau was that this son brought home fresh venison for eating, and Isaac liked venison. Jacob, on the other hand, helped his mother Rebekah cook and keep the home area neat and clean. One day Esau's love for hunting kept him out in the woods until he was exhausted, as much from hunger as physical exhaustion. When Esau arrived home Jacob was preparing a stew of red lentils which Esau especially liked. One of the ongoing disputes between the twins was that Esau was older and therefore would become the chief heir to Isaac's inheritance. Also, Isaac would be the priest or spiritual leader of his heirs until his death. Esau could not see himself in this capacity. He had no desire for spiritual concerns. Jacob told Esau that he would give him stew if the latter would renounce his birthright in Jacob's favor. Because Esau despised such responsibilities, he sold his elderly status to Jacob.

Mar. 8, 1998

"God's Covenant And Isaac"
Gen. 2 6

Couples Class
Wendell Alford,
Teacher

I. One of the biggest problems relating to mankind's physical sustenance in the Palestinian area of the Middle East is and was the potable water supply. At the outset of Chap. 26 the second severe famine in the Genesis account is recorded. Recall that when Abraham first came to the area to which the Lord called him, a famine came upon the land. When this dearth of the water supply happened to Abraham, he took Sarah and Lot and went westward to Egypt. Abraham returned to Bethel from Egypt rich in goods, Gen. 12:16,20; 13:2-3. Isaac's first reaction to this new famine was to approach the king of the Philistines at Gerar. We met the political leader Abimelech first in Chap. 20:2 when he took Sarah into his harem. The term "Abimelech" was the name given to the supreme political leader in that area at that time. Such titles as King, Caesar, Pharaoh, Pope, or President have been and are used to designate such political headships through the years. I do not believe that the Abimelech Abraham dealt with is the same person called "Abimelech" in Chap. 26. The latter leader was very likely the son of Abraham's Abimelech. The succession of this chief ruler is inherent in the meaning of the name itself, "father of the king." The custom of that period and place was that the king had the authority and privilege to select any beautiful woman in his realm for his harem. This royal privilege was extended toward Sarah in Chap. 20, and now, in Chap. 26, the same thing happens to Isaac's wife Rebecah and for the same reason, both were very beautiful women, Gen. 12:14, vs. 7. Sadly, King David later immorally and illegally exercised such a right for a married woman, Urriah the Hittite's wife, Bathsheba.

II. The Lord appeared to Isaac when this terrible second famine occurred in south Palestine to tell Abraham's son two things. Isaac should not, as his father had done, leave Gerar to go over to Egypt, but he was to remain (sojourn) in this land where God would bless him by his (God's) presence. The promise to Abraham would be extended as promised to Abraham's seed, Isaac, Gen. 17:19. This promise was an oath (covenant) of God which would remain in effect through Isaac and beyond. The Lord calls to Isaac's attention that Abraham had, "obeyed my voice, and kept my charge, my commandments, my statutes, and my laws," vs. 5. This reference to commandments, statutes, and laws can only mean essentially God's will, because the Law, per se, had not been given until Moses' time, some four-hundred and thirty years after God's Covenant with Abraham (Gal. 3:16-18). We should be careful to note that the second thing God promised in his appearance to Isaac was the affirmation of God's oath to Abraham. That promise included, "for unto thee and thy seed, I will give all these countries, and will perform the [entire] oath which I swore unto Abraham thy father, and I will make thy descendants multiply as the stars of heaven, and will give to thy seed all these lands; and in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed," vss. 3-4. Note especially the repeat of the promise of the countries, land. This specific promise of God to Abraham's descendants has been especially treasured by the Jews from then through today. Practically every day's newspaper testifies

to that fact.

III. So Isaac stayed at Gerar. He made the same mistake his father had made in announcing to the area that Rebekah was his sister, not his wife. He did this deliberately, as Abraham had done, to save his own life. Isaac must have lived near Abimelech's place, because one day the king saw Isaac caressing Rebekah. The king called Isaac and asked him why he was lying about his "sister" Rebekah. Abimelech scolded Isaac for his lying and accused him of putting the king in jeopardy of becoming guilty of adultery. The king issued a decree that, "if anyone should touch this man or his wife, he shall surely be put to death," vs. 11. With this marital protection in place, Isaac turned his attention to his farming. The Lord blessed his crop, and the first year his planting produced a hundredfold. Isaac's prosperity gained for him a great reputation. He continued to prosper until the Philistines became jealous. One reason Isaac's crops and herds were so productive was that he had ample water. He had not only much grain, large flocks, great herds, but also a large number of servants. For some unreasonable purpose the people around Gerar under Abimelech's direction had filled with dirt the many wells which Abraham had dug so that no longer was water available. The envy of the local citizens caused Abimelech to tell Isaac, "Go from us, for thou art much mightier than we," vs. 16. Isaac left as requested and went farther down the valley Gerar. Isaac evidently knew where the wells which Abraham had dug were, and redug each one. When the wells were again producing fresh water, Abimelech's herdsmen began to compete with Isaac's herdsmen for the water as they had Abraham's. When the competition grew beyond tolerance for Isaac, he kept moving farther away and digging wells until the people of Gerar bothered him no more. Isaac's moving took him all the way down south to Beer-sheba. During his first night at Beer-sheba the Lord appeared to Isaac to assure him that he should not fear, because the Lord would continue to bless him, "for my servant Abraham's sake." Because the Lord appeared, Isaac built an altar and dug another well there. Soon after the Lord appeared to Isaac, Abimelech surprised him with a visit. Abimelech declared that he wanted to be at peace with Isaac, because "thou art now the blessed of the Lord." They feasted together and Abimelech left Isaac's tent the next morning reconciled with God's chosen Isaac. But Isaac and Rebekah were not so happy about Jacob's twin Esau, because Esau married the daughter of a Hittite.

IV. Some say that Isaac gave little substance to the genealogical chain which produced the birth of our Lord and Savior, Jesus God's Messiah. All Isaac did was dig water wells! To sustain human physical life water is surpassed only by air as an immediate necessity. God's Holy Spirit is symbolized in the Word as both water and air. That Spirit is the Agent for a human's spiritual rebirth through his/her faith in Jesus Christ and the maintenance of ones spiritual relationship and growth in that grace of God through forgiveness, John 3:6-8; 7:37-39; 10:27-30; 14:22-29; 15:26; 16:13-15; I Pet. 5:10; I John 1:8-2:2. Isaac's wells of water related to mankind's physical well-being, but God's provision of his Spirit through Jesus' sacrifice on the cross is eternal life with God, I John 2:28-3:3.

Mar. 15, 1998

"Jacob's Blessing And Flight"
Gen. 27

Couples Class
Wendell Alford,
Teacher

I. The Bible is replete with episodes of human drama more telling than the most potent of those created today by creators of interpersonal relations in what we call "soap operas." Why, then, are not more people engaged in Bible study rather than "glued to the boob tube?" I believe that the difference is that some people are more interested in enjoying the lurid details of relations between people engaged in "affairs," "alternate life styles," "pro-choice," etc. In movies and television dramas these buffered-from-sin terms are used to shield viewers from what the Bible calls adultery, fornication-homosexuality, and pro-abortion-on-demand (taking human lives), sins against God's will. As Shakespeare put it, "Ay, there's the rub!" (Hamlet, Act III, Scene I) People tend to enjoy what God's Word identifies as sin, mankind's displeasing the Lord, without the climax of retribution by God for humanity's engaging in such activities. Dramatists enjoy David's sinful treatment of Uriah by committing adultery (an "affair") with his wife and then having Uriah killed to "cover up" his sin against God. As a consequence of David's sin, the child born to him and Beer-sheba in their adulterous relationship, died on his seventh day of life, II Sam. 12:14,18. The Bible states explicitly that, "the thing that David did was evil in the sight of the Lord," II Sam. 11:27. David was made painfully aware of his sin by Nathan the prophet, II Sam. 12:7-27. I wonder how pleasurable our present-day dramas would be to us if the displays of the pleasures of the flesh were noted as being the sins they really are, against mankind's God and Creator.

II. I have given the above introduction to the twenty-seventh chapter of Genesis, because one can misunderstand the actions of Rebekah and her favorite son, Jacob. Just because the Bible relates the evil activities of the characters therein, it should not be assumed that such activities are approved by God. Such an incident occurred when Isaac was too old to dig more wells for water, because his sight was gone. His sight was so poor that he could not distinguish objects in his very presence. His sense of smell and feeling, however, were still somewhat sensitive, and his hearing was such that he could, to some degree, distinguish the different timbres of different peoples' voices. In this condition Isaac realized that he would soon die so he called Esau, his elder son, to him and said to him, "Understand now, I am old; I do not know the day of my death, therefore, take your weapons, your quiver and bow, to the woods and bring me some venison. You know that I love the tasty food which is made from the fresh meat you bring from the woods. As I am eating this savory food you supply, I want to bless you with my spirit before I die," vss. 1-4. Apparently, Isaac had forgotten or else could not bring himself to give the blessing associated with passing the lineage of his posterity to the younger son instead of the older. Recall that at Gen. 25:23 the Lord had declared explicitly that the elder of the twins (Esau) should serve the younger (Jacob). God's declaration had been given even before their birth, while they were still in Rebekah's womb! This arrangement defied the general custom of Abraham's time

regarding lineage. We cannot know from the Bible account whether Isaac's consideration of changing God's prescription for blessing the younger was deliberate or simply a geriatric (and therefore excusable) oversight. In any case, Rebekah was the one to whom God had declared that the younger would take precedence in the family blessing. She overheard Isaac request of Esau, fresh meat and his promise to give Esau the blessing. The very best credit which can be given to Rebekah for her subsequent actions, and Jacob's compliance, is that she was following God's will rather than Isaac's error in forgetting God's command. Scripture reveals the correctness of Rebekah's and Jacob's actions. I realize that suggesting the possibility of this position refutes many Bible student's condemnation of the apparent deceit in the mother-son's treatment of Isaac's "error." In further Biblical evidence at Mal. 1:1-5, the Lord's message to Israel in Malachi's time was that God had, in fact, given Jacob's lineage, preference over Esau's. Again, in the New Covenant God's Word states at Rom. 9:6-16 that, while quoting the Malachi passage, God's mercy is noted as the deciding factor. Last week we stressed God's sovereignty and grace in Rom. 9:18-33 concerning God's choices for all mankind.

III. Rebekah told the plan of Isaac to Jacob, her favorite son. Jacob then followed his mother's orders. He went to the domestic flock and picked out a choice kid for a meal for Isaac. He told his mother that Esau was hairy all over, his clothing would smell of the woods, and his voice would expose the plot. Rebekah told Jacob that if her plan failed, she would accept the blame and be cursed herself rather than Jacob. The meal was readied, and Jacob told Isaac that he was Esau, Isaac's first born, and ready for his blessing. Isaac was surprised by how quickly the venison had been killed and prepared. Jacob gave God the credit. Isaac still had doubts and asked "Esau" to come closer so that he could feel the hair on his body. Rebekah had anticipated this possibility and had taken the goat skin and fashioned pieces of it on Jacob's arms and neck. Isaac accepted the evidence with reservation and asked "Esau" again, "Are you really my son Esau?" Jacob replied, "I am," vs. 24. Isaac asked that the meal be brought in, and Jacob brought the "venison" and wine which Rebekah had prepared. Isaac asked Jacob to come kiss his father so that he could bless him. In the nearness Isaac smelled the woody smell of Esau's garments which Rebekah had put on Jacob. Isaac pronounced upon Jacob his full blessing, making him to be the recipient of Isaac's authority over all his forthcoming posterity. Jacob had scarcely left Isaac before Esau arrived home, prepared his freshly slain venison, presented it to Isaac, and asked for his blessing. Isaac asked, "Who are you?!" When Esau told him the truth, Isaac shook emotionally in disbelief and told Esau that he had blessed another. Esau sobbed bitterly and begged his father to bless him still. Isaac realized that Jacob had by trickery secured the only blessing allowed, outlining the fact that Esau would, in fact, be subject to the will of his brother Jacob. Esau hated Jacob from that moment and swore that, after Isaac had died, he would kill Jacob. Rebekah, again, interfered and told Jacob to flee to her brother Laban's home at Haran. Esau would be angry only a few days, and while there, Jacob could make arrangements for his marriage to a family member rather than to a local Hittite girl. Rebekah never saw Jacob again, and her favorite son was entrusted to the wiles of Laban.

Mar. 22, 1998

"God's Covenant With Jacob"
Gen. 28

Couples Class
Wendell Alford,
Teacher

I. After the Lord initiated a covenant with Abraham At Gen. 12:1-4, the offspring of Abraham remained rather simple until his grandson Jacob came into the picture. In the messianic lineage after Abraham came his son Isaac, and now Jacob is about to have a much larger family than either Abraham or Isaac. Jacob ends up with twelve sons by two wives and two concubines. We should remember a rather complicating factor, however, because while Abraham's offspring are furthering the messianic line with only three sons, Hagar's son Ishmael had had a total of twelve sons. Ishmael's entire family and their offspring began, continued, and still are very hostile to the messianic line, the Jews of our day. The people called "Jews" were not so called until Jacob's son Judah became a prominent personage in Abraham's posterity and the history associated with him (Judah). Judah was the fourth son of Jacob by Leah (Gen. 29:35), Jacob's first wife and sister of Rachel, his second wife. The word "Jew" first appears in the Bible at Esth. 2:5 (about 465 BC) where the title is given to Mordecai, "the son of Jair, the son of Shimei, the son of Kish, a Benjamite. Benjamin was, of course, the younger son of Jacob by Rachel. Later the names of the twelve tribes of Israel became primarily the names of the twelve sons of Jacob (Israel). Israel became a nation in its own right when it was freed by God from Egyptian slavery. When they left Egypt and returned to Palestine, the land God had promised them as descendants of Abraham (Gen. 12:1-4), they struggled for centuries. The Jewish peoples were split into two nations after Solomon, David's son, died. The two nations were called Israel to the north and Judah to the south. Israel was extinguished as a nation in about 721 BC and Judah in about 536 BC. Since Judah was the last nation of the Israelites (descendants of Jacob) to exist until AD 1948, the Israelites were called "Jews" based upon the Hebrew word "y'hudi," Aramaic "y'hudai," Greek "joudaios," Latin "judaius," and Assyrian "yau dai a." Today, in the nation of Israel, the term "Jew" is used to include the ethnicity of a person and not necessarily an exclusive reference to ones Jewish religion. Simply put, a Jew is every descendant of Jacob's son Judah (Israel). A believer and practicer of the Jewish religion is one who follows Judaism in one of the three current divisions, Orthodox, Conservative, or Reform, with Reform being the most liberal in practice.

II. As Jacob was preparing to leave his family, Isaac sat down with him to give some final instructions. With the force of commanding, Isaac charged Jacob not to marry one of the Canaanites. Rather than send a servant as his father Abraham had done, Isaac sent Jacob himself to Padanaram (Mesopotamia) where Jacob's grandfather Bethuel lived at Haran. Isaac was very specific about whom his son should marry. He told him to go to his uncle's house (Laban) and marry one of Laban's daughters. Recall that Laban was Rebekah's brother. Isaac prayed that God would bless Jacob to multiply his descendants as God had promised Abraham, including the same land of Palestine where those offspring would own and inhabit. It is interesting that as Isaac instructed Jacob and bid him farewell,

no mention is made of Rebekah. However, Esau was very aware of what was happening. He understood that Isaac did not want Jacob to marry women from among the local citizens. From what appears to be respect for Isaac's wishes, Esau went to his uncle Ishmael's place and married Mahaloth, Ishmael's daughter.

III. Jacob set out from Beer-sheba and went on his way toward Haran. He traveled all day and must have been fearful and anxious about the uncertainty of what was happening to him. As far as we know this experience was his first time away from his parents. He was not as competent in woods-dwelling as his brother Esau. Jacob apparently relied upon his mother Rebekah in his everyday activities. All through the day he thought of the perils awaiting him. Then the sun went down, and darkness surrounded the lonely Jacob. Adding to his physical discomfort was the bed he made for sleep. He piled up a group of stones and lay down to sleep. Under these conditions Jacob had a dream which impressed him traumatically. He dreamed that a large ladder was standing upon the earth whose top reached continually upward to heaven itself. As Jacob observed this awesome spectacle, God's angels (messengers) were climbing up and down the ladder. To make the scene more astounding, the Lord himself stood above the ladder. As Jacob was observing the angels going up and down the ladder, the Lord said to him, "I am the Lord God of Abraham your father, and the God of Isaac: The land whereon you rest, to you will I give it, and to your descendants who will be as the dust of the earth - - through your descendants shall all the families of the earth be blessed. And, note carefully, I am with you, and will protect you everywhere you go. and will bring you again into this land: for I will not leave you until I have kept my entire promise to you," vss. 13-15. Jacob awoke from the dream and said, "Surely the Lord is in this place, and I did not realize it." The Lord's appearance to him filled Jacob with utter awe. He had thought that he was alone, but how awesome to know that God was there with him. And not only that, but God had just promised to be with him wherever he went and protect him! This place which had been Luz, Jacob changed to Bethel, the House of God. Jacob swore an oath that as God's promise was fulfilled in taking care of his needs and bringing him again to his home, he would know that the Lord would indeed be his God. He found a large stone which he set for a pillar to mark where God had appeared to him. Further, Abraham's grandson Jacob, promised to give a tithe to the Lord God of heaven of all his substance. This idea of giving could have been passed along through Isaac, because the practice was begun by Abraham at Gen. 14:20. Not until thousands of years later was the meaning of Jacob's ladder dream fully known. When Jesus was choosing his first apostles, he called Andrew first, then Peter his brother, then Philip who asked Nathanael to come and see Jesus. Nathanael questioned whether anything good could come from Nazareth? Jesus saw Nathanael coming and said, "Behold, an Israelite, indeed, in whom there is no deceit [Jacob]. - - Truthfully, I say to you [Nathanael], 'Hereafter you shall see heaven open, and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of Man,'" John 1:35-51; 14:6; Rev. 4:1. Jesus became God's communication between the Lord God and mankind, John 1:1-2,9-14.

Mar. 29, 1998

"Jacob Toils For Companionship"
Gen. 29

Couples Class
Wendell Alford,
Teacher

I. After Jacob's profound spiritual experience at Bethel and his vow to God, he continued his journey on eastward toward Haran. Nearing Haran he saw a well in a large field where three herds of sheep lay nearby awaiting water from the well. In the distance Jacob saw a group of men come to the well and take from the well's opening a big stone which protected the water. After watering the three groups of sheep, the men replaced the stone over the well. At about that time Jacob arrived at the well. He asked the men where they lived, and they said that their home was at Haran. Then he asked them whether they knew a fellow by the name of Laban who was the grandson of Nahor. Jacob was pleasantly surprised when they answered in the affirmative. He asked about the welfare of Laban, and the men assured him that he and his family were well. "In fact," they said, "Laban's daughter Rachel is her father's shepherdess and should be bringing animals to this well about this time. Then we should note the forwardness of Jacob (Remember that his name means "Supplanter" or "Deceiver.") when he told (ordered?) these strangers that, since it was early in the day and the cattle would not come to the well until later, they should finish watering the sheep and take them away from the well for grazing. They refused because they were required to wait for all the sheep to come and be watered. While this discussion took place, Rachel came with Laban's sheep for water. Then the brazen Jacob took over the men's task and removed the stone himself and watered her sheep. Even before Jacob spoke to Rachel, he went to her, kissed her, and wept. Then he told her that he was a relative of Laban, Rebekah's son. Rachel ran ahead to Laban's place and told her father what had happened. Laban ran back to meet Jacob, embraced him, kissed him, and listened to his story after they had entered the house.

II. The Scripture leaves no doubt that Jacob had met in Laban a kindred spirit of deceit artistry and a shyster of the first rank. Laban told Jacob that he was glad that they were of the same flesh and blood, therefore Jacob was welcome in his home. Jacob stayed for a month. At this time Laban began to be concerned that Jacob's room and board were such that his sister's son (nephew) should begin to work to earn his keep. One day Laban propositioned Jacob concerning the latter's beginning work and the reasonable wage for such labor. Laban had two daughters, one was Rachel already noted and an older daughter, Leah. Rachel apparently favored Jacob's mother Rebekah, Laban's sister, for Rachel was beautiful and well built, vs. 17. On the other hand, Leah was [delicate or soft, i.e., we would say that she was chunky], well, to Jacob, ugly. For obvious reasons Jacob loved Rachel and told Laban that he would work for his uncle for a total of seven years if she (Rachel) would become his wife. Laban, with tongue in cheek, said, "It is better that I give her to you, rather than to another man. It's a deal, live here with us [and go to work for me]," vs. 19. Jacob began work and worked longingly for Rachel for seven tedious years, although the time passed fast because of Jacob's love for her. Finally, the day came when sweet Rachel should become Jacob's very own wife.

He told Laban, his future father-in-law, "Give me my wife, for my days are fulfilled, that I may go in unto her," vs. 21. Laban planned for the occasion very meticulously with his best trickery. He announced to all the people around that he was having a feast (throwing a party) to celebrate the marriage of his kinsman Jacob to his daughter. I believe that, although the Bible does not give details of what happened at the feast, the circumstantial evidence is overwhelming that alcohol was involved. Why do I so presume? Jacob had known Rachel for a full seven years during which he had associated with, loved, and observed her at close range. After the feast Jacob went to his place for sleep, and the crafty Laban, undoubtedly with Leah's collaboration, presented her (Leah) to Jacob for the consummation of the marriage. Already we have noted the contrast of Leah's appearance and physical bearing with Rachel's. So I believe that sobriety was not practiced by Jacob that night, or he would have detected a problem. In fact, Jacob did not realize what a horrible mistake the night had produced until "in the morning." vs. 25. "Mr. Deceit" had been outdone by "Mr. Deceiver," Laban. Since all new brides were given a maid to help with their marital duties, Laban gave one Zilpah to Leah for a handmaid.

III. The next morning, married, Jacob awoke cold sober and disgustingly discovered his new wife to be, not Rachel, but Leah. He confronted Uncle Laban at once who had, no doubt, chuckled through his breakfast! Jacob said, "What have you done to me? Did I not work seven years for Rachel? Why have you deceived me?," vs. 25. Well, the prime deceiver Laban had thought about how he would respond to these questions. He said, in effect, "I am not sure what your customs are back in Beer-sheba, but here in Haran, the younger sister only marries after the older. If you are willing to work another seven years, Rachel will then be your wife also," vss. 26-27. Jacob had no other choice if he wanted an intimate relationship with his beloved Rachel. Without hesitation Jacob began another seven years of service in Laban's household. Although Leah was unloved by Jacob (She bare no child until Jacob had married Rachel.), "the Lord saw that Leah was unloved and opened her womb, but Rachel remained barren," vss. 31-32. Leah conceived and bare a son who delighted her, because she believed that her motherhood by Jacob would cause him to change their relations so that he would then love her. This son Reuben, meaning "See, A Son," was Jacob's first child. Then she became pregnant again and gave birth to another son, Simeon meaning, "Unloved, But Heard," vs. 33. Again Leah gave the Lord credit for her good fortune. She bore two more sons, Levi meaning, "Becoming Attached To," and Judah meaning, "Praise God," for she now had given Jacob four sons, the only children her husband had. After Judah, however, she became barren for some time. Through this period of Jacob's life, I believe he was introduced to the virtue of patience and that Leah learned that one does not have to be physically attractive for God to love and care for anyone. How pertinent for us in this period when the world scene is rapidly approaching the time when the Lord will purge the entire world, and Jesus will come back to rule the earth, Matt. 24:21-30; Lk 21:25-28. In the meantime, we believers are to be expectant and patient, Psalms 37:1-7; Dan. 2:44; I Cor. 15:51-52, 58; Rev. 11:15.

Apr. 5, 1998

"Jacob's Family Grows"
Gen. 30

Couples Class
Wendell Alford,
Teacher

I. We learned in Chap. 29 that, although Jacob was married to both Rachel and Leah, only Leah bore children by Jacob. Rachel was not a gynecologist, but she believed that the reason for her barrenness was Jacob. She said to her husband, "Give me children, or else I will die," vs. 1. This dire sadness of Rachel due to her inability to bear Jacob children reminds me of Jesus' statement regarding women's childbearing at Lk. 11:27-28; 21:23; 23:26-31 and the Word further at Rev. 6:16-17; 9:6 concerning end time sorrows. Leah had four boys by this time, and Rachel felt that her role as a wife was unfulfilled and worthless without any children. She envied her sister Leah. After Rachel confronted Jacob with her misery, she suggested that Jacob do the same thing that Sarah had requested of Abraham, that he have sexual relations with her (Rachel's) maid Bilhah. It appears strange to us today that Rachel was angry with Jacob for his not having given her children. Especially is her anger at Jacob odd since she was asking Bilhah to do what she herself could not perform with the same man. In other words, if Jacob were the missing link in Rachel's not having children, how could Leah be the mother of four children by Jacob? In response to Rachel's blaming him for her barrenness, he told her that this control was God's prerogative to "withhold from her the fruit of the womb," vs. 2. So, Rachel gave to Jacob her maid Bilhah to relate to him as his wife (concubine). Bilhah conceived and bore Jacob a son, and Rachel named him Dan which means "Judge." She so named him because she said that God had judged her. Immediately following the birth of Dan, Bilhah conceived again and gave birth to a son whom Rachel named Naphtali which means "wrestling," because she (Rachel) was continually wrestling with Leah because of her own childlessness. At this time Leah "had left bearing" and apparently was fearful of Rachel's surpassing her four sons in number. She, therefore, took Zilpah her maid and "gave her to Jacob as a wife" as Rachel had given him Bilhah. Timely Zilpah bore a son for Jacob, and Leah named him Gad which means "Troop" or "Fortune." The significance of that name is not told us. Zilpah then had another son Asher meaning "Blessed" or "Happy," because, Leah said, "The other women would now realize that she was happy and blessed, vs. 13.

II. Before examining vs. 14-18 we should consider what mandrakes were and are. They are so called in the KJV, but in the RV margin they are called "love apples." They were ready for harvest in late spring, May. These plants still grow in southern Palestine where soil moisture is relatively low. They can grow in such arid areas, because they send their roots very deep into the earth. Mandrakes are in the potato family, have a heavy narcotic odor, and a sweetish taste. Especially interesting in this Bible passage is the fact that eating mandrakes was considered by the ancients as an aphrodisiac or fertility food, thus the name "love apples." From this definition it is clear why Rachel would desire mandrakes to eat, for she was still barren. One day at the time when winter wheat was being harvested, Reuben the oldest son of Jacob and Leah, was in the field (probably with Jacob his father). There Reuben

found mandrakes growing and gathered some for his mother Leah. Leah, recall, had not conceived for some time so she was glad to get this relatively rare food (medicine), mandrakes. Knowing human nature, we can assume, I believe, that Leah made known to Rachel (still childless, except through Bilhah her maid) that she had access to some "love apples." Leah enjoyed Rachel's response to the news. Rachel said, "Give me, I pray (beg) you, some of your son's mandrakes," vs. 14. Leah told Rachel, in effect, "Remember, Jacob was my husband first, and you took him (his love and respect) away from me. And now, in the same way, you want to take my son's mandrakes?" Rachel said, "Because of your son's mandrakes, Jacob will no doubt engage you in sexual activity this very night," vs. 15. Rachel's prediction was exactly correct. When Leah saw Jacob coming in from the field that evening, she ran out to meet him and said, "You must sleep with me tonight, for I am due that since your son [Reuben] brought me mandrakes today." Jacob complied with Leah's wishes. What part the mandrakes played in the union we cannot know for sure, but we do know that, "God hearkened unto Leah and she conceived and had a fifth son by Jacob. This son Leah named Issachar meaning "Hire," because, she said, "God has paid me for sharing my husband with my maid," vs. 18. Then she was pregnant again and had Zebulun meaning "Gifts." She said that God had given me good gifts for my husband, and Jacob will honor me because of my part in giving him six sons. Her last child by Jacob was a girl named Dinah meaning "Judgment." No reason is given why she was so named.

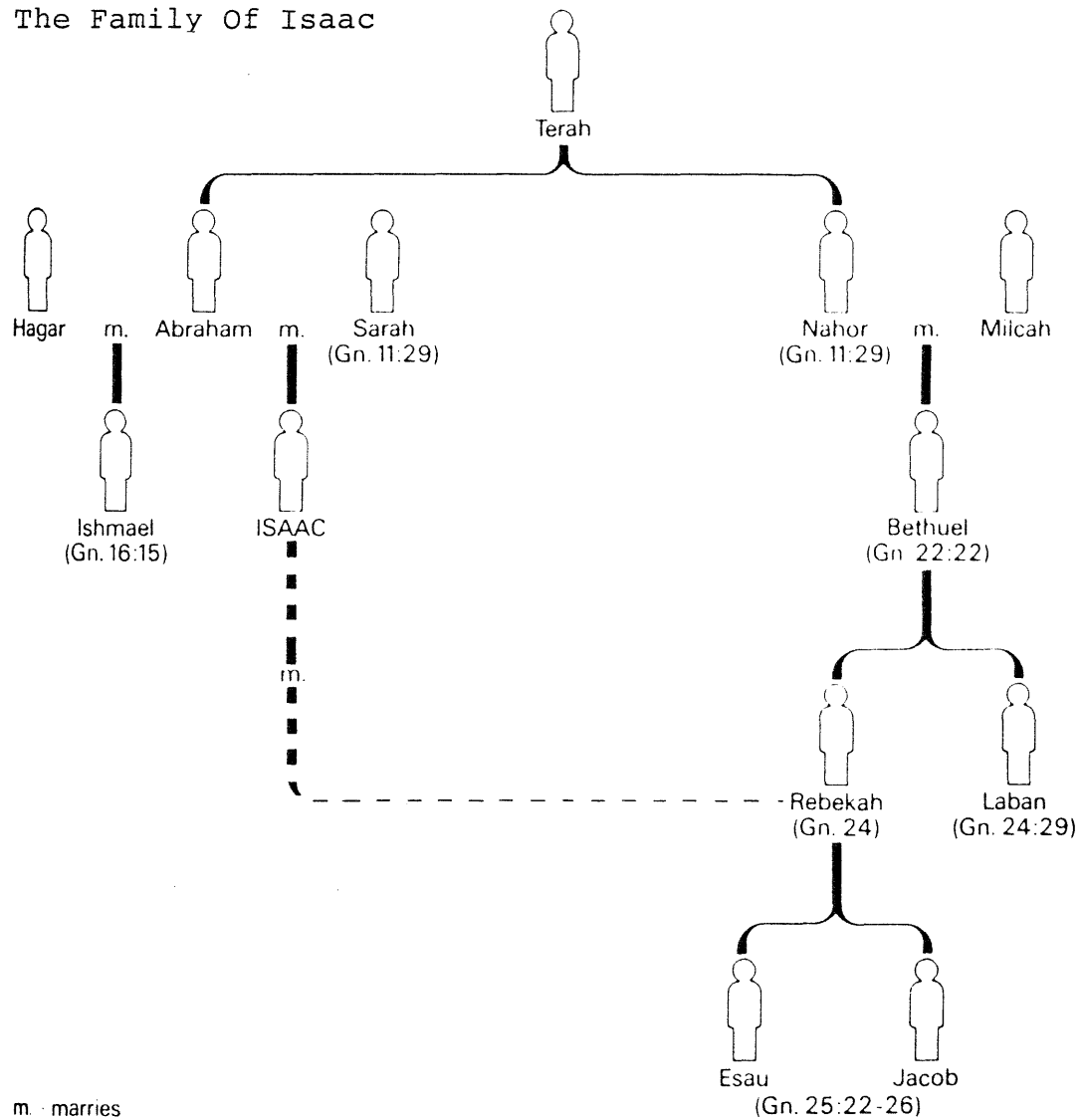
III. Finally, God remembered Rachel, "opened her womb," and she had a son whom she named Joseph which means, "He Will Add." Rachel strongly believed that God would give her another son by Jacob. He did, as she was dying, and he was Benjamin, Jacob's last son and son number twelve, Gen. 35:18. When Joseph was born, Jacob told Laban that he wanted to take his family and possessions and return to his native land in Palestine, vs. 25. Laban did not want Jacob to leave him, for he admitted that his presence with him had brought prosperity as only God could give. In fact, Jacob told Laban that when he came to Haran for a wife, Laban had little. Now that Jacob had made Laban prosperous, Jacob was concerned about an estate for his own family in the future. Laban asked, "What shall I give you?" Jacob had calculated a plan and introduced it to Laban by saying, "You will need to pay me nothing." Esau's brother outlined a plan which would divide the herds over a period of time by a biological process. Laban agreed to Jacob's proposition, and went out himself that day and divided the animals according to Jacob's plan. Jacob's sons took Jacob's allotment of the herds some three day's journey from Laban's sheep and goats. By means of Jacob's knowledge of animal husbandry and his continuing to care personally for Laban's herds while his own sons cared for his, he was able to manipulate Laban's flocks with his own. As a result, Laban's herds diminished while Jacob's increased, vss. 40-43. I confess that I do not understand all the intricacies or validities of Jacob's deceit. However, the Bible makes the end results very clear that Jacob prospered exceedingly at the expense of Laban. During the period of Jacob's deception, Laban was apparently unaware of Jacob's skullduggery. Next week, Lord willing, we shall learn, "The rest of the story!"

Apr. 5, 1998
(Supplement)

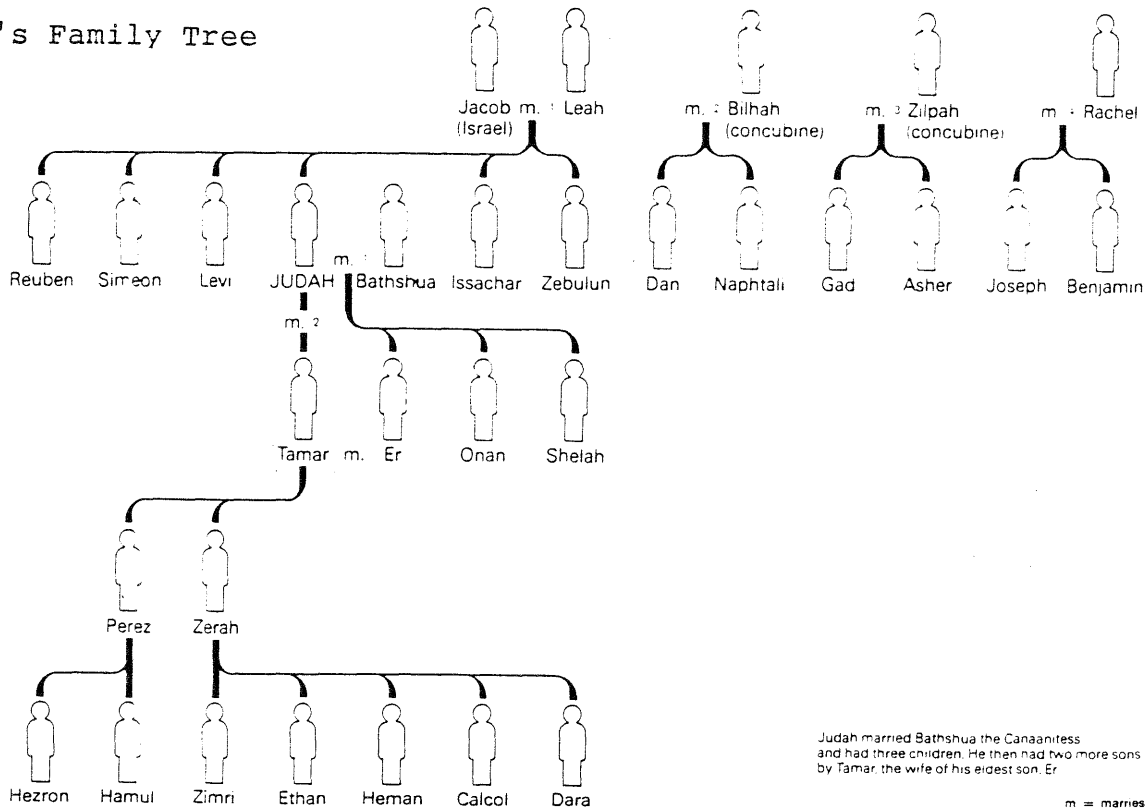
"Jacob's Family Grows"
Gen. 30 - Supp.

Couples Class
Wendell Alford,
Teacher

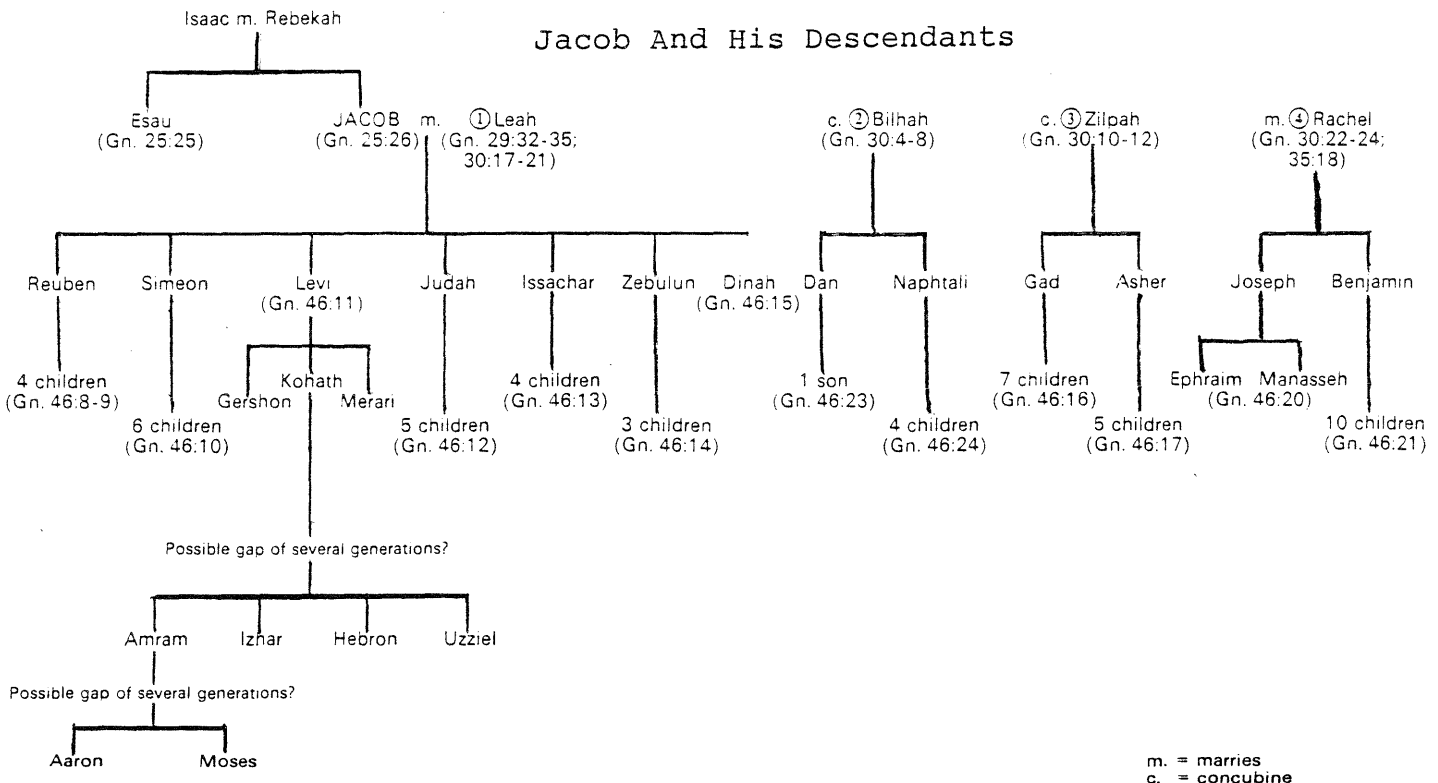
The Family Of Isaac



Judah's Family Tree



Jacob And His Descendants



Apr. 19, 1998

"Jacob Flees Again"
Gen. 31

Couples Class
Wendell Alford,
Teacher

I. We recall that when Jacob left Beer-sheba, he was under the threat of his brother Esau because of the birthright problem. Now here in Chap. 31 we learn that Jacob is unhappy with his father-in-law Laban who objected to the unfair management of their animals. Jacob learned of Laban's discontent by the look on Laban's face. At this point in Jacob's service for his uncle, the Lord told Jacob, "Return to the land of your fathers (Abraham and Isaac), and I will be with you," vs. 3. Jacob chose a convenient time and asked his two wives, Rachel and Leah, to convene with him in privacy out in the open country with his flock. He knew that for him to leave Laban's household as God had told him, he would need his wives' cooperation. After all, they were Laban's daughters who had never ventured from their childhood home. Jacob told his wives that he had noted a change in Laban's disposition toward him for the worse lately. He told them that he had served their father diligently, because the God of his fathers had been with Jacob. Further, the way he had managed the herds had been in the way in which Laban had agreed. Through this process God had taken the flocks from Laban and had given them to Jacob. God had appeared to Jacob by identifying himself as the same God who had appeared to him back at Bethel. Again, God gave him specific instructions that it was now time for Jacob to return to the land of his birth. Both Rachel and Leah agreed that of their father's estate they would receive nothing, because Laban had, in effect, sold them to Jacob for his hire to Laban and thereby "devoured also our money," vs. 15. His wives told Jacob to follow his God's bidding and that they would go with their husband. One could logically ask why would the God of the universe continue to love, prosper, and care for Jacob who was obviously not Godlike in his attitudes and actions? God had a plan to salvage mankind through the lineage whom he had preordained, I believe. A loving God has to use people who are not worthy of his love, in spite of their weaknesses. God's Word at Eph. 2:4-10 declares that everyone whom God makes right with himself is a person who, through faith in God's grace, is God's workmanship. Certainly Jacob was unworthy of God's love and direction, but every time he turned to God, the Lord accepted him. Jacob was fulfilling God's promise to Abraham and Isaac. God's Word at Eph. 3:14-21 and Phili. 4:4-7 assures us believers in Jesus as God's Christ (Savior) that our relationship with God as his spiritual offspring is beyond human understanding. We are to rejoice in the Lord continually.

II. God's promise to be especially with those in the messianic lineage began at Gen. 3:15 and continued specifically from after the flood as noted at Gen. 6:18 (Isa. 54:7-10). That lineage passed from Noah through his son Shem, through Arphaxad, Lk 3:36. From Noah's son Shem comes the present group of peoples we call Semites, but not all Semites are what we call Jews today, i.e., all Jews are Semites, but not all Semites are Jews. For example, Ishmael's offspring as sons of Abraham are all Semites, but not Jews. They are today's Arabs. Oddly enough the people designated as Hebrews

today are offspring of Shem, but in this order: Noah, Shem, Arpachshad (Arphaxad), Cainan, Shelah, and Eber, Gen. 10:21-24; Lk 3:35-36. The name "Hebrews" came from the fifth in line after Noah, Eber, (Heb., 'ibri). The first person in the Bible called a Hebrew is Abram at Gen. 14:13 where Abram led a confederacy of five kings against the four kings from the north country in order to rescue his nephew Lot. Jonah said of himself, "I am an Hebrew, and I fear Yahweh, the God of heaven," Jon. 1:9. I believe that today the term "Hebrews" is synonymous with the term "Israelites," because both are used to designate the same peoples at Ex. 3:18 and at Ex. 5:1-3 where God speaks to Moses, and Moses repeats God's words to the Pharaoh of Egypt. Also at Acts 6:1; II Cor. 11:22, and at Phil. 3:5 the Hebrews and the Israelites are considered to be the same peoples in the New Covenant of God with all humanity.

III. After Jacob conferred with his two wives, Rachel and Leah, he readied his entire family, his herds, and household goods for travel upon a caravan of camels. Laban was away shearing his sheep, and Rachel was able to enter his quarters and steal Laban's idols to carry with her on the journey. We should emphasize the fact that Rachel had a religious loyalty to idolatry, not to Jacob's God, and was very probably why God wanted Jacob to leave Laban, his people, and the other Syrians. Note in vss. 20,24 the emphasis that Laban was considered a Syrian. I believe that God did not want Jacob's children and family to be reared under this idolatrous influence. With Laban away and the caravan ready, early one morning Jacob fled from Pandanaram with all that he owned, heading back to his father's home at Beer-sheba. After three days a messenger reached Laban at his shearing place and notified him of Jacob's action. By this time Jacob had forded the river and was heading for the mountains of Gilead. It took Laban seven days to overtake Jacob, but on the last night of the pursuit God appeared to Laban in a dream and told him, "Take care that you take no strong position toward Jacob, either good or bad," vs. 24. Laban confronted Jacob and asked him why he had left in a manner of a military coup de'tat. If I had known that you wanted to return to Beer-sheba, I would have given you a going away party and sent you away in happiness! I have the power to hurt you, but your God told me in a dream last night not to be harsh. I have but one problem, why did you steal my gods (idols)? Jacob knew not that Rachel had stolen them, and said, "You are free to kill whoever took them," vs. 32. Laban went through the tents of Jacob, Leah, and the two maidservants and found nothing. Lastly, he went to Rachel's tent where his daughter was sitting on a piece of furniture (a trunk?) in which she had hidden the idolatrous images. She told her father that she did not feel like arising, for she was experiencing her period. Laban did not locate the gods so Jacob was angry and rebuked Laban for his "false" accusation. Jacob in his anger accused Laban of working him for twenty years during which he had to pay Laban for animals even accidentally killed or lost, had worked without proper rest, and had his pay changed (reduced?) ten times. God had been with Jacob all these years, and Laban knew that to be true. So there at Mt. Gilead they both swore that neither would harm the other thereafter. Laban returned home, and Jacob continued westward toward Beer-sheba.

Apr. 26, 1998

"Jacob Becomes Israel"
Gen. 3 2

Couples Class
Wendell Alford,
Teacher

I. After Jacob and his father-in-law Laban became reconciled at Gilead by a "Mizpah" experience, they went their separate ways, Jacob westward toward Beer-sheba and Laban eastward back to Haran. A "Mizpah" can best be described by the sentiment felt when a group sings "Blessed Be The Tie That Binds" when separating from one another. It means literally "Watch", i.e., watch over us, each one, as we are absent from one another, Gen. 31:49. In this mood of repentance, as he traveled along, messengers (angels) of God appeared to Jacob. He named the place "Mahanaim" or "Double Camp," because his entourage and God's angels were both camped there, vss.1-2. As Jacob reflected upon what he feared would probably happen to him when he arrived back at the old home place, he had a feeling of dread, because of the animosity of his brother Esau. Remember that twenty years before, at Jacob's departure, Esau had wanted him dead for having "stolen" the birthright from Isaac. The place where Esau now lived had become Edom after Esau's hair color. He was born with red hair all over his body, Gen. 25:25. Edom in Hebrew means "Red," and is also associated by some with the red stew which Jacob served Esau when the latter "conceded" his birthright to the former. The area which his posterity occupied was now known as Edom and they, Edomites. In anticipation of harm from Esau, Jacob sent messengers ahead to him and told them to say, "Your servant Jacob wants you to know, my lord, that he has been with Laban these long years, but now he has many oxen, donkeys, menservants, and maidservants. We have been sent to tell you that he is not in need of anything, but he is returning home and wants to be accepted amicably by you," vss. 4-5. When Jacob's envoys returned to him, they told Jacob that his brother Esau had sent word to the effect that he would be coming to meet him with four hundred men (troops?), vs. 6. Jacob presumed that his deep feeling of fear of meeting Esau was justified. He immediately devised a plan which he believed would save him from his hateful brother. He divided his entire company into two components including all personnel, household goods, and livestock. His plan was to send one company ahead of the other so that when Esau attacked the first group, the second would have time to escape.

II. After devising his plan of safety, Jacob did what any God-fearing person should do fearing for his/her life; he prayed! His prayer was very directly related to his problem as he saw it. He prayed (my paraphrase-WA), "O God of my father Abraham, and of my father Isaac, the Lord who asked me to return to my homeland and kindred and who promised to continue to be with me. I am not worthy of the least of your mercies, because, even though your promise was and is that you would care for me, my action has been as one of unbelief. I am able to devise a plan which does not take genuine trust of you as fact. I am returning across the Jordan with plenty when I had nothing but my staff [twenty years ago]. But deliver me, I beg you, from the hateful actions of my brother Esau, for I am afraid of him for my own safety as well as my twelve children and their mothers. And remember, Lord, you promised to do me good even to making my descendants as the sands of the sea which cannot be

numbered for multitudes," vs. 9-12. After his prayer Jacob spent the night, and, early the next morning, he assembled some things as a gift (bribe?) for Esau. The gift included two hundred female goats, twenty male goats, two hundred ewes, twenty rams, thirty female camels each suckling a colt, forty cows, ten bulls, twenty female donkeys, and ten male donkeys. He instructed three groups of servants to take three groups spaced in tandem of the animals for Esau on ahead. When the first group met Esau, they were to tell him that Jacob was behind them and that these livestock were a gift from his brother who believes that you will accept them. Jacob hopes that you will be kind to him as he returns. That night Jacob took all of his company westward across the River Jordan at the Jabbok Ford, but he himself recrossed the river to meditate upon what his meeting with Esau would be like.

III. Jacob was all alone and could not sleep for the stress brought on by the anxiety. While in this condition, he was confronted with and wrestled by a Person who has through the centuries been mysterious to Bible students. No one denies that Jacob's prayer in this chapter and this wrestling experience constitute the spiritual pinnacle and major change in Jacob's life. He had had a profound promise from God that the Lord would care for him and be with him wherever he went, but this application of that promise was an ultimate test of his spiritual faith in the Lord. His repentance in vs. 10, "I am not worthy - - " is the prayer which all of us believers confess when we accept God's sacrifice of Jesus for our sins against our heavenly Father. Jacob was in this prayer confessing what God's Word declares at Rom. 3:23 and Rom. 5:12. I cite this connection of God's Word from Paul because of my belief of who the mysterious Person was with whom Jacob wrestled. The Person took the initiative in the struggle, and Jacob's strength prevailed against the Man until he could only hold on to him. This "holding on" continued until Jacob's hip joint at his thigh was disjointed by the Man's touch. The Man said, "Let me go, for it is dawn," but Jacob replied, "Not unless you bless me." He asked Jacob, "What is your name?" Jacob answered, "Jacob." The Man replied, "Thy name shall no more be called Jacob [Usurper, Selfish], but Israel [Prince with God], for as a prince you have power with God and with men, and [since you] have prevailed [held on]," vs. 28. When Jacob asked the Man's name, he would not say, but he did bless the new Israel. The Man left, and Jacob called the place Paniel (Face of God), because Jacob knew that he had been in God's immediate presence. He also knew that God had preserved his life. After that experience, Jacob limped because of his displaced hip joint. The Israelites thereafter refrained from eating an animal's tissue from that place. I believe that the Person who wrestled with Jacob was none other than Jehovah God himself, the preincarnate Christ. Hosea speaks of the incident at Hos. 12:2-6. Paul at Rom. 7:1-8:1,11,14-17,31-39 indicates that his life was a continual struggle which only the Lord Jesus Christ could bless and keep whole, but with Jesus wrestling for us believers nothing can separate us from him. Remember also that Jesus told Nathanael that he, Jesus the Son of Man, was "Jacob's Ladder" upon whom the messengers of God would thereafter ascend and descend through the Holy Spirit from God to earth, John 1:51; 14:26.

May 3, 1998

"Israel Meets Esau"
Gen. 33

Couples Class
Wendell Alford,
Teacher

I. Jacob, whom the Lord God had renamed Israel, appears even more humble as he nears his brother's land, Edom. In the twenty years of Jacob's absence from his old home place, Esau had prospered and his posterity had grown along with his influence over the people of the area. Esau's standing appears so because of his ability to muster four hundred men as a force to meet his brother Jacob. We should remember that, just as Jacob was concerned about the current attitude of Esau toward him, Esau also had to be prepared to meet a twin brother who had "tricked" him consistently during their youth. So Esau came prepared to meet Jacob for any emergency, eventuality. As the meeting ensued, we learn that Jacob's experience with God that fateful night back on the east side of the River Jordan made him contrite and without the deceit of his early years. God in the person of, I believe, the preincarnate Christ, took the initiative in wrestling with Jacob and making him Israel, a prince of power with God and with men, Gen. 32:28. As Jacob continued on westward, he kept searching the western horizon for signs of Esau and his "troops," four hundred men. A cloud of dust indicated that they were approaching! Jacob's immediate action was to separate his children into four groups with their mothers, Leah, Rachel, Zilpah, and Bilhah. Striking is the way in which Jacob arranged the family. He placed Zilpah with her children Gad and Asher, who would be the first to meet Esau, at the head of the column. Second in the grouping, he placed Bilhah with her children Dan and Naphtali. Following Bilhah came Leah and her children Reuben, Simeon, Levi, Judah, Issachar, Zebulun, and Dinah, the daughter. Lastly came Rachel and Joseph with Jacob following them all. When Jacob had the lineup in an order with his most loved at the rear, Esau approached the family and bowed respectfully seven times although he did not know who they were. When he neared his brother Jacob, he ran toward him, hugged him, dropped his face upon his neck, kissed him, and cried! Releasing Jacob, Esau asked him, "Who are all these people here ahead of you?" Jacob replied, "They are my family whom the Lord has graciously given to your servant." vs. 5. Each of the mothers and their children gathered around Esau and bowed themselves in respect. Esau then asked about all the livestock which had preceded the family. Jacob told him that those are my gift to you to let you know my feeling of warmth toward you, hoping that they would make you feel likewise toward me. Esau informed Jacob that he was well off in goods and did not, in fact, need Jacob's help. However, Jacob begged him to take the herds and thereby signify his friendly acceptance of Jacob his brother. With this urging Esau received the gift from Jacob.

II. Esau further expressed his love of Jacob by offering to go before him and insure the safety of Jacob and his caravan. Jacob told his brother that since some of the children were so young and some of the herd had young, he would have to travel so slowly that such a pace would be impractical for Esau and his large group. Note the respect indicated by Jacob's reply to Esau's offer of help, "Let my lord, I beg you, go ahead on your way, and I will

continue on at a slow pace as is needed by the flock and my family," vs. 14. Esau asked if he could at least leave a few of his men to help, but Jacob again told him that they would not be needed. Jacob thanked Esau who then returned to Seir, the land of the Edomites. Edom lay to the east of the north-to-south Arabah mountain range south of the Dead Sea. Jacob journeyed slowly on to Succoth (Booths) where he apparently stayed for a rest to let his family and animals gain strength to continue. He erected tents for his family and built booths (stalls) for the animals. After a time of respite, he, his family with all of his possessions continued on to the land of Shechem to the city of Shalem. There he ended his long journey from Padanaram and was finally back in Canaan. Shechem was located in central Palestine in the valley between mounts Ebal and Gerizim, thirty-four miles north of Jerusalem and seven miles southwest of the city of Samaria. This valley was very fertile and was watered by many springs coming from the surrounding elevations. There Jacob bought a tract of land for a goodly sum of money from Hamor, the Hivite and father of Shechem. He also set up a permanent tent and erected an altar on his property. The altar he called Elelohe-Israel meaning "[to] God, the God of Israel."

III. In the past several chapters we have noted a change of Jacob's attitude brought about by his spiritual experience with the Lord God. Jacob's whole outlook about the significance of his life as related to God's plan changed dramatically when God wrestled with him on the east of the Jordan at Jabbok Ford in the wee hours of that night. Of interest, I believe, is that this place is at or near the site where John the Immerser immersed our Lord in the Jordan River, Matt. 3:1-17; Mk 1:1-15; Lk 3:20-23; 4:2. Another interesting aspect of Jacob's change of spirit after his "night with God" is this experience in Chap. 33 of reuniting with his brother Esau. While Jacob's extreme politeness could have, in and of itself, been an act of deceitfulness, I believe the change was genuine. Remember, at Gen. 32:10 the former master deceiver confessed to God, "I am not worthy of the least of your mercies, and of all the truth which you [the Lord] have shown unto your servant [Jacob]." (Psa. 51:15-17) Our Lord, in the proverbial conflict between his humanity and his divinity, expressed a somewhat similar sentiment at Matt. 26:38-46. He was alone in the supreme test of his life, because he knew that his physical life was about to be required. There in the Garden of Gethsemane, Jesus, with his face on the earth he had created, begged God the Father to consider the possibility of dispensing with the humiliating and extremely painful death on a Roman cross. Three times he prayed the same prayer, "O, my Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me: nevertheless, not as I will, but as you will." We sinners can only have our own imperfections, in God's sight, blotted out by our heavenly Father's sacrificial offering, Jesus his only begotten Son, Acts 3:19-21; Heb. 10:10,14-25. When we admitted (confessed) our sinful condition and accepted Jesus in faith as the Messiah (Savior) and Lord of our lives, we too believed, and still believe, with Jacob, "I am not worthy of the least of your mercies, and of all the truth which you have shown to me." God so loved the world.

May 10, 1998

"Sexual Immorality And Murder"
Gen. 3 4

Couples Class
Wendell Alford,
Teacher

I. In Chap. 33 we learned of the area (Shalem) where Jacob chose to make his home upon returning to the Palestine area. At this time Jacob's family was large and somewhat unusual in that he had two wives, two concubines, eleven sons, and one daughter, Dinah. The chief reason, I believe, which God had for Jacob to leave his Uncle Laban was to leave the idolatry of Laban and the people in the Haran area. That disloyalty to the true God of heaven was demonstrated when Jacob's beloved wife Rachel felt the need to take with her the family idol of Laban as she traveled into, for her, a strange land. We see what God was doing in retrospect as we are led by God's Holy Spirit because of our faith in God's Messiah. Our heavenly Father was laying the familial lineage for the coming to earth of his only begotten Son, and, at the same time maintaining the environmental setting for Jacob and his family to maintain a holiness required of his followers. To provide these two requirements presented a continual struggle on the part of God's chosen Messianic lineage. The people who occupied the Shalem area were not concerned with God's will for them, but they did occupy at this time the land which God had promised to Abraham and his descendants, Gen. 12:1-4,7; 15:18. For many years psychologists have discussed the relationship between a person's behavior with his/her inherited (genetic) influences vs environmental influences. In Jacob's case, I believe, both were involved in his personality. We, as believers in God's Christ, know certainly that ones relationship to the Lord can transcend both genetically and environmental factors. In Jacob's life as well as in his father's and grandfather's, Isaac and Abraham, God appeared to them directly and communed with and directed some of their choices in life. We, too, can be directly influenced by God's Holy Spirit to do what God wants us to do and override our own wills as conditioned by genetics or environments. The Spirit that was in our Lord overrode his own human will in the Garden of Gethsemane. We have the same Spirit to inspire and to empower us to act as God wills.

II. But many times the will of God's people can be right, but the flesh is weak, Rom. 7; I John 1:8-2:2. Chap. 34 presents activities which are plainly contrary to what God wants his people to do. Jacob's only daughter, Dinah, was a young person who was apparently gregarious and therefore wanted companionship with young ladies of her own age and interests. Dinah began to associate with the Hivite people, and she was seen and admired by Shechem the son of Hamor, the top political leader of the city. The Hivites were the offspring of one of the sons of Canaan, the son of Ham and grandson of Noah, Gen. 9:18,22-27. Shechem "fed her a line," and then forced himself upon her and "lay with her," vs. 1. We are not told the details of Shechem's "defiling" Dinah, but the language makes his action rape. However, the language also makes it clear that afterwards he loved her and wanted to marry her, vss. 3-4. The Word states that he was "strongly attracted to this young woman." His feeling was so intense that he asked his father Hamor to arrange for the two to be married. However, when Jacob (Israel) learned

that the young man had raped his only daughter, he told his sons of the crime against Dinah. All of the males in the family were grieved and very angry. Jacob had been very discreet about the event ("held his peace until they [his sons] were come"), vs. 5. Shechem's father, Hamor, had learned of the indiscretion (sin) of his son and went out of the village into the country to speak with Jacob. Jacob's sons rallied around and expressed their displeasure with what had happened. Hamor told them, "The soul of my son Shechem longeth for Dinah. I beg you to give her to him for a wife," vs. 8. From the specific of his son's marrying Jacob's daughter, he expanded the proposition to include a general agreement that the children of Israel freely intermarry with the Hivites and become integrated in the culture (trade and ownership of property). The son Shechem also addressed Jacob and his sons asking for their favor. Ask any dowry and gifts, and I will give it, only give me Dinah in marriage. Israel's answer was that because of the rape we cannot agree to such a marriage. The sons said that our relationship to our God requires that all males be circumcised. For our sister to marry an uncircumcised man would create an impossible union. Sensing the strong desire of Shechem for the marriage, I believe, Jacob's sons agreed to the marriage and generally to intermarriage provided that all the Hivites be circumcised. We will become one people only if this arrangement is met immediately, but if not we will leave this area, vs. 17. Shechem agreed to do their bidding and convinced his father, who was the prince of the village, to set in motion universal circumcision at once. As Shechem and Hamor came back to the city and entered the gate, Hamor told the city leaders there, "These men (the Hebrews) are peaceable with us, and we should therefore let them dwell in the land and trade therein. The land hereabout is ample, and we should integrate with them through intermarriage. In this way, in time, their possessions will become ours. For this to happen it is necessary for us to meet one condition: every male among us must be circumcised as they are," vss. 21-23. All males obeyed Hamor and were circumcised immediately.

III. On the third day after the mass circumcision, two of Dinah's full brothers, Simeon and Levi, entered the city and aggressively proceeded to kill every male there with swords (while they were all ill from the circumcision). Their massacre included Hamor and Shechem, and they found Dinah in Shechem's house, took her, and ransacked the entire city. They (I believe that all the sons were involved) took all the women and children and plundered all the houses for booty. Twenty years previously Jacob would probably have complimented his sons, but now he is sorry that the sons have given him such an obnoxious reputation among the people of the area, the Canaanites and Perizzites. Another concern of Jacob's was that these people, who were considerably more numerous, would in unison overpower and kill him and his entire family. The sons' response was, "Should he (Shechem) deal with our sister as a common whore?" God was not pleased with their choices, I believe. Their actions were wrong, but we as believers have a guide when such evil happens to us at Rom. 12:16-21. Jacob had been very deceitful in his early years, and now "the chickens have come home to roost."

May 31, 1998

"Back To Bethel"
Gen. 3 5

Couples Class
Wendell Alford,
Teacher

I. What happened to Jacob and especially to his family in Chap. 34 was contrary to God's will for them, I believe. The patriarch's experience with God when God changed his name to Israel gave him a sense of sorrow for not doing God's will, but he still needed to grow in God's grace, II Peter 3:17-18. Through Peter God told the early believers (and us) in Jesus as God's Messiah, "- - seeing you know these things [the longsuffering of the Lord] before hand, beware lest you also, being led away with the error of the wicked [for Jacob, the Hivites], fall from your steadfastness; but grow in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord - -." Jacob was growing in his knowledge of the Lord, but he obviously had a ways to go, or he would not have stopped at Shalem. God did not tell him to go there specifically. He must have gone there by his own choice, and the events of Chap. 34 occurred, rape of his daughter Dinah and the murder of males by his sons. Yes, Jacob still needed to grow in God's graceful instructions. He had been very relieved by his reconciliation with his brother Esau, and now in vs. 1 God instructs Jacob to return to where God first appeared to him as he fled from his brother, to Bethel, Gen. 28:18-22.

II. As Jacob thought of Bethel and God's vision to him there, about the ladder to heaven, he was reminded immediately of Laban and his idolatry. By this time he must have learned, or at least had suspicions, of Rachel's possession of Laban's idols. Jacob had not to this time been exercising his spiritual duty as father and head of the household concerning their loyalty to his own God, the Lord of Abraham and Isaac. (Remember that originally this very reason was why Esau was not eager to receive Isaac's birthright, Gen. 25:32, 34; Mk 8:36-37; Heb. 12:16-17.) With Bethel in mind, "Jacob said to his family and to all who were with him (servants, etc.), 'Put away the strange [foreign] gods that are among you, purify yourselves, and change your garments.'" And how were they to purify themselves? By changing their garments? That term needs further explanation. The word for garments literally means "habits." Some religious leaders such as Roman Catholic nuns and their priests so display their special positions in their organizations by the garments or "habits" they wear. Jacob did not have such in mind at all, but rather that their activities (lifestyles) should display what God wanted them to do. Jesus condemned religious leaders who wore garments with broad phylacteries (leather square boxes containing Bible verses) and garments with special enlarged borders to indicate themselves to be especially holy. The Lord said of such "leaders," "whoever shall exalt himself shall be humbled, but he that shall humble himself shall be lifted up," Matt. 23:5,12. Further, God's Word at Jam. 5:2 states that [those who love money, Matt. 6:24; I Tim. 6:10], "Your riches are corrupted [have rotted], and your garments [lifestyles] are moth-eaten." James here uses the word "garments" to mean exactly the same idea Jacob means in Gen. 35:2b, change your attitudes and actions, Eph. 6:12-17; I Thes. 5:8; Rev. 3:4-6; 16:15. This Chap. 35 is very rich in God's message for us trusters in Jesus as our Savior and Lord.

III. Notice carefully what Jacob now tells those for whom he is a spiritual leader, "And let us arise, and go up to Bethel [the house of God]; and I will make there an altar unto God, who answered me in the day of my distress [loneliness and fear], and was with me in the way (everywhere I have gone)," vs. 3. Jacob was not in the situation we believers are in today, Acts 2:16-21. We are led by God's Holy Spirit who is along side each of us wherever and in whatever circumstance we find ourselves. And not only that, but we can confer with other believers for comfort and strength at any time. We have regularly scheduled times and places to assemble together for group study of God's Word and to worship our heavenly Father to praise and glorify him. This mutual study and praise together is encouraging and stimulates our spiritual growth, II Tim. 2:14-19; Heb. 10:19-25. Jacob longed for this feeling and knowledge that God was near him as he did on that first night away from the comfort and security of his parents. Jacob could have been surprised by the compliance of his entire family as they turned over to him all of the foreign gods as well as "the earrings which were on their ears." vs. 4. Jacob took them all and buried them under an oak tree at Shechem. Several times in the Bible earrings implicate idolatry. For example, at Exod. 32:1-10 Aaron, Moses' brother, used the gold earrings from the wives and children (both boys and girls) to make the molten calf which the Israelites worshiped as a false god. The Lord was extremely angry and thought to destroy them, but Moses' pleading saved them from God's wrath, Exod. 32:11-14.

IV. The local people (Canaanites and Perizzites) in the area of Shechem learned of Jacob's family and what they had done to the people at Shechem. Consequently, they feared for their own safety and did not pursue Jacob when he followed God's order to move to Bethel. He took his family, his servants, and all of his possessions to Bethel. There he built an altar and called it "God of the House of God" (Elbethel), vs. 7. Rebekah's nurse died and they buried her and called the place "Weeping," for she was a loyal servant. God appeared again to Jacob, repeated his name change to Israel as well as the covenant he had made before at Bethel, and reminded him that this covenant was between Jacob and God Almighty. The land promised to Abraham and Isaac remained in the covenant. The group journeyed on from Bethel to Ephrath (Bethlehem) which is just south of Jerusalem. Rachel had reached full term with her second and last son of Jacob. In her labor to deliver, she bore Benjamin, but died in the process and was buried there. From Bethlehem they journeyed on to Hebron (Mamre) where Abraham had lived, and where Isaac still lived. (All we know of Rebekah's death is that she was buried where Isaac was later buried, Gen. 39:31.) Jacob was finally back at his old home place! Isaac then died at age one hundred eighty. Esau came to his father's funeral, and he and Jacob buried him at Hebron in the cave of Machpelah near Abraham and Sarah. God's Word in relating the full truth, notes that Jacob learned of the immoral sin committed by his oldest son Reuben who had a sexual relation with Jacob's concubine Bilhah, vs. 22. The immoral seeds, of Laban and the Syrian people with whom Reuben lived as a child, evidently were still planted in Jacob's oldest son.

June 7, 1998

"Esau's Posterity"
Gen. 3 6

Couples Class
Wendell Alford,
Teacher

I. Isaac, the son of Abraham, had only two children, Esau and Jacob. Esau was, therefore, the grandson of the father of the Hebrew faith who "looked for a city which has foundations, whose builder and maker is God," Heb. 11:10. In this chapter Moses, in the Pentateuch account, gives a rather thorough treatment of Esau's family who became the Edomites. Recall that the name Esau means "hairy" and the name Edom means "red." When Esau, the firstborn of Isaac and Rebekah, was born, he was covered with red hair. His offspring became a nation of people called Edomites. In fact, Esau and Edom became synonymous terms to refer to Esau's people, vss. 1,8,19,43b, and Edom to the land they inhabited. Isaac was very careful in seeing that Jacob did not marry a Canaanite woman, but Esau took wives from Abraham's and his concubine's son, Ishmael, Gen. 28:9, as well as from the Hitites, vss. 2-3. The Hitites (Hivites) were descendants of Noah's son Ham through Canaan and Heth, Gen. 10:1,6,15,17. The Messianic lineage came not from Ham's line but Shem's, Lk 3:33-36. Both Joseph and Jesus' mother Mary were Semites, i.e., descendants of Shem through Abraham. The Bible does not mention explicitly Mary's lineage, but Luke's account of the Gospel very probably traces our Lord's genealogy through his mother. Matthew's account appears, on the other hand, to trace Jesus' lineage through Joseph, but Matthew is very careful to make clear that Mary's son Jesus was the son of Mary as a human, but the direct Son of God, as his Father, Matt. 1:16,18-25, not the son of Joseph.

II. Esau took two wives from among the Hitites, Adah and Ahalibamah, and Bashemath, the daughter of Ishmael. Esau's family was well established in Canaan, but while Jacob was over east at Haran serving Laban for twenty years, he left the area of Jacob's estate (Isaac's home site). He moved all of his wives, children, livestock, and goods which he had gained in Canaan, and resettled in the area of Mount Seir which area became known as Edom. Edom was located immediately south of Moab which was east of the southern portion of the Dead (Salt) Sea. Edom stretched in a north-south direction from the south end of the Dead Sea to the north tip of the Gulf of Aqabah which is east of the Sinai Peninsula as the Gulf of Suez is east of that peninsula. Both of these gulfs come together to form the Red Sea at the southern tip of the Sinai. The Word states that the land to which Esau apparently knew Jacob would return would not be able to support both Esau's and Jacob's livestock. I believe that Esau had some reluctance to trust Jacob after their previous experiences. At least that would be a logical reason for Esau's desire to separate himself from Jacob. Another reason, perhaps, was Esau's concept of organizing the commonweal or political aspect of the Edomites' activities. The evidence indicates that Esau established a loose "government" among the Edomites in which dukes (We would likely identify them as county officers.) led (were chiefs among) the people, vss. 29-30. Later in the chapter these chiefs are referred as kings, vss. 31-39, who reigned or ruled various segments of the people. The geographic areas over which these kings reigned were called cities (villages?). These kings who ruled the

people in Edom were distinctive as compared with the rulership among the people of Jacob (Israel) up to that time, vs. 31. Esau as the "national" leader was able to bring four hundred troops to meet Jacob returning from Haran.

III. My mention of a lingering distrust between Jacob and Esau above is evidenced by the antagonism between their descendants in the centuries that followed. An example of this animosity appears at Numb. 20:14-21 where the Israelites sought passage through Edomite territory on their long journey between Egypt and the land God had promised them, Palestine west of the Jordan. Again, at I Kings 11:14ff Solomon met opposition in Edom, because David had earlier sent his chief general, Joab, "to kill every male in Edom." In Psa. 137:7 the psalmist states that when Babylon was defeating the Israelites to take them as prisoners to Babylon, the Edomites sided with the Babylonians and said of Jerusalem, "Raze it, raze it, even to the foundation of it."

IV. Hundreds of years after these events of Gen. 36, God told Israel through Malachi that the Lord chose Jacob and Israel above Esau and the Edomites. Paul quotes this fact at Rom. 9:6-16 plainly, "Jacob have I loved, but Esau have I hated." The least shocking interpretation that one can give to this sentence is that God, through the centuries, has given preference to one segment of humanity over another. At Heb. 12:14-17,22-24 God's Word adds further details about the spiritual attitude and nature of Esau, "Lest there be any [spiritual] fornicator or profane (godless) person, as Esau, who for one morsel of food sold his birthright." At the end of the outline for Chap. 25, I noted the reason why Esau looked on the birthright so cavalierly. Assuming the birthright, was taking upon oneself the spiritual leadership of the father's position upon the father's demise. By tradition this mantle fell upon the first male born in a family. God knew what Esau's spiritual disposition would be even before Isaac's firstborn was delivered and told Rebekah that the older (Esau) would serve the younger (Jacob). This predetermination by God of the final spiritual condition of any person involves what theologians refer to as "election." One's view of spiritual election effects one's view of the nature of God the Creator, because, by theological definition, election is defined as: "The act of choice whereby God picks an individual or group out of a larger company for a purpose or destiny of his (God's) own appointment." In Christianity the purpose noted is for eternal life of an individual or group through faith in God's Son Jesus, God's Messiah (Savior). However, in the Old Covenant the purpose was God's election of the Jews as a nation of God's chosen people, Deut. 7:1-11. Later God provided another Covenant for all of mankind through the sacrifice of his only begotten Son, Jesus of Nazareth, Rom. 11:11-32; Heb. 8:7-13. God's election of an individual or of a group is beyond human comprehension, I believe, and the basis for my position is Rom. 11:33-36. God knows but we do not, Gal. 1:15! So then, God's preordination of one or many was known by God from the beginning of his creation (Eph. 1:4), but he still uses people to tell (witnessing) about Jesus' salvation to his chosen ones (the ecclesia), Rom. 10:1-21, especially vss. 12-15.

June 14, 1998

"Joseph To Center Stage"
Gen. 3 7

Couples Class
Wendell Alford,
Teacher

I. Joseph was born to Jacob and Rachel at Gen. 30:24. This birth was the eleventh son born to Jacob and his twelfth child. It was Joseph's birth which caused Jacob to want to leave service to Laban and began building an estate for his own family. Jacob's son Joseph constituted the culmination of the fruit of Jacob's first love, Rachel, Gen. 29:16-18. Although another son was born to Jacob and Rachel (Benjamin), Joseph became more prominent than he or all the other children of Jacob. In fact, more of the narrative of Genesis is devoted to Joseph than any other personality. Chap. 37 through Chap. 50, fourteen chapters (twenty-eight per cent), involve Joseph and his activities. If one includes the chapter in which Joseph was born (30 plus), then sixty per cent of all fifty chapters cover Joseph's life. Why? One can, I believe, make a legitimate, favorable comparison of Joseph with all personages in the Old Covenant. Moses was great although he was a murderer. David was a great leader, but he engaged in adultery and covered it up with the murder of the husband of the woman with whom he had committed adultery. Search the Scriptures and such scandal or immoral act cannot be assigned to Jacob's favorite son, Joseph. Neither Moses nor Joseph were in the lineage toward the birth of our Lord, God's Messiah (Savior), but they both played major roles in God's development of human history toward that end. We believers can be assured that, although no longer is prominence in God's work dependent upon being in the lineage leading up to the birth of a Savior, our witness to others of God's Savior Jesus is what pleases our heavenly Father, Matt. 3:7; 12:14-21; 17:1-5; Acts 2:36-39. I note the above to emphasize in our study of the rest of Genesis the importance of Joseph in the ongoing history of Israel.

II. Jacob was now home in Hebron where Abraham and Isaac had lived. Both Jacob's father and grandfather were buried in the land God had promised to them, Gen. 15:6,18; 25:9-10; 35:29; 49:30-32. Jacob was not in his permanent (forever) dwelling place, but as his forefathers were sojourners on the earth, so was Jacob, vs. 1; Heb. 11:8-10,39-40. In the daily affairs of Jacob and his family, when Joseph was seventeen years of age, he was out caring for their sheep. This day with Joseph were Dan, Naphtali, Gad and Asher who were doing things which Joseph knew to be contrary to their father's wishes. Joseph reported their misdeeds to Jacob. Whether Joseph's telling was a routine report of the day's activities or what we would call "tattling" is not made clear. We do know that "Israel loved Joseph more than all his other children, because he was the son of his old age," vs. 3. One could add reasonably, I believe, that Joseph was also the son of Rachel, Jacob's favorite. Precisely because Joseph was Jacob's choice child, he made him a tunic of many colors, a long robe with sleeves. Such robes were normally worn by those of a "higher class," those of royalty or who were very rich. This special apparel furnished Joseph by Jacob indicated especially that this son was loved more than the others. This arrangement further separated the other children from Joseph. The Word states plainly that they all hated Joseph and shunned

him, "could not speak peaceably (civilly) to him," vs. 4. A further cleavage developed when Joseph dreamed a dream and shared its contents with his brothers. In his dream all the brothers were shocking sheaves of grain in a field, and their sheaves stood around Joseph's sheaf and bowed down to his sheaf. They questioned the implications of the dream. Do you really think that you will come to reign or have dominion over us? Yet, in another dream of Joseph's he told Jacob as well as his siblings that even the sun, moon and stars recognized Joseph as a superior to them all. Now Joseph has included his father (sun), mother (moon), and all his brothers (stars) as ones who will become subservient to him. What a seventeen-year-old youngster could make of, even in a dream, the importance of one who wore a "royal" coat! Jacob considered such thinking to be just too much and rebuked his favorite son. However, Jacob did not forget this concept. The Bible uses this same mental set of Jacob (vs. 11) at Dan. 7:28; Lk 2:19,51 in others thinking.

III. Later, after the "preposterous" dreams, the brothers of Joseph were away to feed Jacob's flocks at Shechem. Evidently, such care of the herds took several days, and during this period Jacob decided to send Joseph to see how the other boys were doing. Joseph volunteered when asked by his father and went up the Hebron valley and arrived at Shechem, but the brothers were not there. Joseph was told that the herds had been taken on north to Dothan. Hebron to Dothan is fifty-two miles, quite a distance for a lone teenager. Dothan was located in a pass through which caravans of traders would pass from Gilead on southward to Egypt. While there Joseph found his brothers and was seen by them some distance away. His bright cape made his person obvious even at a great distance. Seeing Joseph away from the protection of his father, they agreed, as he approached, that this would be an opportune time to "dispose" of him. Their first thought was to kill him and tell his father that some wild animal had eaten him. That would give this dreamer exactly what he deserved! Jacob's oldest son, Reuben, suggested that they not kill Joseph (He was their own flesh and blood.), but throw him into a nearby dry well. Reuben had in mind to retrieve him for his father, vss. 21-22. When Joseph reached them, they stripped his tunic from him, threw him in the well, and sat down to eat while Reuben went to check on the herd. As they were eating, a caravan came through the pass on their way to Egypt with spices. Judah said to the others, "There is no profit for us in killing the dreamer. Why don't we sell him to this Ishmaelite caravan from Median (Gilead) for twenty pieces of silver?" When Reuben returned to the group and discovered that Joseph was not in the well, he was very sad. They told Reuben what they had done. They had also killed a kid, spotted proud Joseph's tunic with its blood, and made plans to deliver it back to Jacob with the story they had concocted before. When they arrived back in Hebron, they told Jacob that they had found a garment which appeared to have been someones who had been killed by some wild beast. Of course Jacob recognized the tunic, and wept bitterly and grieved for days, refusing to be comforted. Meanwhile, the Midianites sold Joseph in Egypt to Potiphar, an officer and captain of his bodyguards.

June 21, 1998

"Judah, Jacob's Fourth Son"
Gen. 38

Couples Class
Wendell Alford,
Teacher

I. We live in a day in human history when many people seek to communicate information about themselves by what has become known as "spinning." News reports in print, radio, television and other media "spin" the news. These "spins" edit ones activities and even attitudes which one wants others to know. Of course, the final information propagated can present an altogether false representation of the true facts concerning a given individual or group. To be believed they contain half or partial truths. Retrospectively, we know the wicked effect which can result from such propaganda as performed by Hitler against the Jews of Germany and Europe. We have learned that millions of Jews were cremated (murdered by gassing and incineration) by the leading dictator of the twentieth century, Adolf the Aryan. Events can now be so skewed that falsehood can become humanly created "truth." With attitudes and events so falsely established, we believers in Jesus the Christ are amazed at the unadorned (without a "spin") truth that appears in Scripture. If we are not alert, we can find ourselves wishing that such information as found in Chap. 38 were left out of the Bible account. Jacob's son Judah is the person from whom the word Jew came. (Recall that we examined this fact at Gen. 28, I.) Judah plays a large part in the history of Jehovah's people the Jews. Our Lord's physical lineage came through Judah and Tamar, Matt. 1:2-3. This fact makes Jesus' sinless life even more revealing about his willingness to satisfy our Father God in every act, intent, and attitude throughout his entire life, from birth of a virgin until his "it is finished" on the Roman cross at Golgotha. Physically our Lord Jesus came through the sinful line of all humanity, for all have sinned and come short of God's glory, except Jesus, God's Savior, Isa. 53:6,9-11; Rom. 3:23; II Cor. 5:21; Heb. 4:15. Yes, we believers could wish that Judah had not lived the sin and shame of this chapter, but God's Word does not put "spin" on Judah's life. We can identify with Judah and know thereby the need for one who can make us and keep us at one with our Creator, Gal. 3:24-29. With our trust in Jesus Christ we are sealed forever with the promise (God's faithful promise) of eternal life, John 3:15,18; Eph. 1:13-14; 2:4-10. Neither is there "spin" in God's promise of eternal life in Jesus Christ!

II. After the sons of Jacob sold his favorite son Joseph to the Ishmaelite traders heading for Egypt, we are given an insight into what at least one of Joseph's brothers was doing back at Hebron. Following is what happened to Judah. Judah left Hebron and went alone down to a town called Adullam. (The cave was at Adullam where David hid from Saul and there formed a legion of four hundred men, I Sam. 22:1-3.) Adullam was about midway between Jerusalem and Lachish. This move for Judah was a permanent move from his father's household. He lived with a man named Hirah, and there met and married a Canaanite girl, Shua's daughter. They moved to the town of Chezib (Chozeba, meaning untrue or false) during the marriage. Judah and his wife had three sons, Er, Onan, and Shelah. When the oldest son Er reached adulthood, Judah arranged for him to marry

a Canaanite girl named Tamar. Shortly thereafter, Er was so wicked the Lord took his life, vs. 7. After Er's death Judah instructed the next son in line, Onan, to marry Tamar and "to raise up seed to thy brother (Er)." Onan objected to fathering a child who would not be considered his own. However, he did feign compliance with Judah's wishes, and the action Onan performed is unique in the Bible. As he had sexual intercourse with Tamar, he did what marriage counselors call "coitus interruptus" meaning that at the end of the intercourse he "spilled it (seminal fluid) on the ground (bed?), lest he should give seed to his brother," vs. 9. Onan's act was "evil in the sight of the Lord, wherefore the Lord slew him also," vs. 10. The act which Onan committed, contrary to Judah's command, was later treated in the Law which the Lord God gave to the Israelites through Moses at Deut. 25:5-10. This same law was used by the Sadducees to "disprove" Jesus' position about resurrection and eternal life at Matt. 22:23-33. Jesus told them that they did not know the Scriptures nor the power of God.

III. Judah told Tamar to remain a widow until Shelah became marriageable and to live again with her parents. She moved back to Adullam with her folks and waited. Judah's wife died, and he mourned through the customary period. Afterwards Judah went to shear his sheep with his friend Hirah up at Timnath, and Tarah learned of his being away from home and where he was. She had a plan of her own, because Shelah was grown without Judah's having taken any action about her widowhood. She took off her widow's garments and dressed in regular clothing with a veil. She went out near the shearing operation where Judah was working, and sat in a open place where she could be easily seen. Custom was that a veil noted that she was a prostitute. Her plan worked when Judah came and propositioned her, and she asked what her time would be worth to him. She was glad that he had not recognized her when he told her that he would send a kid goat for her time. She would not agree unless he gave her some proof in hand. Judah asked her what that would be. She asked him for his signet, his bracelet, and his sheep staff. Surprisingly, he agreed and left the pledge items with her after his lust had been satisfied. Judah dutiful had the kid delivered to her by Hirah, but he could not find her. He asked about, and no one knew of any prostitute in that area. He reported his efforts to Judah, and three months later Judah learned that Tamar had prostituted herself and was thereby pregnant. He instructed his men to bring her to him, and she was to be burned. When approached by Judah's men, she said, "It is true. I am three months pregnant by the owners of these items of pledge." After admitting her misdeed, she produced the signet, the bracelet, and the staff of Judah. Judah was presented the evidence and admitted, "She is more righteous than I." Tamar bore Judah twin sons, Pharez and Zereh. With these two sons Judah now had fathered a total of five sons.

IV. If one reads straight through this section of Genesis (Chaps. 37-40), it appears obvious that the weak moral character of Judah is given to contrast with the integrity and strong moral stability of Joseph, Gen. 37:26-27; 38, with Chap. 39. We noted last week about the strong character and moral stamina of Joseph.

June 28, 1998

"Joseph, Accused and Imprisoned"
Gen. 3 9

Couples Class
Wendell Alford,
Teacher

I. Of Chap. 38 we noted that a possible reason for the sordid story of Judah was given to depict the impeccable moral attitude of Joseph by contrast with Judah. That contrast is further developed in our chapter today. There are theologians who assert that without Satan there would have been no need for Jesus to save the world's humanity. In other words, without evil there would be no righteousness. Contrast is a necessary component of ethics and morality. If there were no darkness, there would be no light? Truth to exist, requires lies or falsehoods? Why was Satan allowed in the Garden of Eden? We are assured in Rev. 20:10 that the Evil One will continue in the world until our Lord Jesus returns to earth for his ecclesia, us. Then Satan will be forever chained (made ineffective or without power to exercise against God's perfect will). Since Adam and Eve, Satan has had power to alter individual human will by tempting the proneness to do that which contradicts God's design for humans. God tests or proves, but Satan tempts people to contradict God. I believe that Satan was originally an angelic being in the immediate abode of God the Father, heaven. For some reason, not noted in the Bible, Satan challenged God's authority (became an adversary of God) and was expelled from heaven like a bolt of lightning and relegated to earth. The process of Satan's power to overcome mankind's wills is still effective, but a contrary result can be inevitable, made sure by faith in the life, death, and resurrection of God's only begotten Son, Jesus his Christ (Messiah, Savior), Gen. 3:1,4-8,15; Job 1:6; 2:1-8; Isa. 53:4-6; Dan. 12:8-10; Lk 10:17-20; John 3:16-18; 14:30; II Cor. 2:11; 11:13-15; Eph. 2:2; I Tim. 3:7; II Tim. 2:24-26; I Pet. 5:8-9; I Cor. 15:20-28; Rev. 12:7-12; 20:1-3,10. Jesus referred to those who did Satan's will but falsely claimed to be doing and revealing God's will as "vipers" aligning them with the original "snake" in the Garden of Eden, Matt. 3:7-9; 10:25; 12:24-28,31-34; John 8:41-47. Satan's supreme and final will is that our Lord Jesus be discredited as God's Savior and Lord, i.e., that people serve Satan rather than Almighty God, the Creator, through exercising belief, faith and trust in Jesus, God's Christ (Savior), Lk 4:5-8.

II. Joseph's life makes clear that God's ongoing will for the inhabitants of earth is sure. In fact, "All things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are called according to his purpose," Rom. 8:28. And vs. 29 of Rom. 8 reveals that the end of the earth's creation is that, "For whom he [God] did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son." Many times we cannot understand why things are happening in our lives as they are, but in retrospect God's hand can be decidedly seen at work directing our paths. Joseph recognized this fact. When Jacob died his sons feared for what Joseph would do to them. However, Joseph told them that, while their actions in selling him as a slave appeared to be evil, the act was really God's working out in Joseph's life his divine plan for his people, Israel. The Bible reveals no instance in which God appeared directly to Joseph, but his love of God guided him day by day. We too need not fear

that we are not guided by God, even though we have not seen God in a burning bush. If we truly love God, "Love does no harm to his neighbor, therefore love is the fulfilling of the law," Rom. 13:10. We believe in Jesus and therefore are led by God's Spirit, John 14:14-16; Lk 11:13.

III. When Joseph was first brought down to Egypt, he was bought by Potiphar, the captain of Pharaoh's bodyguards. We are not told the price which the Ishmaelites received for Joseph, but the Bible states that, "The Lord was with Joseph and made him successful as he served Potiphar," vs. 2. His master noted that Joseph's Lord was with him through his ability to make sound and wise decisions. Soon Potiphar favored him by making him overseer over the entire household as well as his business everywhere. Joseph's responsibilities were so extensive that his master did not know what possessions he had, save the food he ate daily, vs. 6. As a goodly person Joseph was respected by everyone. Potiphar's wife became very attracted to the young Hebrew, and one day she propositioned him for sexual favors. He refused her advances. He told her that he respected the trust of his master, and, most importantly, such wickedness was "sin against God," vs. 9. Potiphar's wife confronted Joseph on a daily basis, but he consistently refused her invitation to engage in lust. One day, when all the males were not present, she grabbed him physically and begged him to cooperate with her. In Joseph's struggle to flee, she was able to pull his jacket off. She took advantage of having Joseph's jacket by calling the men in, and telling them that, "See, he [Potiphar] has brought in an Hebrew unto us to laugh at us [show us up]. He came in to me to attack me sexually, but I cried out with a loud scream. As this was happening, and I was screaming, he fled in short order but left his jacket in the commotion," vs. 14-15. She craftily kept the jacket until Potiphar came and told him that Joseph had attempted to attack her sexually. "He escaped," she said, "but I was able to scream and keep his jacket in the fury," vs. 17-18. Potiphar had Joseph put into prison. The Lord continued to bless Joseph, for his imprisonment was in a special prison reserved for Pharaoh's prisoners. We will learn, as the story unfolds, that this factor becomes a key to Joseph's further advancement in the political affairs of all of Egypt. His leadership became evident even here in the "king's prison." God's loving kindness (mercy) caused him to be favored by the keeper of the prison, and soon he was charged with assigning the tasks of all the other prisoners and for their keeping. The Bible makes clear that the favored treatment was the result of: "The Lord was with him, and that which he did, the Lord made it successful," vs. 23. The same God keeps us believers safe for eternal life, because we trust his only Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. In Rom. 8 we have God's promise that nothing can separate us from the love of Christ who died, yes rather, that is risen again, and is at the right hand of God, where he continually makes intercession for us. If God be for us, who can overcome us? In all things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us. For I am persuaded that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor governments, nor things present, nor things to come, shall be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

July 5, 1998

"The Dreamer Interprets Dreams"
Gen. 40

Couples Class
Wendell Alford,
Teacher

I. Many Bible scholars have pointed to the many parallels of Joseph's life and circumstances with many of those in the life of our Lord. I find those parallels both interesting and pertinent enough to make them part of our study of this portion of Genesis. Jesus commands that those who trust him should love one another as he loves us, but in doing so he said that the world would hate believers as it hated him. Jesus' relations according to the flesh (the Jews, as Mary's Son) hated Jesus, and he quoted Psa. 35:19; 69:4; 109:3-5, at John 15:18-25, saying, "They hated me without a cause." Joseph's brothers hated him, and, had it not been for Reuben, they would have killed him. No one saved Jesus from being hung on a wooden cross until dead. Jesus was sent from his Father's home in heaven to save the lost sheep of the house of Israel (Matt. 10:6-7). Joseph was sent from his father's home in Canaan down to Egypt to save the nation of Israel, Gen. 50:20. Joseph was sold by his brothers for twenty pieces of silver (Gen. 37:28); Jesus was betrayed by one of his apostles for thirty pieces of silver, Matt. 26:14-15. Joseph was raised from a pit (a dry well, Gen. 37:24) to save his family and people, and Jesus was raised (resurrected) from a grave to save, not only the Jews who will believe, but anyone who will believe, Gal. 3:28-29. Joseph was mimicked and mocked by his brothers with, "Behold, the dreamer is coming," and of Jesus they said, "If he is God's Messiah, let him come down from the cross," Matt. 27:39-44; Mk 15:30-31; Lk 23:34-37. The brothers of Joseph refused to accept him; Jesus' brethren (the Jewish people) refused to accept him as God's Messiah (Savior), John 11-13.12; Acts 2:22-23,36-39. Joseph's coat was spotted with a kid's (young goat's) blood; Jesus' coat was ante for the Roman soldiers' dice game. Joseph was separated from his family for many lost years, but he reappeared as their physical savior; Jesus has left his believers for many years (millenia) but promised to return as their spiritual Savior forever, Dan. 7:13-14; John 14:3; Acts 1:11. Joseph was continually tempted to do contrary to God's will and so was our Lord, Gen. 39:10; Matt. 4:1-11; Heb. 4:14-16. Last Sunday we noted that the jailer favored Joseph while the latter was in jail, and a Roman centurion said of Jesus, "Truly this was the Son of God." Today in Chap. 40 Joseph is grouped with criminals in jail with one condemned and the other saved (physically). Our Lord was crucified between two criminals, one of whom Jesus said, "This very day you will be with me in paradise." The other criminal was condemned when he blasphemed our Lord by saying to him, "If you are God's Messiah, save yourself and us," Lk 23:39. Truly, it is interesting to note and remember these parallels, I believe.

II. There is a strangeness in the thought when, at the end of Chap. 39, we are told that the Lord made everything Joseph did to prosper. After all, Joseph was in prison. Chap. 40 further explains in what ways the young Hebrew advanced. It happened as Joseph's prison time extended on, that Egypt's Pharaoh (king) became unhappy with two of his personal house servants, his butler and baker. The butler served the king as cupbearer and was considered to be an important

person in the king's household. He maintained the wine cellar and other stocks of spirits which were a major element in royal feasts and ceremonies. A king's ability to entertain foreign representatives demonstrated the status of the entire nation. The king's personal security was also an element in the effectiveness of the cupbearer since poison was the terminator of many monarchs. So the butler was more than a valet who opened the entrance of the king's residence and helped him dress. While the butler cared for the supply of food and dispensing of drinks, the baker was what we call today the chief chef of the king's daily meals. The king's food preparation was important in the affairs of the realm. These two officers in the king's court in some way had offended the Pharaoh, their lord, vss. 1-2. What their offenses were we do not know, but we do know that Joseph was unjustly charged. Their quarters were arranged so that the three saw each other constantly. And remember, Joseph had been committed by the keeper of the prison to the watch care of all the prisoners. After the cupbearer and chef had been in the prison for some time, Joseph was able to detect their moods and dispositions.

III. One morning Joseph noted that both the cupbearer and chef felt sad and dejected. Joseph asked them why they felt so badly. They both on the night before had had dreams which disturbed them, because they had no one to interpret the dreams' meanings, vs. 8. At this time and place dreams were included in the magic and sorcery thinking of the people. There were extensive manuals outlining the meanings of dreams and their consequences for the dreamers. The king had a staff of magicians for dream interpretation. Remember Joseph's dreams of the sheaves and heavenly bodies when he was a youngster back at home with Jacob. Also, later in Egypt, magic played a big part in Moses' relation with the magicians of another Pharaoh, Exod. 7:8-13. Joseph told the cupbearer and chef that dream interpretation belong to God. Joseph asked, "Tell me your dreams, I beg of you," vs. 8. The cupbearer told Joseph his dream first. "A large vine was near me which had three branches. On the three branches, as I watched, beautiful blossoms grew and produced ripe grapes. I held the king's cup in my hand, pressed the grapes for juice in the cup, and passed the cup to Pharaoh's hand," vss. 9-11. Joseph interpreted his dream to predict that the three vine branches meant that in three days the cupbearer would be pardoned by Pharaoh and restored to his former position. Joseph solemnly requested that the cupbearer remember him to the king after his restoration, for truthfully this Hebrew has done nothing deserving to be in jail. When the chef heard the good news, he begged Joseph to interpret his dream also. He told Joseph that in his dream he was carrying three baskets of white bread upon his head when birds came and ate the bread in the baskets. Joseph interpreted his dream to predict that in three days Pharaoh would take him from prison, hang him on a tree, and the birds would "eat your flesh from off you," vss. 18-19. Three days later, on Pharaoh's birthday, the king held a feast for all his servants. He restored the cupbearer to his position and hanged the chef just as Joseph had predicted. However, the cupbearer forgot to mention Joseph to the king, but God did not forget Joseph.

July 12, 1998

"The Lord Advances Joseph"
Gen. 4 1

Couples Class
Wendell Alford,
Teacher

I. At the beginning of this chapter Joseph had been in Pharaoh's prison for a full two years. He had gained the reputation of being a jailbird. We should remember that his incarceration was due to the scheming for lust with Joseph and then the bearing of false witness by Potiphar's wife. Potiphar, to cover up the "scandal" in his own immediate family, placed Joseph in prison. If the king ever heard of the accusation against Joseph, we are not told. In the minutia of Joseph's life the adversity which he experienced could be interpreted as, "Does God really care for Joseph?" In our lives and the world events which we are witnessing, one could assume the same position about whether God really cares for his people, those of us who are trusting his care. The day-to-day details appear to say that God could not be in our, or our nation's, long range planning by God. Peter (God's Word) responds to such thinking by stating, "The Lord is not slack concerning his promise as some men count slackness, but he [the Lord] is longsuffering toward us [who believe], not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance," II Pet. 3:9. The Word's stress here is for believers to be patient as the Lord works toward the culmination of his plan for the ages. Jesus said as he spoke of that culmination, "In your patience possess you your souls," Lk 21:19. Paul (God's Word) at Rom. 8:16-31 encourages us believers to wait patiently for what God has promised those who are trusting him for the salvation of their eternal spirits, also see at Heb. 11:39-40. As we wait, we are to fill our lives with service to and worship of the God who is saving us through Jesus our Lord and Savior. We are not in prison as Joseph was for those two years.

II. Let's see how God continues to work out his plan in Joseph's life. On Joseph's second anniversary of his prison life, with the cupbearer and chef, the king was dreaming one night that he (the king) was standing on the banks of the great Nile River. Out of the river came seven sleek, fat cows. As he watched they left the river's edge onto a meadow nearby. Following these well-fed cows, came another seven cows from the river, but these seven were poor in bodies with their skeletons pushing their skins outward. Their rib cages were evident along with their hip bones. In this dream Pharaoh saw the sleek cows turn on the lean cattle and eat them! (Dreams do not have to be logical!) The king was bothered by the dream, but he was not able to convene his magicians and wise men. The very next night he dreamed another dream which also baffled him. In this dream a healthy stalk of corn grew up and had seven ears of plump, full corn attached. Immediately following on this stalk seven thin, stringy, blighted ears grew up along side the plump ears and consumed the plump ones. The next morning, after the second mysterious dream, Pharaoh was so disturbed by these apparently contradictory dreams that he gathered from all of Egypt his wise men and magicians to consult with them about the meaning of the two dreams. The king found no help from the gathered dream interpreters. At this meeting was Pharaoh's cupbearer who had been

in prison with Joseph two years earlier. The cupbearer saw the dilemma the king and his magicians were in, and confessed to the king that he had been remiss in not mentioning to him the fact that while he was in prison, there was also there a young Hebrew who had successfully interpreted two dreams of his and the chief chef's. Both dreams came true just as interpreted by the young prisoner.

III. Pharaoh sent for Joseph quickly and told him the dreams. Note that Joseph refused to take credit for his dream interpretation ability, vs. 16. "It is not me, but God shall give Pharaoh an answer of peace [understanding]." In detail Pharaoh related to Joseph the two dreams concerning the cows and corn and added that his official dream interpreters were unable to clarify the dream's meanings. Joseph told Pharaoh that, "God has shown what he [God] is about to do," vss. 25,28. What God has told you in the two dreams is that beginning now and for seven years, weather conditions will be just right for bumper crops throughout Egypt and the area. However, following this bountiful period, will come seven years of grievous crop production. In fact, during the last seven-year period, the crops will fail because of a severe famine so that people will die from hunger if nothing is done. God had repeated the two dreams two nights in succession in order to emphasize that necessary action was called for immediately, vs. 32. There is no time to waste, and the king must take action at once! Joseph then outlined a plan which Pharaoh should follow to save his kingdom: The king should locate a man who is wise and practical (discerning) and set him over the whole of Egypt. This person should have an organization of overseers under him to implement their chief's directions. During the beginning seven years of plenty, the surplus grain produced should be gathered and stored in the centers of population (cities) where it will be available during the coming seven years of dearth. Many times those who suggest sweeping changes are asked to chair a committee or head the operations suggested. The king selected Joseph to be the one who would accomplish the goals of the outline which he had suggested. Pharaoh was very sincere in his choice of Joseph as the one who should do the king's business during this period. Note especially the basis for the king's choosing Joseph, "Forasmuch as God has shown you all this, there is none as discreet and wise as you are," vs. 39. (My emphasis - WA) Pharaoh told Joseph to realize the gravity of his assignment, "I have set you over all the land of Egypt," and, "By your word shall all my people be ruled: only in the throne will I be greater than you," vss. 40-41. To insure Joseph's authority the king put his own signet ring on Joseph's finger, dressed him in royal regalia, made him to ride in a royal chariot immediately behind the king, and required all citizens to bow in Joseph's presence. Pharaoh said, "Without your permission no person shall do anything in all of Egypt," vs. 44. He was given the daughter of the priest of On for a bride. All of this dictatorial power, while Joseph was only thirty years of age! Joseph's wife bore him two sons, Manasseh (Making Forgetful) and Ephraim (Fruitfulness). When the seven years of dearth came, the condition was not only in Egypt but throughout the entire Middle East so that all countries of the region were forced to come to Egypt to God's director of grain for food, vss. 57-58.

July 19, 1998

"Joseph Receives Visitors"
Gen. 4 2

Couples Class
Wendell Alford,
Teacher

I. Back in Canaan the famine was as devastating or worse than in Egypt where Joseph was in control of Egypt's ample food supply, Gen. 41:55. Jacob heard of the plenty in Egypt and discussed his plight with his sons. That God was in control of the weather is an undisputed fact. Egyptian agriculture at that time was dependent, as it is today, upon the snow melt in southern Africa which flooded the areas along the banks of the Nile in the spring and early summer. This arrangement normally created a natural irrigation of the rich land on which for centuries the humus (sediment) and black soil had created fertile crop lands. Rainfall in Egypt is very light with about one inch in a normal year. Apparently the seven lean years which Joseph had predicted were caused by a lack of snow melt in lower Africa and, of course, the lack of rain would have practically stopped the land's production of crops. In the land of Canaan where the advantage of the Nile was not present, the lack of rain reduced crop production drastically. The last thoughts in Chap. 41:54,57 make clear that the famine was over the entire area surrounding the east end of the Mediterranean Sea, i.e., all nations around Egypt. Recall that a trade route existed between the Iran-Iraq area and Egypt through Palestine. Camel caravans carried food, fiber, etc., and it was to one of these caravans on its way to Egypt that Jacob's sons sold Joseph their brother as a slave. Joseph was seventeen when that transaction happened, and now he is about thirty-seven-plus years of age. I would guess about forty, and he had changed significantly since he last saw his family. He now is married, has two sons whom he gave names which indicated what had happened in his life. The first son was Manasseh which means "forgetfulness," because God had enabled him to forget, "all my toil and all my father's house." The second son was Ephraim meaning "fruitful" as God had "caused me to be fruitful in the land of my affliction [Egypt]." Remember, too, that Joseph had adopted the Egyptian language, kept his face shaved, married a Gentile, and adopted Egyptian customs in all ways except the worship and trust of the God of his forefathers, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

II. When Jacob learned that life supporting food was available down in Egypt, he instructed his sons to go there to buy grain so that, "we may live and not die," vs. 2. Jacob sent only ten of the eleven sons, because he was fearful that something untoward could happen to them. Therefore, he kept Benjamin whom he loved especially since he was the only son left by his favorite wife Rachel, now dead. He thought that Joseph, his other son by Rachel, had been slain by a wild beast near Dothan. What Jacob did not know about Joseph was to be the physical salvation of himself, his family, and the entire nation of Israel! Among the great group of Canaanites who came to Egypt to buy grain from Joseph were Reuben and his nine younger brothers. When they arrived at the capital, they approached Joseph and bowed their heads to the earth in his exalted presence. (Remember the dream in which the other sheaves [his brothers] bowed before Joseph's sheaf.) Joseph recognized his brothers, but they did not know who he was. He spoke to them

harshly, further promoting the distance between them and himself. He asked them where they were from, and they said that they were from Canaan and needed to buy Joseph's lifesaving grain. Joseph accused them of being spies who had come to Egypt to discover how weak his nation was from the drought, vs. 9,12. They denied Joseph's accusation by giving him some details of their family situation back home. "Your servants are of twelve brothers of a man in the land of Canaan, and the youngest is home with our father and one is no more," vs. 13. Joseph's reply was that they had not convinced him of their innocence as spies. To prove that they were not spies they must return to Canaan and bring back to Joseph the brother whom they had left with their father. To give them time to think over his proposition, he placed the ten brothers in jail for three days. Joseph said that he was giving them a chance to redeem themselves, "For I fear God," vs. 18. If you will do as I say, you will be saved rather than condemned as spies from Canaan against Egypt. One of you brothers I will keep here in prison, and the other nine are free to return to Canaan with grain for your family. You are to return to me with the brother not now with you. Only then "shall your words be verified, and you shall not die, and they did so," vs. 20.

III. The ten brothers discussed again their long held guilt about what they had done to Joseph back at Dothan. Reuben reminded the others how he had not wanted to "do away with" Jacob's favorite son, Joseph. Joseph was overhearing their conversation about him, but they did not know that Joseph could understand their Hebrew. He was speaking to them in Egyptian through an interpreter. Hearing Reuben's position, that his (Joseph's) blood was upon them, saddened Joseph, for they were concerned about what could happen to Benjamin. Joseph at this time excused himself and went aside and wept, because he was emotionally overcome by the love he still felt for his brothers although he was unable to express himself in their presence under the circumstances. Upon Joseph's return he told them that he was holding Simeon in prison until they returned with Benjamin. Joseph then ordered his grain dispensers to pack full their sacks with grain, and also to place the money given for the grain with the grain. On their return journey to Canaan one of them opened his sack to feed the donkeys and discovered his money. When he told the others of his find, they were scared, because they wondered what "God is doing to us." vs. 28. When they reached home and Jacob, they told him, "The man, who is lord of the country, spoke harshly to us and took us as spies against his country," vs. 30. And, even though we assured him that we were not spies, he kept Simeon in jail as a guaranty until we return with Benjamin. As the brothers opened their bags of grain, they all found their money packed in each bag with the grain. This find frightened not only the sons further, but Jacob also. Jacob recalled how his sons had saddened him, because Joseph was gone, Simeon is in jail in Egypt, and now they want to take Benjamin away to Egypt. All is going against Jacob's welfare. Reuben promised Jacob that if he did not return Benjamin, Jacob could slay his (Reuben's) own two sons. The chapter concludes with Jacob's refusing to permit Benjamin to be taken from him. But God's plan shall be fulfilled, Rom. 8:14-39; Phili. 1:6.

July 26, 1998

"Joseph With Benjamin Again"
Gen. 43

Couples Class
Wendell Alford,
Teacher

I. When we left Jacob at the end of Chap. 42, he solemnly declared that his favorite son Benjamin was not to be taken to Egypt as "that man" there had demanded. "That man" was Joseph, but Jacob nor his other eleven sons were aware of Joseph's identity as the one in charge of dispensing Egypt's grain surplus. Simeon had been kept in prison in Egypt for security to insure the other brothers' return with Benjamin. One could wonder about why Joseph was so intent upon having Benjamin brought to him in Egypt. The reason is, I believe, because Benjamin was Joseph's only brother by his mother Rachel. He had eleven brothers: of Leah (Jacob's first wife), Reuben, Simeon, Levi, Judah, Issachar, and Zebulun; of Zilpah (Leah's handmaid), Gad and Asher; of Bilhah (Rachel's handmaid), Dan and Naphtali; but of Rachel (the second but favorite wife), Benjamin and himself. Joseph's loving bond with Benjamin was special and unique, and Joseph longed to see him. This fact is obvious from the extreme care Joseph had taken to see that Benjamin would be brought to him. Further, he knew how long the drought would last and that Jacob could not feed his family back in Canaan throughout the drought period. Sure enough, when the supply of grain had been consumed which they had brought on their first journey, Jacob's stubborn position about Benjamin's going to Egypt changed. At first Jacob simply told his sons to return to Egypt for another supply of grain. "Go again, buy us a little food," he said, vs. 2. But Judah told his father, "The man" did solemnly warn us saying, 'You shall not see my face, except your brother [Benjamin] be with you.' Unless you permit Benjamin to accompany us as we go to Egypt, we will not go," vss. 4-5. Jacob then accused his sons of being wicked toward him for having told "the man" about the brother left in Canaan on their first trip. Judah said that "the man" was very specific in his questioning about their father and about another son. Judah then promised Jacob that if Benjamin were permitted to go this time, he (Judah) would bear the blame forever, a most solemn oath. Remember that all our lives are in danger now, including our children also. Let us go that we may live and not die.

II. Jacob relented when he realized that all of their very lives were in jeopardy from hunger. Only he insisted that the brothers take with them gifts for "the man," balm, honey, spices, myrr, pistachio nuts, and almonds. Canaan's chief lack of food was of the staff of life, grain (bread). Also they were to return with the regular price for the grain as well as the money that had been found in their sacks on the first trip. Lastly, they were to beg "the man" in the name of God Almighty for mercy lest their father be bereaved unto death. No doubt his sons had told Jacob that "the man" had confessed to them that he feared God, Gen. 42:18. This confession gave Jacob at least a faint hope that "the man" would be merciful to him. The brothers left with the presents, the double money, and Benjamin, and then stood before Joseph, "the man." When Joseph saw his brother Benjamin with the group (at a distance), he immediately said to his head housekeeper, "Bring these men to my home and butcher fresh meat for lunch. Make everything ready,

for these fellows will be having lunch with me today," vs. 16. As the servant was accompanying the brothers to Joseph's home, they were very frightened, because they did not understand why "the man" would want to visit with them in his own home. After all, this man was second only to the Pharaoh himself! Did he want to question them personally about the money found in their bags on their first trip? Their fear caused them to speak with the steward just before they entered Joseph's mansion. "The first time we came to buy grain, we found the money we had paid in with the grain later. This time we are returning that money. This finding was and still is a mystery to us," vs. 20-22. The steward answered, "You fellows should not be afraid, because the God of your father brought about what happened to you. In fact, I had your money," vs. 23. The steward's information still left them mystified. Evidently, however, Joseph had witnessed to the steward about the God of Jacob whom he also believed and worshiped. The steward then brought Simeon out to join them, and they all together entered the mansion where they found water to wash their feet. The servants then provided food for their donkeys. The brothers had learned that "the man" would be there at noon so they had time to prepare the gifts for him. Joseph came just at lunch time, and they presented to him their gifts after bowing low in his presence. The lord of the mansion asked them how they were getting along and how their father was. They told Joseph that Jacob was, indeed, alive and well. When Joseph had expressed his thoughts about their welfare, they not only bowed, but prostrated themselves upon the floor. Then Joseph looked directly at Benjamin, the son of his own mother, and asked, "Is this the other son you mentioned to me?" Joseph said to Benjamin, "May God be gracious to you, my son." This interchange was overpowering emotionally for Joseph. He quickly excused himself, went to his bedroom, and sobbed with joy. After weeping, he composed himself, washed his face, and joined the brothers in the dining hall. He then told the servants to serve lunch. The arrangement for eating contained the subterfuge which Joseph was perpetuating: all of the Egyptians ate together, the Hebrew brothers were separated from them. And most strangely, Joseph ate with neither group. Further, Joseph's placement had arranged the brothers in the order of their ages, with Reuben first and Benjamin last, all in chronological order. The brothers were amazed at these placements, but they ate, drank and were merry with "the man."

III. At the beginning of our examination of Chap. 40, we noted a number of parallels of Joseph's life and circumstance with Jesus, our Lord. I am reminded of another here in Chap. 43. At Zech. 12:10 the prophet prophesies that one day the Jews as a nation will recognize Jesus whom they crucified (John 19:6,34; Acts 2:14-24,36-39). At that time Jesus will say, "Those [wounds in his hands] with which I was wounded in the house of my friends," Zech. 13:6. Joseph's brothers delivered him for slavery, and so was Jesus (John 1:10-11) delivered to die mortally. Both Joseph and Jesus were later revealed to their brothers as one whom they did not recognize. So will Jesus, "That Man," one day be recognized by his brothers (the Jewish nation) as God's Messiah (Savior), Rom. 9:1-5; 11:22-32; Rev. 7:1-8.

Aug. 2, 1998

"Joseph Tests His Brothers"
Gen. 44

Couples Class
Wendell Alford,
Teacher

I. Joseph's concern about the loyalty of his ten half brothers toward, not only himself but especially toward Benjamin and his father, was not settled in his mind. Also, they could be less than sincere about their part in selling Joseph himself. In the last verse of Chap. 43 Joseph tested their love for Benjamin by having the servants serve him five times more food than was served to either of the others. That difference was significant since these men had been eating sparsely, and now they were partaking sumptuously of the best food available in rich, bountiful Egypt. This bounty was directly related to Joseph and his love for God and God's blessings to him, Gen. 41:39-40. But Joseph had even more testing of the ten brothers as he prepared their departure for Canaan. He commanded his steward to, "fill their sacks with as much grain as they can carry, and pack the money they have paid for the grain again in with the grain. In addition to the money, pack my own silver cup in the sack of the youngest [Benjamin]," vss. 1-2. Joseph's command was implemented exactly as given. At the crack of dawn the eleven brothers left for Canaan from Joseph's mansion with all the grain their donkeys could manage. Just as they were outside the city limit, they were overtaken by a contingent of Joseph's men led by his chief servant, the steward. The steward's greeting was not congenial, "Why have you repaid my master's kindness with your evil action? You have taken my master's favorite drinking vessel, the one from which he drinks as he meditates upon his plans for the future. My master is especially aggravated by your having done such an evil thing!" Their answer was, "Far be it from us that God would permit your master's servants to do such as you accuse. Recall that we proved our honesty by bringing back from Canaan the money which, for some reason, we found with the grain after our first trip for food. Such honesty proves that we would not take your master's favorite silver cup. Furthermore, whosoever has the cup in his bag, let him be put to death, and the others of us will be made slaves for your master," vss. 7-9. The steward replied, "It will not be done as you suggest, but whoever has the cup in his bag will become my master's slave, but the others will be considered blameless, innocent," vs. 10. On the spot and immediately, all of the sacks were opened. The steward opened every bag slowly, and meticulously, beginning with Reuben on down the brothers by age. No cup was found through the first ten bags, but when the last son's (Benjamin's) sack was opened, the early sun's rays gleamed from Joseph's bright silver cup. All of the other brother's eyes became fixed upon, first, Benjamin, and then, upon the steward. The brothers tore their garments in remorse and reloaded their donkeys. They were taken back to Joseph's mansion where he was waiting for them. All eleven brothers fell prostrate upon the floor before "that man," and Joseph said to them, "It is not understandable that you would believe that you could be excused from such evil as stealing my silver cup. Don't you know that I have insight (am astute) about such things as you have done?" Judah was the spokesman for the eleven brothers and said, "We are speechless about what recompense would be appropriate to our lord,

but one thing is sure, we are all guilty for this evil against our lord. We are all my lord's servants along with the one who had the cup in his sack." Here Judah is making a bid for corporate guilt rather than singling out their kid brother as guilty alone. This position (corporate) illustrated for Joseph that the ten brothers were not only protecting Benjamin but that they were taking into account the wishes of their father, Jacob. They had told Joseph before why Benjamin was not allowed by their father to make the first journey, Jacob feared for his hurt or life.

II. Joseph refused to accept the corporate plea for what appeared to be Benjamin's sin. Rather, Joseph said, "God forbid that I should follow your suggestion, but the man in whose hand the cup was found, he shall be my slave. As for you others, you can go in peace back to your father," vs. 17. Judah was unwilling to accept Joseph's decision and approached the king's supreme commander. Judah begged Joseph to hear what he had to say, "speak a word in my lord's ears," vs. 18. "Please don't be angry with us, for we are aware that you speak with the authority of the Pharaoh (king). When we were here before, you inquired about our family, about whether we had a father or another brother back in Canaan. We told you the truth by informing you that our father was back home with our young brother. One of our father's sons died, leaving only one other son of the dead son's mother. Benjamin is the son whom our father loves above everyone else in the world, for his mother has died. You asked us to bring the youngest son to see you, and we made known that to separate permanently this youngest son from our father would surely kill him. Benjamin is here only because you insisted that he be present, before you would permit us to buy food to save the lives of our families. Before we left home our father told us, 'Benjamin was the only son left of his mother, because the other son was torn to pieces by wild beasts. I have not seen him since. If you take the only other son of my dead son's mother, I will surely die.'" Judah continues, "Our father's life depends upon the return of Benjamin, because his life is bound up in the lad's life, (vss. 30-31). I, Judah your servant, am surety for the lad's return to Canaan and to our father, for I have taken a solemn oath: If I bring him not back to you [Jacob], then I will bear the blame for ever. In view of this oath, my lord, let me, your servant, remain with you as your slave instead of the lad. Let him return with his brothers for the sake of our father." This long, compassionate discourse by Judah delivered before Joseph, the chief authority in Egypt, is one of the most touching pleas of all times.

III. Judah's plea reminds me of some significant discourses in the New Covenant: Peter's message to those assembled in Jerusalem at Pentecost after Jesus' ascension (Acts 2:14-41), and Peter's revelation of God's Gospel being also for the Gentiles at Acts 10:34-48; 15:6-11; Stephen's message to Jewish religious leaders at Acts 7:2-60; Paul's testimony concerning his own miraculous acceptance of Jesus as God's long promised Messiah, Savior and Lord (Acts 22:1-23); and the greatest plea of all the ages was Jesus' conversation (prayer) with God the Father for himself, his apostles, and those who believe in and trust him, John 17:1-26.

Aug. 9, 1998

"Joseph Identifies Himself"
Gen. 45

Couples Class
Wendell Alford,
Teacher

I. At the end of Chap. 44 we see the summary given by Judah, "For how shall I go up to my father then, and the lad [Benjamin] not be with me? Doubtless, I will see evil come on my father." Judah's relating the past events and then making of a final request of Joseph for leniency, because of Benjamin and his father, caused Joseph's emotions to overflow. He began to weep and ordered the steward and the other servants to leave the room. Finally, Joseph stood alone, in private, with his eleven brothers. He sobbed so audibly that those he had sent away could hear his groanings. "That man" said plainly, "I am Joseph; is my father really well?" This revelation of who Joseph was caused a profound fright and terror to come upon the eleven. No doubt Joseph spoke to them in Hebrew for the first time without the aid of an interpreter. This change of the language further heightened the eleven's fear and dread. Was Joseph crying because of what he felt he must do now to recompense them for all the evil that had befallen him? Their fear was expressed by drawing away from Joseph. Joseph said, "I beg you to come near to me." They followed his bidding by gathering near him, and Joseph repeated, "I am Joseph your brother whom you sold into Egypt. Don't be in sorrow or angry with yourselves because of your previous actions that brought me here, for God did send me [to Egypt] ahead of you to preserve [your] lives. The famine has been under way for only two years, but there will be yet five more years. During that five years, crops will not grow and produce grain. God sent me here to govern and thereby preserve our posterity by a great deliverance. Really, it was not your doing that brought me here, but God it was who has made me a father [political creator] of all of Pharaoh's national policies, supervising his affairs for the entire nation. I want you to go quickly to our father and tell him that his son Joseph has been made by God the lord of all of Egypt. Tell him to come to see me without delay. He should bring the entire family, and I will have a place for all of you over in Goshen. Also, bring all of your possessions including your herds, etc. I will provide for all of you since, during the next five years, you could be reduced to utter poverty. Don't forget that your eyes have seen and your ears have heard firsthand from Joseph himself, including my brother Benjamin, that I am, in fact, Joseph, the son whom God has blessed. Tell my father of all my success [glory] in Egypt." He wants his father to know of his accomplishments and notoriety which they had personally witnessed. Joseph repeated his desire that they hurry and bring their father, their families, and all their possessions down to Egypt so that he could care for them. He then kissed his kid brother Benjamin and cried for joy "upon his neck" as well as the other ten. His expressions of love for them satisfied his brothers that he was sincere and intended them no harm, and they talked together for a long time.

II. The news of Joseph's brothers' coming, soon ran through the rumor mill so that even the Pharaoh learned of the news. Joseph's pleasure from their visit pleased the Pharaoh and not only because of Joseph's value to the nation, but also because this Pharaoh

was very probably a Hyksos descendant. Joseph had at this time been in Egypt for about twenty-two years. He was seventeen when he was sold to Potiphar as a slave, thirty when he was taken to stand before the king to interpret the two dreams which had taken nine years (seven prosperous and two of drought) to fulfill, to the time of the brothers' second visit to Egypt. Truly, Joseph had been of outstanding, excellent service to Egypt and its king. I noted above what many historians today believe, that the Pharaohs over Egypt during this period were from among the Hyksos. The name Hyksos, or "Shepherd Kings," was given to the earliest invaders of Egypt, and were noted by the Hebrew historian Josephus as a race associated with the Israelites (Apion, 1,14). These Shepherd Kings ruled Egypt for five hundred and eleven years but were then driven out by the kings of Thebias (Thebes). The name "Hyksos is a combination of the two words, "Hyc," meaning "a king", and, "Sos," meaning "a shepherd" according to Josephus. Encyclopaedia Britannica quotes Josephus as its source of information for its article on Hyksos which also refers to the Hyksos as "the name of the earliest invaders of Egypt." Assuming this information to be factual, and I believe it is, makes more understandable the Pharaoh in Joseph's day as being kind to Joseph and his family. I believe that this arrangement of God's plan for creating the nation of Israel (Jacob), by Jacob's immediate family, to be a major part of God's plan to bring his Son and Messiah, Jesus, to the world for both the Jews and us Gentiles. This long range plan of God expands our knowledge of his great love for us, in that we can see the tremendous price God paid for our eternal life through our faith and trust in his Son Jesus, our Savior and Lord.

III. The king's favorable reaction to Joseph's family's coming to join Joseph in Egypt was given immediate and effective implementation when Pharaoh commanded Joseph, "to tell his brothers to load their donkeys with food and return to Canaan. Further, return to Egypt with your father, your brothers and their families, all of their possessions, and I will see that they are provided with the best that rich Egypt can furnish (the fat of the land)," vs. 18. Further, the king commanded Joseph to send large Egyptian wagons sufficient to transport Jacob and all his children and their families. You need not bring foodstuffs, for all of Egypt's supplies are at your disposal. Joseph then gave all his brothers a changing of clothes and food for the journey, but to Benjamin he gave five changes of clothing and three hundred pieces of silver. Additionally, he sent his father twenty donkeys loaded with a variety of food. When they reached Canaan and their father, Jacob could not believe their message, but when he saw the Egyptian, large wagons (chariot size carts), which Joseph had sent, he believed. Jacob declared, "I am so pleased that my son Joseph is alive; I will go see him before I die." The fact that God's Word gives assurance that God has not nor will ever forget the Israelites should reinforce our faith in his promise to us Gentiles, and to all who will believe concerning our eternal life through faith in Jesus, John 3:16-18; 14:1-3,6-7,26-28; Rom. 11:1-7,11-32; II Cor. 1:18-22; Eph. 1:13-14; Rev. 7:1-4. With God's faithful promise to us, we are free to love and serve him with all our beings, Mk 12:29-31.

Aug. 23, 1998

"Jacob Moves To Egypt"
Gen. 4 6

Couples Class
Wendell Alford,
Teacher

I. When Jacob was given first hand information about his favorite son Joseph's being alive after some twenty-two years, he at first refused to believe the story, "his heart fainted, for he believed them not." After seeing the huge wagons which Pharaoh himself had sent with supplies, then "the spirit of Jacob revived." One of the weapons of war which made Egypt one of the leading military forces in the east Mediterranean Sea area in this era was the chariot for rapid changing of troops and armaments. The large wheeled carts were also used for distributing food and fiber products over long distances during peace time. These vehicles were concrete evidence to Jacob that Egypt's authority had been exercised on his behalf. Israel (Jacob) agreed to go down to Egypt to visit with Joseph, "before I die." Very probably the patriarch did not have in mind making a permanent move, but rather, that he would go down to Egypt to visit with Joseph and return to his home in Canaan at Hebron. Jacob remembered that both his father and grandfather, Isaac and Abraham, had had trouble down in Egypt. At Gen. 26:2 the Lord appeared to Isaac and specifically told him not to go to Egypt as Abraham his father had done. Later at Beersheba Isaac met the Lord who promised him not to fear, for he, the Lord, would continue to be with him and protect him, Gen. 26:23-25. As Jacob went to Egypt at Joseph's request, he felt uneasy about making a trip to Egypt even though he wanted desperately to see his long lost favorite son Joseph. Now he was on his way with all his earthly possessions along with all his sons and their families and their possessions. Just to be sure that he was doing God's bidding, he stopped at Beersheba, about thirty miles from Hebron, to worship God (offered sacrifices), as Isaac his father had done years before as noted above. There "the God of his father Isaac spoke unto Israel and said, 'Jacob, Jacob - - I am God, the God of thy father: fear not to go down into Egypt, for I will there make of you a great nation, '" vss. 1-4. Jacob now had the assurance of God for his going. His going down to Egypt was in direct contrast with what God had told his father Isaac. Obviously the different circumstances called for a different directive from God. In retrospect we can see the difference: Isaac had only two sons, one who had little desire to pursue spiritual goals, Esau. The other, Jacob, however, had twelve sons who were willing to serve God and who could people a new nation. After Jacob had received the clearance from the God he believed to be beyond reproach, he "rose up from Beerssheba [and] the sons of Israel carried Jacob their father, their little ones, and their wives in the wagons which Pharaoh had sent to carry them," vs.5. In the promise made by God to Jacob is a detail that thrilled him: "I will go down with you into Egypt; and I will surely bring you up again although you will be with Joseph when you die," vs. 4.

II. We noted above that Jacob's offspring were to become the geneological basis for a large nation down in Egypt, the nation of Israel. A good part of this chapter (vss. 7-27) is given to establish the human spring from which flowed the great host of Israelis, between

two and three million souls about four hundred and thirty years later than the time of Chap. 46, Exod. 12:40; Gal. 3:15-17. In this section are listed all the sons of Jacob arranged by his two wives and two concubines, Leah, Zilpah, Rachel, and Bilhah with their sons under each of the four. Vs. 27 gives the total count of Jacob and his offspring as seventy who constituted the embryo of Hebrews who grew into the entire nation of Israel over the next four hundred and thirty years. A detailed examination of vss. 7-27 gives the following facts taken into account for the seventy to be justified: Judah's sons Er and Onan died in Canaan and his two grandsons (sons of Pharez) were included with Jacob and Leah to make the thirty-three, vs. 15; Jacob's sons by Zilpah are given as sixteen which excludes a daughter named Serah, vs. 18; Joseph and his two sons were already in Egypt but are included in the fourteen offspring of Jacob and Rachel, vs. 22; Bilhah's children and grandchildren are counted as seven, vs. 25. One should note that Jacob's daughter by Leah, Dinah, is not given in this listing in Chap. 46; see Gen. 30:21. The sixty-six count noted in vs. 26 does not include Joseph, his wife and two sons which are included in the seventy count in vs. 27. This laborious account of all these people should not be considered unimportant, because God had promised Jacob that he would make of him a great nation in Egypt, vs. 3. Every aspect of this process is miraculous as we shall see in our study of the remainder of Genesis and the Book of Exodus. Why should Moses have given this genealogical accounting in Chap. 46? One reason is that it shows God's servant Jacob and how he had progressed spiritually from a fleshly disposition living in Haran, to a belief in his own strength in Canaan, and finally, with a firm faith in God's will now in Egypt. Most of our lives in our day climb Jacob's spiritual ladder as we grow in God's grace, Eph. 4:12-32; II Pet. 3:17-18. The second reason for this detailed genealogical account is that from these seventy people will come the most important person in all of human history, Jesus, God's Son and Savior of the world, Matt. 1:1-3; Lk 3:33-34.

III. Evidently Judah had become the spokesman for the tribe of Jacob. Remember it was he who spoke for the eleven brothers to Joseph to save Benjamin from Egyptian slavery, or so Judah thought. Judah even volunteered self-servitude so that Benjamin could be sent back to his father. When this host of Jews reached Egypt, Jacob sent Judah to Joseph to tell him that they were in the area of Goshen and to learn exactly where Joseph wanted them to locate. Joseph dropped everything he was doing (affairs of state), had his chariot readied, and went up to Goshen. Joseph presented himself to Israel, his father. The two embraced for the first time in twenty-two years, and what a meeting it was! Joseph fell on Jacob's neck and shed tears of joy, "a good while," vs. 29. Israel said to his favorite son Joseph, "Now let me die, since I have seen your face, and you are alive," vs. 30. Joseph said to his family that he would go and inform Pharaoh of their arrival to be with Joseph. He wanted to be sure that Pharaoh understood their trade to be shepherds and that they had brought their flocks with them. Goshen was an area where shepherding would be excellent, the best in Egypt. Egyptians considered shepherds to be loathsome people, vs. 34.

Jacob's Seventy in Goshen - Gen. 46 Supplement - 8-23-98

Jacob

Reuben

Hanoch

Phallu

Simeon

Jemuel

Jamin

Zohar

Levi

Gershon

Kohath

Judah

Er, died in Canaan, not counted

Onan, died in Canaan, not counted

Shelah

Pharez, sons: Heron, Hamul

Zarah

Issachar

Tola

Job

Phuvah

Shimron

Zebulun

Sered

Elon

Jamleel

*LEAH - 33 PERSONS

Gad

Ziphion

Shumi

Haggai

Ezbon

Eri

Arodi

Areli

Asher

Jimnah

Isui

Ishuah

Beriah, sons: Heber, Malchiel

Serah. sister, not counted

*ZILPAH - 16 PERSONS

Joseph

Manasseh and Ephraim (already in Egypt but counted)

Benjamin

Belah

Ashbel

Becher

Gera

Naaman

Ehi

Rosh

Muppim

Ard

Huppim

*RACHEL - 14 PERSONS, Rachel not counted - died in Canaan

Dan

Hushim

Naphtali

Jahzeel

Gum

Jazer

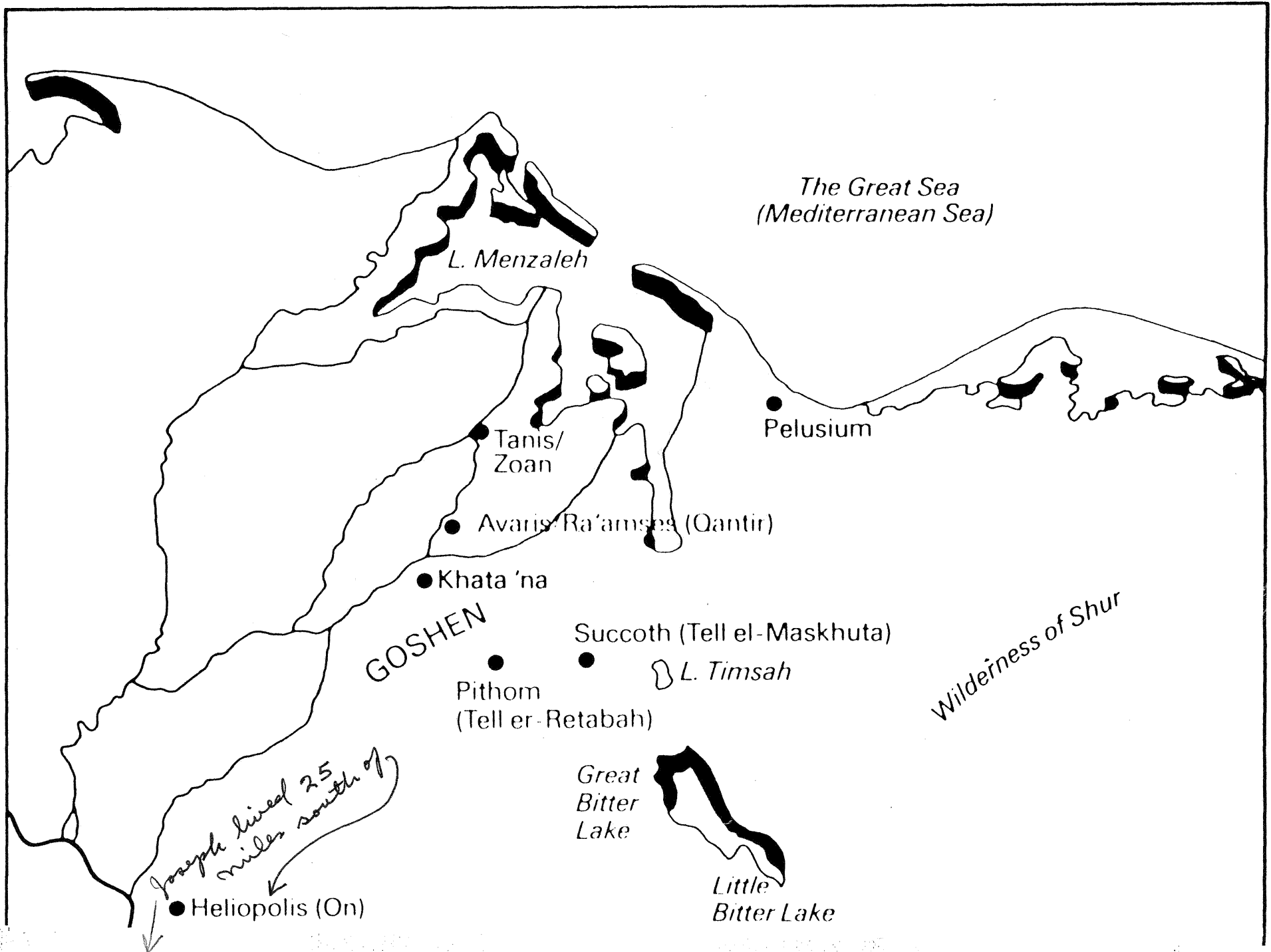
Shillem

*BILHAH - 7 PERSONS, Bilhah not counted - died in Canaan

[33 + 16 + 14 + 7 = 70 PERSONS, Gen. 46:27]

Wendell Alford,
Teacher

GOSHEN



Aug. 30, 1998

"Jacob's Family In Goshen"
Gen. 47

Couples Class
Wendell Alford,
Teacher

I. Can you imagine what poor Jacob was experiencing as he was being uprooted from his homeland in Canaan and moved to a strange land in Egypt? The big prize and consolation for him in the move was that he was to join his best loved person on earth, Joseph, whom he had not seen for over two decades and had thought was dead! That son was the first born of Rachel his dearly beloved who had been dead for years. Jacob had learned that, not only was Joseph alive, his favorite son had become a prime political figure in the rich nation of Egypt, the nation with ample foodstuffs during a deep drought being felt in the entire area. No less excited about the move was that son Joseph. We have learned that he had wept from the joy of seeing his brothers again after their long separation, but in the second encounter with them and his brother Benjamin, his sobbing was so audible throughout his huge mansion that the neighbors knew. And now his father Jacob was coming to live in Egypt where Joseph could care for his whole family, a total of seventy persons including himself, his father and his brothers' family members. Joseph had promptly joined the group of Israelites as soon as they had reached Goshen in northeast Egypt. After joining his family, Joseph's next priority was to have them meet the king of Egypt and settle the assignment of their location in Goshen.

II. The Scripture does not state that Joseph had Pharaoh's permission for Jacob and the group from Canaan to live in Goshen before Joseph invited them down, Gen. 45:10. At Gen. 46:34 Joseph had instructed Jacob and the others to tell Pharaoh that their occupation related to herding flocks of animals such as cattle, sheep and goats, i.e., livestock. This prompting would encourage Pharaoh to agree to the Goshen area, an area where fewer Egyptians lived, for "every shepherd is loathsome unto the Egyptians." Fewer Egyptians lived in Goshen, because that area was the delta of the Nile where annual flooding was expected. Plant growth there maintained perpetual pasture lands for animal production. It is evident, seen in retrospect, that God was planning that in Goshen he would rear the nation of Israel in a rather secluded section of Egypt, separated from the major population areas of the nation. The Israelites remained in the Goshen area during the hundreds of years they grew and sojourned in Egypt.

III. Joseph chose a time which he considered appropriate to tell Pharaoh that his father Jacob and his entire family was up in Goshen. He told the king, "My father and my brothers along with their flocks, herds and all their possessions are come from Canaan to Goshen," vs. 1. For this meeting Joseph took only five of his brothers and Jacob his father. First, he introduced the brothers to Pharaoh, and, in the conversation, the young men were asked their abilities in supporting themselves and their families. They respectfully informed Pharaoh that they, as their forefathers had been, were shepherds of livestock. Remember at Chap. 46:34 Joseph had told his brothers to emphasize this fact to Pharaoh, "that we may dwell in the land of Goshen." Joseph was very intelligent and had calcula-

ted this arrangement would permit his people to have the advantage of the most appropriate land in Egypt for livestock farming. In addition, the Israelites would be somewhat isolated from the main population centers of the Egyptians. Most Egyptians were, in a sense at this time, a subjugated people to the ruling class, the Hyksos Pharaohs (Semites) whom we discussed at Chap. 45,II. Before Moses' day these Shepherd Kings were overcome by a ruling class, from the long-term Egyptians who were not Semites, but Hamites, Exod. 1:8. After introducing the five brothers to the king, Joseph brought in and introduced his father Jacob. The king's first question to Jacob concerned his age. Note that Jacob's answer was self-deprecating, "The days of my sojourning has been one hundred and thirty years. My life has been shorter and less noteworthy than my forefathers," vs. 9. What a change in the disposition of Jacob, the Supplanter or Deceitful One, who took his brother Esau by the heel, even during birth! He who had by deceit become rich at the expense of his father-in-law Laban over in Haran! He who had been and was the father of twelve sons! Jacob had obviously become an humble servant of his and his forefathers' God, the Creator. This concept of his being subservient to the God of Heaven made Jacob feel that he should bless the Pharaoh who had been so gracious to his favorite son Joseph, Gen. 22:16-17; Heb. 6:13-20. So, Jacob blessed Pharaoh as he was leaving the king's palace. Since Joseph had already placed his families in Goshen, the Pharaoh agreed that Joseph could give his people possession of the land in Egypt in the Goshen area. This portion of land was known as "the land of Rameses," and it was from here that the Israelites began the Exodus back to the land of Canaan hundreds of years later, Exod. 1:11. By this time in the drought of seven years, food became extremely scarce in both Egypt and Canaan. Joseph gave special attention to his family in Goshen and saw that they received all they needed.

IV. In vss. 14-22 we learn the events which occurred the remaining three or four years of the seven-year drought. The surplus grain which Joseph had stored in the population centers (cities) over all Egypt during the seven productive years became the only source of life sustaining food availing in both Egypt and Canaan, vs. 14. For a long while everyone continued to pay for the grain from the government storage bins. People's money was depleted before the drought ended, and the citizens began exchanging their other assets (livestock, land, etc.) at Joseph's instructions. The final exchange for food from the people to the government was the land itself. In this transaction the Pharaoh became the owner of all the land of Egypt. The citizens were moved in from the rural areas to the cities. The only exceptions to the land repossession was for the Israelites and the priests. Near the end of the seventh year of the drought, Joseph, knowing that the land would produce grain the following year, gave seed for planting the next year. Joseph issued an edict that thereafter in Egypt all farmers would pay to the government one-fifth of all crops produced, except from the land of the priests. The chapter ends with Israel asking Joseph to swear that when he (Jacob) died, he would be taken back to Canaan for burial. Joseph promised to do so, but why was this so important to Jacob? We shall see next Lord's Day.

Sept. 6, 1998

"Jacob's Last Illness"
Gen. 4 8

Couples Class
Wendell Alford,
Teacher

I. Jacob is now one hundred forty-seven years of age, and, at the end of Chap. 47, he called his son Joseph to his bedside and made him swear by a solemn oath that he would not be buried in Egypt but back in Canaan. Joseph swore that he would follow Jacob's wishes. Why would Jacob be so convinced that his burial place should be back in the area where his forefathers were buried? We, as believers in Jesus Christ, need not be concerned about where our bodies are buried. Jesus, our Lord, has promised us that the very day our spirits depart our temporary, fleshly bodies, our beings (spirits, personalities), will go to be with the Lord, Lk 23:43. Further, God's promise in his Word is that our spirits will be brought back by Jesus to earth and clothed upon with new bodies, I Thes. 4:13-18. Jesus spoke of that time in Matt. 24:36-44 (Mk 13:32-37; Lk 21:34-36), and Paul outlines this event in God's Word to us at I Cor. 15:49-58. I believe that when Jesus comes for all believers, those "asleep (physically dead) in Jesus," I Thes. 4:15a-17, will be taken to the New Jerusalem, Rev. 4:1; 19:7-10; 21:2-5. But only those Jews who have accepted Jesus as God's Messiah (Savior), e.g., Paul, Peter, etc., after Jesus was resurrected from physical death, those "asleep in Jesus," are right with God according to the New Covenant. However, the Old Covenant persons who died with faith in God's promise made to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob will receive the promise made first to Abraham as a result of his faith in God's promise, Gen. 12:1-4; 15:18. This promise to the Jews concerned earthly affairs which, I believe, will be fulfilled when Jesus returns to receive his bride, the ecclesia, Heb. 1:39-40. God's kingdom will be set up at that time and will be further tested for one thousand years, Rev. 20:3,5, before the new earth, Rev. 21:1, continues on beyond the events recorded in the Scriptures. All of the Jews with faith in God's promise to Abraham and his posterity who lived and died physically on earth before Jesus said on the cross, "It is finished," John 19:30, will be citizens of the new earthly Kingdom of Heaven, Heaven on earth. How can this be? The answer is given in Ezek. 37:9-14 in which, note the clause in Ezek. 37:14, "and I shall place you in your own land." Which land belongs to Israel? The God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (Israel) promised all three, Gen. 15:18; 22:18; 26:3-5; 35:10-12, the land "from the river of Egypt (Nile) unto the great river, the river Euphrates," Gen. 15:18, cited above. This land, I believe, will be the headquarters from which the Jews will rule the world from Jerusalem under the Spirit of the Lord Jesus during the thousand years following Jesus' return to earth, Isa. 2:1-5. Jacob wanted to be near headquarters when he is resurrected! While the Jewish nation's hope is on a purged earth, our (believers in Jesus Christ) hope is the New Jerusalem (Heaven) and Jesus' Presence. Jacob's desire to be buried in Canaan emphasized his ardent faith in God's promise.

II. Joseph stayed very busy with the affairs of state, but he maintained a consistent vigilance regarding the welfare of his father Jacob and his family up in the land of Rameses, Goshen. One of Joseph's officers, perhaps, or one of his brothers reported to

Joseph that Jacob was terminally ill. Joseph's reaction was to take his two sons, Manasseh and Ephraim, who were over seventeen years old at this time, to see Jacob. When they arrived, Jacob garnered his failing strength, sat on the side of his bed, and began an autobiographical resume of his experiences with God. He told how God Almighty had appeared to him at Luz back in Canaan, where the Lord had addressed him from the top of a ladder which reached from earth to heaven. Messengers (angels) of God used the ladder to move between earth and heaven, Gen. 28:12-19; John 1:50-51. Jacob repeated the threefold promise of God to him there: to bless Jacob, to multiply his descendants into a vast multitude, and finally, to "give this land Canaan to those descendants for an everlasting possession," vss. 3-4. Jacob acknowledged before Joseph that the two sons would be inheriting land later along with each of his other sons. This equality was especially important as the tribes occupied land while establishing Israel as a nation later in Canaan, and ignored the fact that their mother was Asenath, an Egyptian and daughter of an Egyptian priest, On, Gen. 41:51.

III. Jacob's relating his life story now notes the death of his beloved wife Rachel. She died in his presence as the family traveled from Haran in Mesopotamia back to Hebron, Isaac's home. Her death occurred just after God had appeared again to Jacob. God repeated his name change from Jacob (Supplanter) to Israel (God Strives, relating to Jacob's wrestling with God's messenger at Gen. 32:31; 35:9-13. The first appearance of the Lord to Jacob at Luz (Bethlehem) left him crippled at his hip for life. Rachel then died on this journey just before they reached Ephrath (Bethlehem) while giving birth to Benjamin, her second child. With blurred eyes (due to his old age) Jacob asked Joseph, "Who are these two with you?" Joseph replied, "They are my sons whom God has given to me here," and Jacob asked him to bring them closer for a better view. With Manasseh (older) and Ephraim at his arms length, he embraced and kissed each lovingly. Jacob was to bless them as he placed his hands upon their heads according to custom. Joseph had brought them up to Jacob so that Jacob's right hand would rest upon Manasseh, the older, but evidently Jacob deliberately crossed his hands and placed his right hand upon Ephraim, the younger. The right hand passed the superior blessing, also according to custom. Before he blessed the sons Jacob said, "I never expected to see you (Joseph) again, and, not only have I seen you and how God has blessed you, but here God has permitted me to see your two sons." Joseph protested to Jacob that he was about to give his younger the prime blessing, but Jacob said, "I know it, my son, I know it, [Old age is not the problem!], both shall be great, but the younger shall be greater," vs. 19. Jacob assured Joseph that when the land in Canaan is divided between the tribes, those under Manasseh and Ephraim will be greater than either of the other sons. Jacob said, "I have given to you (Joseph) one portion more than your brothers which I took from the Amorite with my sword and bow," Gen. 34:25-31; vs. 22. The place in Canaan referred to by Jacob here is at Sychar on the West Bank of the Jordan River today, and still in dispute between Israel and the Palestinians. Note also John 4:1-6, 25-26 where Jesus talked with the Samaritan women.

I. We left Jacob at the end of Chap. 48 on his deathbed where he blessed Joseph's two sons and assured Joseph that they were to be an integral part of Jacob's inheritance back in Canaan. All of today's chapter finds Jacob's last moments at that deathbed. After making sure that Joseph and his two sons were accounted for in the future of his family, Jacob called all of his sons to his bedside, "that I may tell you that which shall befall you in the last days," vs. 1. The phrase, "in the last days" is very significant as Jacob is looking ahead, prophetically, for thousands of years. Later Moses viewed the nation of Israel as made up of the twelve tribes of Israel which Jacob emphasized in Gen. 49. Moses' reference to the tribes in his last days is given in Deut. 33 just before his death, and he relates the nation of Israel as divided but still recipients of the Lord's promise at Deut. 34:4, "This is the land which I swear unto Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, saying, 'I will give it unto your descendants (seed).'" (A detailed description of the tribes' geographic boundaries can be located at Josh. 13-21.) But Jacob's prophecy continues on through the Old Covenant, the New Covenant, and to the last book in the Bible at Rom. 11:25-28; Rev. 7:3-8.

II. Jacob, I believe, mustered his strength for one last testimony to his assembled twelve sons after he had blessed the two sons of Jacob. To formalize his last remarks he raised himself to his feet and put part of his weight upon his staff (Heb. 11:21). He regularly used a walking cane which had been his habit since wrestling with God's angel as a young man on his way to Haran from Hebron at Gen. 32:25, 31-32. Leaning upon his staff, Jacob began with his oldest son Reuben telling what each tribe should expect for his descendants in the years to follow. Although Reuben was his firstborn, the beginning of Jacob's issue and the first expression of his dignity and power, Reuben is as "unstable as water." Because of Reuben's lack of self-control, he demonstrated his weakness when he "went up to his father's bed, defiling it" with Jacob's concubine, Bilhah, Gen. 35:22. "- - you will not excel," Jacob told Reuben. Simeon and Levi were brothers of the same mother, Leah, but they had shown examples of violence when they, in vengeance, murdered Hamor and Shechem after Shechem had raped their sister Dinah, Gen. 34:1,2,25-26. Levi's tribe will be divided and not given land of their own, but scattered throughout Israel as the priests of the nation. Jacob's prophecy concerning Judah is particularly noteworthy since, in retrospect, we know that from Judah's line came the great King David from whom, according to the flesh, came Mary the mother of our Lord Jesus, the Messiah, Matt. 1:1-2,16. Jesus asked the Pharisees on an occasion whose son the Messiah would be when he comes, Matt. 22:41-46. They answered, "The son of David," and Jesus quoted Psa. 110:1 where David said, "The Lord said to my Lord, 'Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies your footstool.'" That prophecy is being fulfilled today and has been in progress since Jesus ascended back to the Father in Acts 1:9-11. Peter at Acts 2:25-35 noted that David, in the lineage of Judah, was the progenitor

of Jesus, "according to the flesh." Jacob could state prophetically at Gen. 49:10, that "the scepter (rule)" shall not depart from Judah until Shiloh come. Truly Jesus was from the seed of a woman (Gen. 3:15) whose seed (Jesus, the Messiah - Savior) would eventually destroy the offspring of Satan. Shiloh means "tranquility," and Jacob is prophesying that the world will know lasting peace only when God's Messiah puts down all of Satan's influence on the earth, Rev. 20:10; 21:1-5. Jesus is coming back to earth to reign, and this will happen only after the earth has been purged of Satanic influence as given in the Revelation of God through John on the Island of Patmos. Shiloh shall come to gather his people to himself, vs. 10; John 14:1-3; Acts 1:11. Jacob knew of this and associated the final result of God's actions to come through his son Judah. Through vs. 12 Jacob has already explained the future of the posterity of his oldest son Reuben, then Simeon's and Levi's descendents of the sons who have been rash and hot tempered. Lastly, he has predicted the glorious future of the offspring of Judah who will include Shiloh which is the period of lasting peace under the lordship of our Lord.

III. In vss. 13 through 28 the patriarch Jacob continues prophesying the future of his other eight sons. Zebulun is to dwell near the sea (Mediterranean) and extend eastward to Sidon. Issachar is to be the working backbone of the nation Israel. The two tribes Zebulun and Issachar will become in the northern area the workers and producers of income (through fees for passage). Dan will be the tribe which will act as the stealthy spies to lead the Israelites in rebellions. The main force which formed the glue holding the various tribes together was their common loyalty to the one true God, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob and the subsequent hatred of false gods, idolatry. The Asher and Naphtali tribes are to be noted for their production of choice food and communication skills. Joseph would continue to be a strong witness to God's direction to the Israelites as he had been as a youngster newly transported from Canaan to Egypt. Ephraim and Manasseh in Jacob's prophesy here are the two sons of Joseph and who are to represent Joseph later in the land of Canaan as tribes of Israel. These two tribes were people of strong political positions. At the time the kingdom divided into two nations, Israel and Judah, these two tribes were the leaders of Israel in the north and Judah in the south. Only David's strong military leadership could bring the two components back together. But after David's son Solomon reigned, the two nations again divided. Israel ceased being a nation in 975 BC whereas Judah remained a nation until 536 BC, about one hundred and thirty-five years later. When Jesus was here the first time, the central area of Palestine was known as Samaria with Galilee to the north and Judea to the south. Jesus witnessed to the Samaritans as noted at John 4:3-43. In vss. 27-28 Jacob relates Benjamin's tribe in the nation of Israel and blesses all twelve sons. After blessing them all, Jacob announced that he is about to die and be "gathered to his people." "Bury me with my fathers," Jacob told them, Gen. 23:16-20. His spirit was "gathered to his people," and we shall see what happened to his body next week in the final chapter, Chap. 50.

Sept. 20, 1998

"Joseph Buries Jacob And Dies"
Gen. 50

Couples Class
Wendell Alford,
Teacher

I. At the end of Chap. 49 Jacob died and joined his forefathers (was gathered to his people). When he died (physically) his spirit went where Abraham and Isaac were, but his body is dealt with in the chapter we examine today. When Joseph saw that his father Jacob had expired, he fell upon his face and kissed him. Joseph ordered the Egyptian morticians (physicians) to embalm his father. This process required forty days, but the custom of the Egyptians was to mourn the death of a notable one for seventy days. Jacob was mourned for the full seventy days. We should at this point, I believe, examine some aspects of Egyptian history and the why and methods of human preparation when one dies. Most historians relegate the early history of Egypt into thirty-one dynasties from antiquity (prehistoric) through the thirty-first dynasty which ended in 332 BC during the pinnacle of power of the Persian Empire and the capture of Egypt by Alexander the Great for the Greeks in 331 BC. Persia and Greece constituted the second and third empires (beasts) of Daniel's prophecy at Dan. 7:5-6. I believe that Joseph was in Egypt during the sixteenth dynasty (about 1800 BC), because that period was when the Hyksos ruled. Remember that they were from Arabia and known as Shepherd Kings as we noted in our study at Gen. 45,II. Most Egyptians were Hamites while the ruling Shepherd Kings were Semites. By Moses' time, about four hundred years later, the Hamitic Egyptians had overcome the Shepherd Kings and reinstalled dynasties of native Hamites as rulers.

II. Joseph had become an avid believer in his father's God, Jehovah, during his first seventeen years before he was sold into slavery into Egypt. Egyptians were worshipers of idols and practiced polytheism, not the one, true God, but Joseph's faith in the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob never wavered. The Egyptians believed that after death a person would live again within the same body occupied during mortal life. We believers in Jesus, God's Son and Savior, believe that when we return with Jesus, we will experience a resurrection but will occupy a new, supernatural body, I Cor. 15:51-58; II Cor. 5:1-8; I Thes. 4:14. The Egyptians' belief caused them to attempt to save their mortal bodies as near as possible in their physical state after death as they had been while alive. The result involved embalming and/or mummification. This process involved removing the viscera (internal organs) and filling the empty torso with substances to preserve the corpse as near as possible to its state before death occurred. In addition to placing preservatives internally, the entire body was submerged in a solution of salt or natron (sodium carbonate) for some time. The whole process took from forty to seventy days. Embalming in our day consists of removing the arterial contents (blood) and replacing it with gallons of formaldehyde as a preservative, glycerol to counteract dehydration, and borax to keep the blood liquid before removal. [My information on mummification and embalming was taken from the Encyclopaedia Britannica.] Some understanding is necessary to realize how Jacob's body was transported from Goshen in Egypt all the way back to Hebron in Canaan at donkey speed. Such a move would

have been impractical without the excellent Egyptian expertise in the preparation of corpses. Joseph's body was also mummified later by the Egyptians, vs. 25-26; Exod. 13:19.

III. When the days of mourning Jacob's death was completed, Joseph notified the Pharaoh of his sworn promise to return Jacob's body to Canaan for interment. When Pharaoh learned of Joseph's oath to his father, Joseph told the monarch that he would return to Egypt when the burial was finished. Pharaoh agreed that Joseph should keep the oath made to Jacob. This burial procession must have been one of, if not the, longest and largest funeral procession in all of human history. Joseph left Egypt to return to the area of his birth for the first time after about three decades in Egypt. As he went, all the staff of Pharaoh from all over Egypt were with Joseph and his family. The only members of Jacob's family which were not in the entourage were the little children. The livestock herds of Jacob's family were not taken, i.e., Pharaoh sent the necessary foodstuff for the trip. "A very great company" of chariots and horsemen were included in the procession. The distance of the journey was approximately six hundred miles, one way, if I have calculated the route taken correctly. The Bible does not indicate precisely, but Verses 10-13 state that the great host went to Atad "beyond the Jordan." Therefore, they went south of the Dead Sea to the east side of the Jordan and across that river to Hebron. They buried mummified Jacob with Abraham, Sarah, Isaac, Rebekah, and Leah in the cave which Abraham had bought as a burial plot, Gen. 23:13-20; 49:29-32; vs. 13. After the burial Joseph and all the group returned to Egypt. Without Jacob Joseph's brothers feared that Joseph would finally take retribution against them for their earlier mistreatment in Joseph's youth. Joseph wept when they confronted him with that proposition, and said, "Fear not, I am not God. - - you thought evil against me, but God meant it for good, to bring to pass, as has happened, to save many people alive," vss. 18-20. Joseph took care of all of Jacob's family and lived to see his (Joseph's) own great-great-grandchildren, vs. 23. Joseph died at age one hundred ten, was embalmed, and put in a coffin in Egypt.

IV. The chief highlights of our study of the first book of God's Word, Genesis, include for me, the following: Almighty God is the Creator of mankind and all that mankind knows and knows about. Mankind was a creature and a part of God's creation whom God first created in his own image, i.e., with a potential to be quickened (made spiritually alive, at one with God) by God as his Holy Spirit, an eternal being in God's likeness. On the seventh day (the last segment of creation-time, God's rest day), God breathed into one of his male creatures (made in God's image earlier) a living (spiritual) being, Gen. 1:26-27; 2:7. From the male human God made for the man a soul (spiritual)-mate. In God's likeness (eternal) the man and woman were permitted by God to choose right (that which pleases God and maintains oneness with him, spiritual life), or, wrong (that which displeases God and separates one from God, makes one spiritually dead). Both made the latter choice, and God immediately promised a plan of redemption potential for that broken fellowship, Gen. 3:15; Matt. 1:18-25; John 3:5-21; 4:24-26; 5:22-24.

Sept. 27, 1998

"God Continues With Israel"
Exod. 1

Couples Class
Wendell Alford,
Teacher

I. Genesis began with the mysteries which surrounded the creation by God of the universe from nothing. A man and woman were made perfect by God, perfect (complete) but with the ability to defy God's instructions given for their best welfare. Adam's and Eve's sins, for this reason, Gal. 3:22, was incorporated into the being of every person thereafter born from their union, I Cor. 15:21-26, but God, through his forgiving grace, now provides eternal life with God if one trusts God's Son, Jesus Christ, Rom. 5:12-17. The above is an appropriate introduction to God's Word entitled Exodus, because that title means "the going (way) out." Literally and historically what is dealt with in Exodus is the going from Egypt to God's promised land by the nation of Israel. However, taking the entire Judeo-Christian Bible (Old and New Covenants) into account, the final "going out" is the final separation of one's spirit from the earthly, temporary dwelling place, the physical human body. The chief personages of Genesis include Adam, Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Joseph. Now we come to the period of God's dealing with his especially selected people, the Israelites (Hebrews, Jews). The prime person noted throughout Exodus is Moses who was born of priestly parents (of the tribe of Levi) in Chap. 2 and who witnessed the glory of the Lord in the last chapter of the book as God's glory filled the tabernacle, Exod. 40:34. I believe that Moses wrote the first five books of the Old Covenant (Exod. 17:14; 24:4-7; 34:27; Dan. 9:11,13; Mal. 4:4) which five books are referred to in the New Covenant as "the law of Moses," John 1:17,45; 5:46; 7:19,23; Heb. 10:28. Paul, inspired by God's Spirit, stated that "the law is our (believers in Jesus) tutor (teacher or schoolmaster) to bring us to Christ that we might be declared righteous by our faith in his Son," Rom. 10:4-11; Gal. 3:24. Moses lived for one hundred twenty years. His life involved three equal periods of time: forty years in Pharaoh's household, forty years in the Midian desert area, and forty years leading the Israelites in the wilderness (desert). One of the chief results of Moses' leadership of the young nation Israel was the Lord's giving to him the law which was to be followed by God's people for their physical and spiritual welfare. Moses' very life was the result of his family's faith in God and their willingness to defy the Pharaoh's order that all Hebrew male babies be murdered at birth, "full term abortion."

II. The Exodus account begins with the word "Now" in the King James Version which has also been translated as: "This is the list of sons of Jacob," or, "These are the names of the sons of Jacob." However, to indicate the tie of Exodus with Genesis, I believe that "Now" could better be translated as it is in the Hebrew, a conjunction, "And [again] here are the names of the children of Israel [Jacob]." Then Moses, the author, lists all twelve sons indicating that Joseph was already in Egypt before Jacob brought the others down. Long before the beginning of the Exodus story, Joseph died and his contribution to Egypt's welfare during the dire drought had long ago been forgotten. The children of Israel's faith in the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob continued on as is evident in Moses' choices in

his life, Heb. 11:24-27. "[Moses] endured as seeing him who is invisible." In this period each generation passed to its own children the value of faith in the God of Abraham and how critical that repeated oral revelation was to sustain the Israelites' knowledge of, loyalty to, and faith in God Almighty. And that period lasted for over four hundred years, Gen. 15:13; Exod. 12:40; Gal. 3:16-18. There were thirty years from the call of Abraham in Ur to the time when God covenanted with him at Gen. 15:6-18. In that covenant God told Abraham that his posterity would dwell as strangers in a land that would not be theirs and that they would be servants and slaves to the inhabitants of that land. We learn at vs. 7 of our chapter today that during these four hundred years as slaves, the Israelites would "be fruitful, increase abundantly, multiply and become very numerous so that the strange land (Egypt) would be filled with them."

III. We have observed several times in the later chapters of Genesis that when Joseph and his family first came to Egypt as a group (seventy persons in all), the Pharaoh was a Shepherd King of the Semitic peoples of Arabia. During this period the Hamitic Egyptians were, in a sense, hostages to these Shepherd Kings. In vs. 8 we are told that by Moses' time the Semitic leaders had been replaced by Hamitic Pharaohs who were antagonistic to the Hebrews who continued to multiply and cause the Egyptians trouble. The Bible states, "And there arose up a new king over Egypt, which knew not Joseph." In fact, the Pharaoh informed his people that, "Look what is happening, the people of Israel are more [populous] than we and more forceful than we," vs. 9. If we do not take appropriate measures, they will ally with our enemies and overpower us. The action they took was to place slave drivers over the Israelites to work them so hard that they would either die of exhaustion or leave Egypt. The work they were forced to do was to make building materials, primarily clay bricks, with which the king built two cities, Pithom and Ramses. But, the Pharaoh noted, the harder they worked, the more numerous they became! For the king this continued to be dreadful. To assist the Hebrew women in childbearing, Hebrew midwives were used, two of whom were Shiprah and Puah. The king gave these midwives strict instructions that as they delivered babies, while the pregnant women sat upon the birthing stools, every male baby was to be killed and the females were to remain alive. What the king had overlooked was that the midwives listened to their God, Jehovah, rather than the king. They practiced what we know today as "civil disobedience." The first believers in Jesus as the Savior (Messiah) practiced the same disobedience at Acts 4:19 when Peter and John asked the rulers, "Which is right, to do God's will or yours? Judge for yourselves." The Hebrew midwives refused to kill infant male children, deferring to what they knew was God's will. The king asked them why they refused to follow his command, and they replied that the Hebrews were not frail as the Egyptian women. The Israelite women delivered their own babies before the midwives came. God honored the midwives and made for them special homes. After all else failed, the Pharaoh commanded all families to throw all male babies into the River Nile and save only the females. Some of the reaction we shall see next Lord's Day.

Oct. 11, 1998

"The Deliverer Moses Is Born"
Exod. 2

Couples Class
Wendell Alford,
Teacher

I. Because of the time and situation in the life of Jacob's (Israel's) descendants in Egypt, the need was apparent for a strong leader to do God's will regarding Israel's welfare. That leader whom God brought into being was the son of a couple of the members of the tribe of Levi. God's choice for the birth of this leader came when Pharaoh of Egypt feared Jacob's posterity because of the danger they presented to his nation, in his opinion. The king had decreed that, in order to reduce the Hebrew people's increase, every family was to drown every male child born into a Hebrew family in the Nile River. Females would be spared in this plan of Hebrew population control. The parents of the coming leader of Israel were Amram and Jochebed although they did not name him because of the circumstances of his birth. Jochebed was Amram's father's sister, i.e., he was then marrying his aunt. We know that the couple had three children, two boys and one girl. The girl was older than one of the boys. One boy was named Aaron and the girl was named Miriam. The other son was born while the kill-all-male-newborns edict was in effect. When this the other son was born, his parents were especially impressed with his physical characteristics. His mother decided to hide him for his safety which she did for three months. After three months she felt that his crying would betray her secret. Amram's family evidently lived near the Pharaoh, because the Pharaoh's daughter took her baths in the river nearby. When the boy's cries made him conspicuous, his mother Jochebed fashioned a basket of reeds (bulrushes) which grew about twelve or fifteen feet high with stalks two or three inches in diameter alongside the river. Papyrus was a genus (scirpus) of these bulrushes which were used for making writing surfaces. Jochebed wove the basket closely and spread slime and pitch on its exterior so that it would float on the water at the river's edge among the reeds. She then stationed Miriam in hiding, within eyesight of the ark basket and placed her three-month old precious boy within the basket. One day Pharaoh's daughter came to the river for her bath. Her attendants were asked to examine the ark and bring it to the daughter. When she opened the ark, the baby boy cried and aroused her compassion toward him. The daughter recognized the boy as one of the Hebrew's babies. Miriam came near at this time and suggested, since Pharaoh's daughter could not nourish such a young infant, that she (Miriam) could find the young one a wet-nurse to serve. Pharaoh's daughter took her suggestion, and Miriam went and called the child's mother (and hers) Jochebed. The daughter of Pharaoh told her to nurse it for her, and she would pay her for her trouble! For some time the boy was cared for by his mother. We are not told at what age (Nursing usually lasted about three years.), but when the boy was able to eat for himself, Pharaoh's daughter adopted him as her own child and named him Moses. She chose this name, because, she said, "I drew him out of the water," vs. 10. (Moseh means "to draw forth.")

II. When Moses was born, the children of Israel had been in Egypt about three hundred and twenty years (400 - 80 = 320 years). He lived in Pharaoh's household for forty years, and at that age he

became outraged when he saw an Egyptian beating a Hebrew whom Moses identified with as one of his kin. He glanced in every direction, and seeing no one, he killed the abusive Egyptian and buried him in the sand. The very next day he saw a Hebrew fighting another Hebrew. Moses asked the aggressor why he would attack a fellow Hebrew. Evidently, the Hebrews held Moses in contempt as one of their own who was favored by Pharaoh. The two joined together in expressing their contempt by asking Moses, "Who made you a prince and judge over us? Do you intend to kill us as you did the Egyptian yesterday?" Moses at once realized that the Hebrew whom he had saved had made Moses' act of murder the previous day known. Pharaoh heard of Moses' act of murder and sought to kill him, but Moses, knowing that he could not defend himself against his grandfather (by adoption), fled all the way to Midian in the northwest section of the Sinaitic Peninsula along the east bank of the Red Sea. At the age of forty Moses chose to abandon the family who had nurtured him since childhood as an adopted member of the family. He had, no doubt, been afforded the best education in the world at that time at the Temple of the Sun university, where he studied astronomy, chemistry, architecture, philosophy, etc. We get an insight into Moses' upbringing at Acts 7:20-41 where Stephen said of Moses, "Pharaoh's daughter took him up, and nourished him as her own son. And Moses was learned in all the wisdom of the Egyptians, and was mighty in words and deeds." God had, by age forty, trained a person exceedingly above average for his magnanimous task of taking God's people to the land he had promised to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. The evidence is that one of Moses' chief abilities was his literary skill as indicated by his having written the Pentateuch, i.e., Genesis through Deuteronomy. Moses' counterpart in the early New Covenant period was Paul of Tarsus and Jerusalem. In both instances God needed well trained minds disciplined by a profound, unfettered faith in the one, true God, the Creator of all the universe.

III. When Moses arrived in Midian, he sat down by a well. As he sat there, the priest of Midian's seven daughters came to that well to fill the troughs for their father's flocks. The local shepherds drove them away from the well. Moses saw how maliciously the shepherds had treated the seven young women, and interceded in their behalf. They were therefore able to water their father's flock, with Moses' help, and return home earlier than usual. Their father, Reuel (Jethro), noted their promptness, "How is it that you come [home] so soon today?" They told him that an Egyptian had been at the well and assisted them. Moses had, of course, become as one of the Egyptians in appearance and bearing when reared in Pharaoh's household. Jethro chided his daughters for not having invited him to their home for food. Moses was then invited into his home by Jethro who, in time, gave the "Egyptian" the hand of his daughter Zipporah in marriage. Zipporah gave birth to Moses' son Gershom which means "sojourner," because Moses said that he was a temporary resident of Midian. Meanwhile, back in Egypt, another Pharaoh came to power who was even harsher with the Hebrews. God heard their groaning and acknowledged their need and his promise to Abraham. Next Lord's Day we shall see God's action as a result of the burden of his people and his compassion for them.

Oct. 25, 1998

"God Appears To Moses"
Exod. 3-4

Couples Class
Wendell Alford,
Teacher

I. As you read the Scripture which we will discuss through Exodus, please remember that we will consider two chapters each Lord's Day instead of one per Sunday as we did in Genesis. By reading the two chapters within the week preceding our discussion, the outline will be more interesting, I believe. In the New Covenant which our heavenly Father provides through his Son Jesus Christ, we believers are all priests of God, because God the Holy Spirit lives within each of us who are trusting Jesus as Savior and Lord. However, during the Old Covenant period, God appeared only to certain individuals. Examples of God's appearing to individuals are: To Adam and Eve, Gen. 3:8-10; to Noah, Gen. 6:9,13; to Abram (Abraham), Gen. 12:7; to Isaac, Gen. 26:2; to Jacob, Gen. 28:13. I cite these instances to illustrate the parallel which appears in Exod. 3:3-6, one of the chapters we are examining today. Now, in the name of Jesus Christ, we believers converse with the God and Creator of the entire universe. Our God is the true God, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and Moses, Matt. 22:32. God appeared to Moses first when he had taken his father-in-law (Jethro's) sheep for grazing. On this occasion Moses went much farther south into the lower area of the Sinaitic Peninsular than he had been going to graze Jethro's herds. He took the herd all the way to the Horeb Mountain Range in which is located Mount Sinai. It was there that in a bush the messenger of God appeared to the eighty-year-old Moses. The bush was, or appeared to be, afire, but the leaves and branches were not consumed, i.e., not burned to ash. This unnatural phenomenon caught Moses' attention. (Remember his Egyptian training in physics, etc.), and he turned aside to examine further the situation. The Lord noted Moses' interest and spoke to him from the bush saying, "Moses, Moses." Moses answered that he had heard his name called. The Lord cautioned, "Do not come too close, but take off your shoes, for this land is holy ground. Moreover, I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, the God of Jacob." Moses covered his face, being afraid to look upon God, John 1:18. (I believe that this "messenger" of God was the preincarnate Christ.) This awe of God's holiness by Moses gave him strength which he needed to do God's will. Moses had taken action back at Exod. 2:11 when he saw his own people mistreated and saw that they, the Hebrews, needed deliverance from the oppression of the Egyptians. His action was in his own strength, displayed by his killing of the Egyptian who physically hurt and humiliated a Hebrew. Now after forty more years of life, Moses is beginning to realize that the task of delivering the Hebrews was only what God could do. When God appeared to Moses and he saw the miracle of God, he saw the power which alone could save his people.. Examine Paul's experience at I Cor. 1:25-31; II Cor. 12:7-10.

II. God did not plan to save his people from Egypt entirely by miracles. No, his plan included Moses' participation, for God elected to commission Moses to be a part of his plan to bring his people, the Hebrews, back from Egypt to the land he had promised them.

The Lord said, "I have surely seen the affliction of my people who are in Egypt, - - I know their pain," Vs. 3:7. What surprised Moses was the Lord's next statement, "I am come down to deliver them, - - come now, therefore, and I will send you unto Pharaoh that you may bring my people, the children of Israel, out of Egypt," Vs. 3:8-10. Moses knew that God was right about the misery of the people of Israel, but he questioned whether God was fully aware of his (Moses') limited abilities. Moses had been away from Egypt for forty years, even his own people the Egyptians or Hebrews would not remember who he was or his intentions. (Note Paul's experience in Acts 9:26-28.) "Who am I?" Moses asked God. God promised him that he would be with him to lead Jacob's people back to the promised land, via this very mountain, Sinai. Moses then suggested that the Hebrews could have forgotten who God is, Vs. 3:13. God said to Moses, "I AM that I AM, therefore tell the children of Israel 'I AM has sent me to you.'" Vs. 3:14. Further, God told Moses that the One sending him is the Lord God of their forefathers, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, the One who is forever, the One to be remembered by all generations [of mankind], Vs. 3:15. Then God gave Moses a plan to approach the massive task. Gather the elders (leaders) together and explain God's assignment, but explain to them that the Pharaoh will object. First, Moses is to go with the elders to the Pharaoh and ask for a three-day-journey out into the desert to offer a sacrifice to their God, worship. Pharaoh will veto the request, but I will perform works among the Egyptians to change the king's mind. When you leave Egypt, you will carry a spoil [for your earnings as Egyptian slaves].

III. Moses responded negatively to God's proposal, because "they will refuse to believe that God has appeared to you," Vs. 4:1. God then demonstrated how he would convince Pharaoh and the Hebrews. He told Moses to take his shepherd's rod and throw it to the ground. He did. The rod became a snake from which Moses fled, but God told Moses to grasp it by the tail. As Moses followed God's command, the snake became a rod again. Then God told Moses to place his hand under his clothing on his chest and remove it. His hand came out white with leprosy. The Lord told him to repeat the procedure, and when he did, his hand came out whole (cured). God told Moses that if they did not believe such signs, he should take water from the river and throw it upon the bank where it would become blood. (Concerning God's use of signs see Matt. 12:38-40; John 10:36-39; 11:45-48; 12:37; Acts 2:11,22; 10:46-48; 19:1-7.) Moses' complained to God of his inability to speak well (stutterer?). Moses' reluctance provoked the Lord to say that he had created him. Further, the Lord promised Moses that he could speak to Aaron, his brother, who would speak for him. Also, "You will have your rod for miracles." When Moses returned to Jethro, he took his wife and son, Zipporah and Gershom, and left for Egypt. At their first stop the Lord appeared to Moses and reminded him of his need to be circumcised. Apparently, Moses circumcised himself, and Zipporah circumcised Gershom. The occasion upset Zipporah, but it pleased God, Exod. 18:2-12. Moses returned to Horeb, and the Lord sent Aaron to meet him there. They planned their return to Egypt. In Egypt, Aaron spoke for Moses and the latter performed miracles as needed. The Israelites believed and worshiped the Lord.

Nov. 1, 1998

~~Oct. 29, 1998~~

"Moses Rejected And God Speaks"
Exod. 5-6

Couples Class
Wendell Alford,
Teacher

I. Moses has accepted God's commission to return to Egypt from Midian and confront the Pharaoh with the proposition that, as the Lord's people, the king should permit the Israelites to leave Egypt and return to Canaan. At this time in Egypt's history the huge population of the Israelites, about two million, had become a large segment of Egypt's population who did most of the manual labor of the nation. Their herding days were long past, and their efforts were assigned by the Egyptians to be producers of building materials, household servants, etc. They were driven by Egyptian over-lords to, and beyond, their capacity to the point of daily stress. It was in this uncivil climate that Moses and Aaron made an appointment with Pharaoh to tell him, "The Lord of Israel says for you to let my people go into the wilderness (desert) and keep a pilgrim-feast to honor (worship) our God," Exod. 5:1. Pharaoh's response was, "Who is the Lord that I should give such leave to you Hebrews? I do not know your Lord and, therefore, I will not permit you three days to be away from your labor." Moses (probably through Aaron) told Pharaoh that if the Hebrews did not so recognize their Lord, he could visit them with pernicious, deadly physical conditions even to the killing of the Egyptians' firstborns. This request made Pharaoh very angry and vindictive and caused him to issue the following command to the slave-masters over the Hebrews: No longer are the Hebrews to be provided with straw for brick reinforcement for the bricks. They are to gather their own straw while maintaining the same daily quota of brick production. We will show the Hebrew slaves whether they have enough time to be practicing their religious fervor in idleness in the desert! Their religious leanings toward spending time away from their work is an appeal to vanity, an unnecessary waste of time, Exod. 5:7-9.

II. Pharaoh's command was passed down through the ranks. These taskmasters quoted the Pharaoh's new plan concerning the increase in expected work. The Hebrews were constantly badgered and the Hebrew leaders appealed directly to Pharaoh. The king reminded them that they had wanted to perform "unnecessary" religious rites out in the wilderness which indicated that they had spare time away from their assigned work. The Pharaoh refused to budge from his new stringent position. The Hebrew leaders went immediately to their religious leaders, Moses and Aaron, and complained that, "Your request for religious leave has made us to stink in Pharaoh's eyes." From this encounter (Note the chain of command.), Moses "returned to the Lord," and prayed, "Lord, why have you, (He was, after all, following the Lord's command, Exod. 4:22-23; 5:1.), brought so much trouble upon your people? Why did you choose me for such a forbidding task? Since I came to Pharaoh to speak in your name, he has treated your people wickedly, and he has made no effort at all to relieve your people," Exod. 5:22-23.

III. The Lord's answer to Moses' prayer: "You shall see what I will do to Pharaoh, and when I am through, the king will willingly decide to let my people go, even to driving them out," Exod. 6:1.

Further, God told Moses, "I am the Lord [YHWH], and I appeared to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob by the name of God Almighty [EL SHADDAI] (Gen. 17:1), not by my name Jehovah [YHWH], Lord, was I known to them." I believe that the distinction or difference the Lord God is making to Moses here in the two names is the time element involved. God is telling Moses here that he was God to people before the covenant he made with Abraham and his son and grandson, Isaac and Jacob. However, in fulfilling that Abrahamic covenant, a long period of time would take place before the covenant would be consummated. Taking the Hebrews to Canaan would be fulfilled many millennia hence as well as a nearer time during Solomon's era. The "bottom line" on God's communication to Moses at Exod. 6:2-4 is that God's relationship with Abraham's descendants, the Hebrews, is now with an earthly nation whereas he had been relating to heads of households before this time. God was also relating himself to be the self-existent One, as a Being who is depending upon no one or upon nothing, apart from Himself. God is completely self-sufficient. (Remember the I AM designation at Exod. 3:14.) He is wholly, one-of-a-kind, completely independent, within Himself, but everyone and everything else depends wholly, exclusively upon the only one true God and Creator of all creation. In this absolutely sovereign position, God chose to dwell in his Son, Jesus his Christ (Savior), and subjugate himself to the pinnacle of his creation, humanity, II Cor. 5:17-21; Col. 1:17. God told Moses at Exod. 6:4 that he (God) had established (made or ratified) his (God's) covenant with Israel, as a nation, the land of Canaan permanently, a land which had been and would be for some time a temporary dwelling place. I believe that the Hebrews have still not received that promise on a permanent basis but will when Jesus returns to earth, Acts 1:6-7; Rom. 11:25-32; Heb. 11:39-40.

IV. God continued his answer to Moses' prayer by confirming God's knowledge of the agony of the Hebrew people under Egyptian slavery and his covenant with Jacob's posterity. Further, God will bring his people away from Egypt. While this is being done, and thereafter, God will bring his people to the land which he swore to the Hebrews' forefathers, Exod. 6:6-8. When Moses related God's promise to his people, they disregarded the promise because of their bitter role as slaves. Moses, again, prayed to God who told him to go again to Pharaoh and reiterate the request to leave. Also, God told Moses and Aaron to go personally to the Hebrew leaders and assure them that God, indeed, was about to become personally involved in releasing his new nation from Egyptian slavery. At this place in God's Word, Exod. 6:14-25, many Hebrew leaders are given by name, the ones who are to approach Pharaoh personally and again request to leave Egypt. This personal plea by these Hebrew leaders is the prelude to God's harsh treatment of the Egyptians because of the order of the Pharaoh to retain the Hebrews. The king's position was only hardened in the interchange with God's request, Exod. 9:12, 16; Rom. 9:13-24. God again instructed his servant Moses to appeal again to Pharaoh for God's people, but Moses complained to God about his lack of speaking ability. The plot thickens as we shall see next Lord's Day. Lest we should become impatient with God's long-suffering, our side wins eventually!

Nov. 8, 1998

"God's Plagues Begin"
Exod. 7-8

Couples Class
Wendell Alford,
Teacher

I. At the end of Chap. 6 Moses had continued to complain to God that his speech was not forceful enough to persuade Pharaoh that the Lord was determined that the Hebrews should be permitted to leave Egypt after their four-hundred-year sojourn. The Lord's response to this complaint of Moses was indeed unusual, "See I have made thee a god to Pharaoh, and your brother Aaron shall be a prophet," Exod. 7:1. This elaboration of God's commission of Moses to Pharaoh meant that Moses was to represent the Lord, and Aaron was to speak for God as directed by Moses. Moses was to represent God before the Hebrews and Pharaoh. Aaron, as the prophet, was simply to be the spokesman to relate God's message. We as believers in God's message of forgiveness through the Lord Jesus Christ are prophets or evangelists as we witness to those who have not heard the Gospel, the Good News of the Lord. At Exod. 7:2-3 God repeats the links of his message bearing, i.e., God will instruct Moses, Aaron will tell the Pharaoh, and God will harden the heart (will) of the king. God's part in hardening Pharaoh's heart is often misunderstood. God's part in the process was to make Pharaoh's introspective will known publicly, not to force him to change his will. God has never, from Adam and Eve in Eden, forced anyone to do his will. We humans have never been God's puppets, because God did not want the relationship to be so. God can create conditions which encourage individuals to make a right decision (God's will), but God never forces his will on any human's will. Finally, every person is in control of his or her own spiritual condition. God's invitation to all today is, "whosoever [wills to] believe in him [Jesus the Christ, Savior] will not perish [be condemned spiritually], but will have eternal life [be at one with God, spiritually alive or quickened]," John 3:16; Rev. 22:17. Even Jesus as a human (God in human flesh) did not do his own will but God his Father's, Matt. 26:39,42,44; John 10:27-30. God's will was that Jesus be sacrificed for anyone who will trust his Son's righteousness for eternal life, Isa. 53:10-11; II Cor. 5:17-21.

II. At this time God revealed to Moses that Pharaoh will be encouraged by God's action to show his hand publicly. The king refuses to accept Moses' God rather than the Egyptians' many gods. Pharaoh will learn Moses' God is superior to the false gods of Egypt by God's actions in Egypt. Moses is now eighty years of age and Aaron is eighty-three. They both followed God's instructions when he told them to demonstrate God's miraculous power when Pharaoh asked them. They visited Pharaoh and threw down Moses' staff which became a snake. At once Pharaoh called his "wise men," magicians (sorcerers), and asked them to analyze Moses' miracle. Their answer was to perform the same feat through their sleight-of-hand tricks. Just as the Lord had predicted, Pharaoh's heart remained hardened against Moses' request. He refused to discuss the matter further when his own magicians were able to duplicate the miracle. This phenomenon has been explained by some scientists as the release of microcosms known as flagellates and associated bacteria from the red soil up river during an unusual flood-year of the Nile.

Pharaoh's magicians' ability to repeat the act would be explained by a recurrence of the flood level of the Nile. Even if this were true, the timing of the two events would have been entirely at the discretion of God. Why would the second flood have been performed by God? Remember the hardening of Pharaoh's heart (will, revealing Pharaoh's real position in not wanting the Hebrews to leave Egypt) was yet God's purpose. The Egyptians had to dig wells away from the river's flow for potable water for seven days, Exod. 7:24-25.

III. After the plague of a bloody river and the lack of drinking water, the Pharaoh continued to refuse the request of Moses. The Lord told Moses to warn Pharaoh that further refusal would cause the Lord to fill the land of Egypt with frogs. And the frogs will be so numerous that living quarters of all Egyptians will be uninhabitable. The frogs will infiltrate even the bedcovers in all homes including the servants. The frogs will fill the cooking ovens and wiggle in dough being kneaded for cooking. Having forewarned Pharaoh, the Lord told Moses and Aaron to stretch forth their hands and the sanctified staff over the streams, tributaries, and ponds. As they did so, the frogs appeared and aggravated every Egyptian household. Oddly, again the Egyptian magicians were able to create the same existence of frogs, but Pharaoh believed that Moses' and Aaron's God was responsible for the plague of frogs. The king begged Moses to pray to his God (beg him) to take away the frogs, and, if the Lord would do so, Pharaoh would let the Hebrews go. The king would promise anything to get rid of the frogs! Interestingly, the magicians could produce excess frogs, but they would not kill or otherwise dispose of them. At this point it is well, I believe, that we be reminded that each of the plagues involved Egyptian gods. The Nile was sacred to the Egyptians, because it produced water and plant nutrients (silt) which sustained human life. The god constructed and worshiped by the Egyptians representing the Nile was called Osiris. A beautiful temple built by the Egyptians at Memphis was dedicated to the god Heka, an ugly frog-headed goddess. The frogs appeared in the Nile predominately in the spring when the planting time occurred. Thus Heka was the god associated with reproduction. Frogs were therefore sacred and could not be killed by the Egyptians. However, Moses and the Hebrews held no such religious falsity. When Moses prayed to the Lord, all of the frogs died, were heaped away from homes, and gave respite to the people. The frogs were dead, and Pharaoh refused to let Moses go. The third plague involved lice which infiltrated the soil, and the soil represented the Egyptian god Geb. The magicians could not duplicate this plague even though they tried. These sorcerers informed Pharaoh that, because they could not do the same feat, it must be an act of Moses' God, not one of theirs. Even so, Pharaoh refused Moses' request. The fourth plague brought swarms of flies across the entire nation. These "flies" were perhaps "flying beetles" or scarabs (dung beetles) which the Egyptians associated with their sun-god Ra. The Lord, through Moses, told Pharaoh that he would exempt the Hebrews' area, Goshen, to prove his position. The Lord did so, but later, when the flies were depleted, Pharaoh hardened his heart and would not let the Hebrews go to serve him as a nation. The king still would not do God's will!

Nov. 15, 1998

"God's Plagues Continue"
Exod. 9-10

Couples Class
Wendell Alford,
Teacher

I. We should remember that the ten plagues which the Lord visited upon Egypt were to demonstrate the real God of the universe over the false gods of the Egyptians, Exod. 9:13-16; Rom. 9:16-24. Through Chap. 8, four plagues had appeared involving the blood in the River Nile, a preponderance of frogs, lice in the soil, and flies (dung beetles). All four plagues were loathsome to the Egyptians even though each represented one of the gods revered and worshiped. But Egypt had many gods, for their religion was polytheistic so the plagues continued. The next plague brought a terrible disease (murrain) upon the cattle, horses, donkeys, camels, oxen and sheep. This disease was especially bothersome, because it adversely affected food, clothing and transportation for the Egyptians. To distinguish between the division between Himself as the true God of the Hebrews and Egyptian gods, God made a difference in the animals of the Hebrews and the animals of the Egyptians. The Egyptians' animals were diseased, but the Hebrews' were not. Further, to emphasize the difference, God appointed a specific time when the problem would arise, tomorrow! Just as the Lord had promised, the Egyptians' animals died, and the Hebrews' did not. Pharaoh even sent representatives to Goshen to double check on God's promise, but he still would not let God's people go. He learned that God keeps his promises. God's Word promises that anyone who trusts Jesus as God's Messiah (Savior) will live eternally, spiritually (John 11:25-26), and he will keep that promise forever!

II. The sixth plague should remind us of what happened to the prophet Job at Job 2:1-11. God permitted Satan to strike his servant Job with boils "from the bottom of his feet to the crown of his head." These sores itched and aggravated Job so menacingly that he took pieces of broken clay jugs and scraped the sores for comfort. His wife assured him that if he would become disloyal to God, he would find comfort from death. Job told her that God permits men, even those who believe in him, to receive both good and evil during mortal life. Eliphaz, Job's "friend," in trying to convince Job that he (Job) was not a true believer in God, said, "What is man that he should be clean, and he [anyone] which is born of a woman should be righteous?," Job 15:14-16. Job told Eliphaz that he and the others were miserable comforters, all of them, Job 16:1. Job longed for, "One that might plead for a man with God, as a man pleadeth for his neighbor!" (Job 16:20-21). Job's conclusion was, due to his belief in God, "And though after my [life] worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh [a new body] shall I see God," because, "I know that my redeemer liveth, and that he shall stand at a latter day upon the earth," Job 19:25-26. What God revealed to Job made Job a much wiser man than his critics: his wife, Bildad, Zophar, and Eliphaz. Jesus, God's Redeemer, did come to salvage spiritually anyone who will trust him, II Cor. 4:8-15. The Lord told his servants Moses and Aaron to take handfuls of furnace ashes and, in Pharaoh's presence, sprinkle them upward toward heaven. They did as the Lord commanded, and it happened then that the dusty

ash went all over Egypt causing sores to come upon every person and beast. Even the magicians (priests, holy men) were smitten with open boils so that religious rites were halted. But the refrain continued, "and the Lord hardened Pharaoh's heart" as the Lord had forewarned Moses.

III. At the beginning of the seventh plague, as noted above, the Lord confided in Moses why he was bringing these awful plagues upon Pharaoh and Egypt, "that my name may be declared throughout all the earth," Exod. 9:16. All gods are false except the God of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and Moses! This plague was large hail falling over the entire nation of Egypt. The hail was accompanied by fire (lightening?), Exod. 9:24, and was unlike any phenomenon ever seen in Egypt. The devastation was so thorough that Pharaoh sent for Moses and Aaron to tell them that he recognized that he had sinned. Your Lord is righteous and my people and I are wicked, Exod. 9:27. Perhaps the evidence was building in Pharaoh's mind to bring about this conclusion because, again, in the land of Goshen where the Hebrews lived, the hail and fire were not experienced. Moses honored Pharaoh's request to ask the Lord to cause the hail and lightening to cease. But when the destruction ceased in answer to Moses' prayer, Pharaoh remained steadfast in his position not to let God's people leave Egypt. Moses really did not expect a change of Pharaoh's heart, because the Lord had said as much before. Again, for the eighth time, the Lord told Moses to approach Pharaoh and warn him of a pestilence. The Hebrews' God would now bring locusts upon the nation to ravish all plant life. "How long will you refuse to humble yourself before me? Let my people go that they might serve me," the Lord said to Pharaoh through Moses and Aaron, Exod. 10:3. The locusts will cover the earth so that you will be unable to see the ground, and the pests will literally fill every house. With this warning Pharaoh's servants begged the king to let the Hebrews leave and serve their God. "How long will you let this man [Moses] be a snare to us," Exod. 10:7. Pharaoh sent for Moses and Aaron and told them that they could go and serve their Lord, but asked them about who among them would be expected to leave. Moses answered that everyone with all their herds would be going. Pharaoh said that only the men would be permitted to go. When Moses refused to leave without the women, children, and herds also, Pharaoh drove them from his presence. The Lord then told Moses to stretch forth the sanctified rod over Egypt. The Lord brought a strong east wind which blew for twenty-four hours. On the second day the locusts came and ate all the vegetation which the hail and fire had left. Pharaoh begged for mercy and God blew away the locusts with a strong west wind. As before, Pharaoh refused the Lord's proposal. With Pharaoh's stubbornness, the ninth plague was sent by God, a thick darkness for three days. Pharaoh then agreed that all of the Hebrews could leave, including the women and children, but they must leave their herds. Moses told Pharaoh that the animals would be a necessary part of their sacrifice to their God, and therefore everything must leave. The king became furious and drove them out, telling them that if he saw them again, he would kill them. Moses agreed and left. Only the tenth plague remains, and we shall see what happens next Lord's Day.

Nov. 22, 1998

"Death: The Last Plague"
Exod. 11-12

Couples Class
Wendell Alford,
Teacher

I. God's Word states at Rom. 6:23 that, "For the wages of sin (that which separates one from God) is death (the spiritual state of being separated from God), but the gift of God is eternal life (being at one with God [united with]) in Jesus Christ, our Lord." God through nine calamities (plagues) had pleaded with Pharaoh to permit his people, the Hebrews, to leave Egypt and become a nation unto themselves in Canaan, but Pharaoh remained stubborn (with a hardened heart, sinful) and refused God's request through Moses and Aaron. Over and over Moses had been directed by God to go to Pharaoh and appeal to him on behalf of the Hebrews. Just after the ninth plague (darkness) Moses went to Pharaoh, and in his continuing begging for God's will to be done, Pharaoh threatened to kill Moses and Aaron if they came to the king again, Exod. 10:28-29. Because of this threat we note, as Chapter Eleven begins, the Lord speaks with Moses, but Pharaoh is not spoken to before the tenth plague. The Lord said to Moses, "Yet will I bring one plague more upon Pharaoh and upon Egypt. Every household will have its firstborn killed as well as the firstborn of every beast," Exod. 11:5-6. Afterwards he will let you go away. At this time (after the tenth plague), Pharaoh will not only let you go, "he shall surely thrust you out of his country, gladly," Exod. 11:1. In preparation to leave Egypt, the Lord gives what to us believers in Jesus Christ is a rather strange instruction. The Hebrews are to borrow (ask for) from their Egyptian neighbors things of value which can be transported readily, e.g., silver and gold jewelry. Why would the Egyptians be willing to give their valuables to people who were leaving and who would surely not be able to return the gifts? There were two reasons, I believe: First, Moses had an excellent reputation among the Egyptians (Exod. 11:3), i.e., he was well respected. Second, the Egyptians were well aware of the what and why of the terrible plagues (nine) which had befallen them. In other words, they welcomed an end to the catastrophes which they believed would cease only when the Hebrews were allowed to go and serve their God, Exod. 10:7. The Egyptians had endured a bloody Nile, frogs in their bread and beds, lice all over the land, flies (dung beetles) everywhere, disease which decimated livestock, open sore boils on all people and beasts, hail which destroyed most plant life, locusts to finish all plant life which the hail did not destroy, and finally, three days of darkness so eerie that one could feel it. Why was Pharaoh so insistent that the Hebrews remain in Egypt? First, these approximately two million Hebrews were performing the physical and menial tasks for the Egyptians as virtual slaves. They were building whole cities which would later portray the Pharaoh as a strong king who had accomplished great things for Egypt and the Egyptians, for so had the pyramids. Second, Pharaoh was against the Hebrews' leaving, because God planned to use Pharaoh's reluctance, while serving his false gods, to demonstrate that he (God) is the true Creator, the only God, I AM, Exod. 3:14; 9:16; 11:9-10; 12:12; Rom. 9:17.

II. The tenth and last plague which the Lord God brought upon Egypt is extremely important, both to the Hebrews as well as to us who

trust in the Lord Jesus Christ as God's Messiah (Savior), for the Jews from that time to the present celebrate what God did for the Hebrews in relieving them from Egyptian slavery to become a distinctive nation in the earth. It is important for us believers, because we believe, as did John the Immerser, that "Jesus was fathered by God's [as] Holy Spirit," Matt. 1:20; Lk 1:34-37, but also, "Jesus is God's [Passover Lamb] who takes away the sin of the world [from everyone who will trust him]," John 1:29,34; I Cor. 5:7-8. This tenth plague is announced in Exod. 11, and instructions for the Passover (Exod. 12:1-20), participation in the Passover (Exod. 12:21-28), the redemption made possible by the Passover (Exod. 12:29-36), and freedom afforded to believers and participants in the Passover (Exod. 12:37-51), are given in Exod. 12.

III. The Lord told Moses that the time of the tenth plague will start the Hebrew year thereafter. On the tenth of that first month, the entire nation of Israel will, in each household, take a lamb in its first year and without blemish (healthy) and prepare it until the fourteenth day of the same month (for four days). On that fourteenth day in the evening every family will kill the lamb especially chosen for that family, save the blood from the sacrificed lamb, and take the blood therefrom and strike (place) it on the two side posts and the top door beam of every Hebrew house. The lamb's flesh is to be eaten by the family that night. Any portion not eaten is to be burned completely. The lamb is to be roasted, but not boiled in water, and eaten with unleavened bread and bitter herbs. The family of Israel (Jacob, seventy persons) had come to Egypt about four hundred years before, but now about two million Hebrews were leaving as a nation. Very noteworthy is the fact that the new nation will begin by celebrating the Feast of the Passover as families in concert with all other Hebrew families. The nation did not make the families, but the families made the nation. The families are to become the building blocks which constitute the nation just as individual believers in Jesus are to be the building blocks of the Ecclesia, I Pet. 2:4-10. When the Hebrews were freed from Egypt, their innocent children were delivered with the families from bondage. This movement from physical bondage can logically be likened to the taking up from the earth of the Ecclesia when Jesus comes again for us believers, Matt. 24:27-31; I Cor. 15:42,50-52,58; I Thes. 4:13-18. I believe that when Jesus comes for us, all believers, the infants and all youngsters who have not reached the age of accountability (those too young to realize their need for a Savior) will be taken as redeemed by the blood of Christ along with each person who has received Jesus as his or her Lord and Savior. The same will be true for all believers and innocents who have died physically before Jesus comes for us. They too will Jesus bring with him and who will have been with Jesus since their mortal demise. The entire family of faith, the whole Ecclesia, will be made up of individual family members, not a "glob" or a large mass without individual distinctives. I believe that we will know each other in heaven. We have not the ability in this life even to conceive of the glory and rapturous conditions which await us who are trusting our Creator through Jesus our Lord and Savior, I Cor. 13:12; Philip. 3:10-21. Faith in Jesus is our Passover for sins.

Nov. 29, 1998

"Moses' God Triumphs"
Exod. 13-14

Couples Class
Wendell Alford,
Teacher

I. At Exod. 12:1-3 (last Lord's Day) we learned that when God instituted the Passover Feast for the nation of Israel, he told Moses and Aaron to make that month the beginning of the nation's year. Very probably the Egyptians followed a solar month with the year made up of twelve thirty-day months plus five additional days, i.e., three hundred sixty-five days. The Hebrew calendar, however, became a year of twelve lunar months probably because the moon cycle of size-changes gave a definite method of determining a regular variable for honoring certain events. For sure the Lord wanted his new nation to note and remember in perpetuity God's action for the new nation's creation and care. Israel's deliverance from Egypt by the Lord was an outstanding feat which God wanted Israel's (Jacob's) posterity never to forget. The ten plagues were brought about by God to signify the Lord of the Hebrews as the true God of the universe, confounding the falsity of the thousands of false gods (idols) of the Egyptians. Because of the above, I have with today's outline given two tables relating to some of the false gods of the Egyptians and the calendar of the Hebrews based upon God's directive to Moses and Aaron regarding having the year begin with the month Abib, Exod. 13:4. As you observe the pre-exilic name of the months, you will note that many months have no names given. However, these months were designated by numbers only, elsewhere in the Old Covenant: third, Exod. 19:1; fourth, II Kings 25:3; fifth, Numb. 33:38; sixth, I Chron. 27:9; ninth, Ezr. 10:9; tenth, Gen. 8:5; eleventh, Deut. 1:3; and twelfth, Est. 3:7. Note at the last month cited in Est. 3:7, that post-exilic names of months are also given for Abib (Nisan) and for the twelfth month, Adar. For the most part in the New Covenant, calendar references are to the current Jewish calendar. It is important to remember that all Hebrew calendars, in every case, uses Abib as the base month, month one, Exod. 12:13; 13:4, the month when God's superiority over pagan (false) gods had been thoroughly demonstrated once and for all in the earth, for all humanity to know forever thereafter, Exod. 20:1-7; Deut. 6:5; 10:12; 30:6; Jer. 25:6; Matt. 22:34-40.

II. God's Word, in connection with the Passover Feast, lays down a provision which makes clear what is to happen eight days following our Lord Jesus' birth, God's Messiah (Savior), Lk 2:21-24. The Lord told Moses, "Set apart (sanctify) for me all the firstborn, whosoever opens the womb among the children of Israel, both of man and of beast: such a son is mine," Exod. 13:2. Further, every Israeli is to remember what the Lord did for their nation in bringing them from slavery beginning in the month of Abib. To indicate that they have not forgotten, their bread is to be prepared without leaven (yeast) for seven days. On the seventh day of unleavened bread the Hebrews are to proclaim it a holy Feast Day. This is to be an annual observation in the month of Abib. Even after the Lord has brought the nation of Israel into the land of the Canaanites and their neighbors, the Passover Feast is to be practiced annually. To their children who are born through all the years which follow are to be told with proper solemnity the meaning of the

special diet of unleavened bread which is eaten for seven days. Every year at Passover time tell your children, "This is done because of what the Lord did for me to free me from Egypt," Exod. 13:8. Observance of the Passover is to be a perpetual regulation for my people, the Hebrews. Every male which is born a Hebrew is to be redeemed by the shedding of a lamb's blood. The same redemption rite is to be performed with a lamb for the firstborn of all beasts. When a lamb is not available for a beast's firstborn, that firstborn's neck is to be broken, Exod. 13:13. Tokens of remembrance are to be placed upon the hands and between the eyes of the Hebrews to indicate that they were freed from Egypt by God's strong hand. The chief point to be remembered about Passover is that the Hebrews' freedom from slavery in Egypt would not have happened without the Lord's instruction and action. Their becoming a nation in the earth was due solely to God's choice and power.

III. With the above groundwork laid the time has come for the exodus of God's people from Egypt. No map was needed, because "God led them." God had a method and route for the Hebrew nation to follow, for the Lord knew the weakness of humanity and the inadequacy of the young nation to defend itself militarily at this time. They could have gone directly from Goshen to Canaan, but God led them across the Red Sea out into the barren desert. They were so led because, "Lest perhaps the people change their minds (repent) when the Philistines opposed them, and return to Egypt," Exod. 13:17. At Gen. 50:24-26 Joseph, when dying, took a sworn oath from the Israelites that they would take his body with them when they would be leaving Egypt for Canaan. (His prophecy is now being fulfilled!) Moses kept the oath and took Joseph's body with them when they left. After the Hebrew people had left Egypt, Pharaoh believed that as soon as they were struggling through the desert, he would be able to overtake them and implement his change of mind not to let the Hebrews leave Egypt after all, Exod. 14:13. When Pharaoh learned that God's people were actually leaving Goshen and leaving all their work for the Egyptians to do, they complained, "Why have we done this, letting the Hebrews go from serving us?" (Exod. 14:5) Before Israel reached the Red Sea, Pharaoh went toward them with his entire military force. Israel was encamped on the west side of the sea when they saw Pharaoh's troops coming. When the Hebrews saw their predicament, the sea on the east and Egyptian troops on the west, they became filled with dread and fear. They cried unto the Lord and accused Moses of taking them to the desert for burial. They reminded Moses that they were better off back in Egypt as slaves, rather than die in the barren desert! Moses told them to settle down and observe the Lord's deliverance from their danger. God's messenger had led his people with a cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night. The Egyptians pressed hard upon them, but God's cloud moved between the two groups while Moses, at the order of God, stretched his hand over the sea which divided to permit the host of Israel to cross through the sea on dry ground with the water walled up on their right and left. The Egyptians followed, but when the Hebrews were on the east bank, God closed the sea which completely covered Pharaoh and his army. Israel witnessed God's miracle, feared and believed their Lord, and Moses, his servant.

Pagan Gods of Egypt

Name	Responsibility	Form or Sacred Animal
Aker	Earth-god • Helper of the dead	Two lion heads
Amon	Wind-god • God of Thebes • Helper of the pious	Human (ram and goose sacred)
Anubis	Glorifier of the dead	Jackal-headed, black-skinned
Apis	Ensures fertility	Bull
Aton	Sun-god	
Atum	Primordial creature-god	Serpent-human
Bes	Protection at birth • Dispenser of virility	Group of demons
Edjo	Goddess of Delta/Lower Egypt	Uraeus serpent
Geb	Earth-god • Consort of Nut • Begetter of Osiris	Human
Hathor	Sky-goddess • Goddess of love, dance, alcohol	Cow
Heket	Primordial goddess	Frog
Horus	Sky-god	Falcon
Isis	Goddess of life, healing • Daughter of Geb Consort/sister of Osiris • Mother of Horus	Human
Khepri	Primordial god • Rising sun	Scarabaeus
Khnum	Giver of the Nile • Creator of mankind	Human with ram's head
Khons	Moon-god	Human
Maat	Justice • Daughter of Ra	Human
Meskenet	Goddess protector of newborns and of destiny	
Min	God of virility and reproduction	
Mut	"Eye of the sun," consort of Amon	Vulture or human
Nekhbet	Goddess of Upper Egypt	
Nut	Sky-goddess • Consort of Geb Mother of Osiris and Seth • Mother of heavenly bodies	
Osiris	Dead pharaohs • Ruler of dead, life, vegetation	
Ptah	Creator-god • Lord of artisans	
Ra	God of sun, earth and sky • Father of Maat • National god	Human with falcon head
Sekhmet	Goddess of war and sickness	Human with lion head
Selket	Guardian of life • Protector of dead	Scorpion
Seshat	Goddess of writing and books	
Seth	God of chaos, desert and storm, crops • Brother of Osiris	
Shu	God of air, bearer of heaven	
Sobek	Creator-god	Crocodile
Sothis	God of Nile floodwaters	
Thermuthis	Goddess of fertility and harvest; fate	Serpent
Toth	God of wisdom, moon, chronology • Messenger of gods	Ibis or baboon
Thoueris	Goddess of fertility and women in labor	Hippopotamus

	Month	Pre-exilic name	Post-exilic name	Modern equivalent	Season	Festivals
Dry	1	ABIB Ex. 13:4; 23:15; 34:18; Dt. 16:1	NISAN Est. 3:7 Ne. 2:1	Mar.–Apr.	Spring Latter rains Barley harvest Flax harvest	14 Passover (Ex. 12:18; Lv. 23:5) 15–21 Unleavened Bread (Lv. 23:6) 16 Firstfruits (Lv. 23:10f.)
	2	ZIV 1 Ki. 6:1, 37	IYYAR	Apr.–May	Dry season begins	14 Later Passover (Nu. 9:10–11)
	3		SIVAN Est. 8:9	May–June	Early figs ripen	6 Pentecost (Lv. 23:15ff.) Feast of Weeks Harvest
	4		TAMMUZ	June–July	Grape harvest	
	5		AB	July–Aug.	Olive harvest	
	6		ELUL Ne. 6:15	Aug.–Sept.	Dates and summer figs	
Rain	7	ETHANIM 1 Ki. 8:2	TISHRI	Sept.–Oct.	Early rains	1 Trumpets (Nu. 29:1; Lv. 23:24) 10 Day of Atonement (Lv. 16:29ff.; 23:27ff.) 15–21 Tabernacles (Lv. 23:34 ff.) 22 Solemn assembly (Lv. 23:36)
	8	BUL 1 Ki. 6:38	MARCHESVAN	Oct.–Nov.	Ploughing Winter figs	
	9		CHISLEV Ne. 1:1	Nov.–Dec.	Sowing	25 Dedication (1 Macc. 4:52f.; Jn. 10:22)
	10		TEBETH Est. 2:16	Dec.–Jan.	Rains (snow on high ground)	
Cold	11		SHEBAT Zc. 1:7	Jan.–Feb.	Almond blossom	
Rain	12		ADAR Est. 3:7	Feb.–Mar.	Citrus fruit harvest	

The Hebrew calendar, showing seasons and festivals with modern equivalents.

Dec. 6, 1998

"Israel Sings And Complains"
Exod. 15-16

Couples Class
Wendell Alford,
Teacher

I. From the last two verses of Exod. 14 we learned that after God delivered his people, the Israelites, by blood (the Passover) out of Egypt, he exercised his power again by safely taking them through the Red Sea. In both instances God exercised miraculous power. This exercise of power reminds me of what our Lord told the early believers in his messiahship at Acts 1:8, "But you (disciples) shall receive power, after the Holy Spirit is come upon you, and you shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth." These words were the Lord's last before he was taken up into heaven. Jesus' messengers told the disciples, as they witnessed the Lord's ascension, that he would return in a like fashion. Jesus stated that after all nations of the earth have heard the Good News, "then shall the end come," Matt. 24:14. We who are enthusiastically awaiting the Lord's return should work diligently to spread the Gospel of God's good news! (I Cor. 15:58) The Hebrews under God's miraculous power were so happy about God's deliverance from Egyptian bondage that they sang a song of exuberance, "I will sing unto the Lord, for he has triumphed gloriously: the horse and his rider [the Egyptians] has he thrown into the sea [Red]. The Lord is my strength and song, and he is become my salvation: he is my God and I will praise him [with my living], my fathers' [Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob] God, and I will exalt him - - Thy right hand, O Lord, has become glorious in power: your right hand, O Lord, has dashed in pieces the enemy," Exod. 15:1-6. Why were the people of Israel so marvelously elated? I believe we can better understand their happiness when we relate their immediate past experience with ours. A key to that understanding is found at I Cor. 10:1-4, "Moreover, brothers [believers in Jesus Christ], I would not have you without understanding how our fathers were under the cloud, and all passed through the sea [Red] and were all immersed [baptized] with Moses in the cloud and in the sea." We should see clearly how Paul (God's Word) relates the Israelites as having been uniquely immersed "in" the Red Sea, although they came through the sea completely dry! Immersion (baptism) is a symbol or sign of establishing a relationship, in this case, through their faith in God's power to deliver them from impending danger. How do we know that they were exercising faith in God in their willingness to walk through the Red Sea? Because we are told at Heb. 11:29, "By faith they [the Israelites] passed through the Red Sea as by dry land; which the Egyptians attempted [and] were drowned." Immersion of a believer in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit does not save a person (make him or her spiritually redeemed by God), but rather is a symbol of what has already happened when a person trusts God's Messiah (Savior), Jesus Christ, for eternal life and the direction and power of his Holy Spirit, to escape, not the Egyptians, but rather the danger of eternal separation from God (spiritual death). Immersion was chosen by our Lord Jesus as the proper method to identify with or relate to himself, personally and spiritually, Matt. 3:13-17; 28:18-20, "Be immersed [baptized], and I will be [identified with or related to] you throughout the current age."

Today, being right with God depends upon establishing, through individual faith, a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. This relationship begins when one first yields to God's Holy Spirit (being born again, spiritually) from above, John 3:5-7; I Cor. 12:13-14). The Holy Spirit is the one who connects or joins us to Christ, causing us as individuals to become one with him. This relationship is the very best thing that can happen to a person in his or her lifetime.

II. The song of Moses, sung by Moses and the Israelites, raises questions in the minds of some Bible students about God's involvement in using the force of battle. Recently I stated that God does not trespass an individual human's will, ever. God's Word states that God is love, I John 4:14-19. Note that love will be completed when we, who are trusting Jesus as Savior, have boldness (assurance) in the day of judgment, I John 4:17. We believers who are sons of God through spiritual adoption, Gal. 4:4-7, do not escape punishment by our Holy Father, God, Prov. 3:11-12; 13:24; Heb. 12:5-11. Further, as God's children, we believers must stand before God and give an account of our service (not spiritual salvation) as his children, Rom. 14:8-12. Jesus said, "Think not that I am come to send peace on earth - - but a sword," Matt. 10:34. I believe that that promise will be fulfilled at Rev. 19:11-16. The earth's humanity will become so utterly despicable and contemptible to God that the Spirit will cease (Gen. 6:3) finding willing hearts to do God's will. Destruction to renew the earth will be God's choice as at Sodom and Gomorrah, Gen. 19:24-25; II Pet. 3:10-13; Jude 7. God is love, but Godly love corrects error, i.e., love calls for judgment of and retribution for sin, John 16:6-13; Rev. 20:9-10.

III. Moses led the nation of Israel away from the Red Sea after his sister Miriam led the women in singing and dancing accompanied with tambourines, Exod. 15:20-21. As the Hebrews went out into the desert another three days, they found no life-sustaining water for themselves or their animals. At Marah they found no potable, but bitter water. The people looked to Moses for a solution, "What shall we drink?" Moses found a plant which sweetened the water. After advancing to Elim, they found twelve wells, an oasis. They camped there, and Moses cautioned the people that unless they followed God's leading, they could be overcome with plagues as befell the Egyptians. The nation advanced from Elim southward to the Sin Desert toward Sinai. After two months from Egypt, Israel was dissatisfied and grumbled against Moses and Aaron. Without adequate food they said that it would have been better to have died back in Egypt than die from hunger here. The Lord told Moses that he would furnish food directly from heaven for his people. Only a day's supply would come down daily except for the sixth day when a two-day portion would come down. They were to gather on that sixth day enough for the seventh. This arrangement was to test the people regarding God's law of supply and demand and God's law concerning the Sabbath, God's memorial day of rest. Greed tempted some, and Paul referred to this problem at II Cor. 8:7-15. God appeared to the Hebrews there in a cloud and supplied manna for forty years until they reached Canaan, Exod. 16:10,15,35.

Dec. 13, 1998

"Israel Murmurs, God Supplies"
Exod. 17-18

Couples Class
Wendell Alford,
Teacher

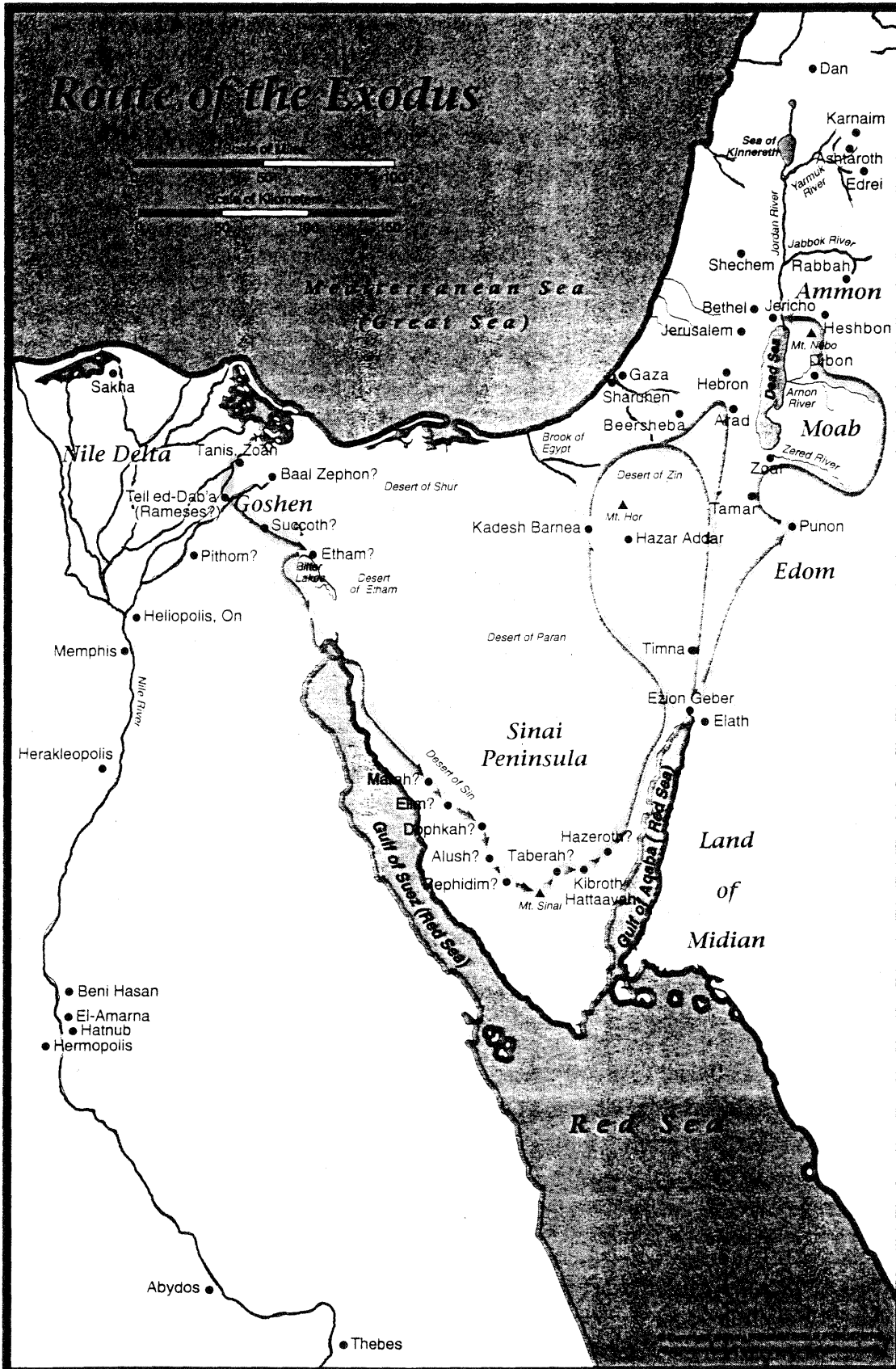
I. Last week we left Israel in the Sin Desert, and today they follow the Lord's directive on south to Rephidim where they set up camp. If Moses had not planned to rely upon God's providing their need for water, I do not believe that he would have set up camp for about two million of God's people to pause on their journey to the land of Canaan. The animals also required water daily. All of the Israelites, however, did not have Moses' faith in God. Moses was the obvious leader of the people, for he it was who had instigated the grand Exodus from Egypt where they had been for over four hundred years. The difference in Moses' faith and the nation at large caused the people to contend strongly with their leader. Moses told the people not to test the Lord, because it was the Lord, after all, who had given directions to Moses and Aaron to implement God's promise back through the generations to Abraham. At Gen. 15:18 God had made a covenant with Abraham, "Unto your descendants I have given this land from the river of Egypt [Nile] unto the great river, the river Euphrates." The evidence is that Moses accepted the terms of this covenant for the Israelites. The people's complaint to Moses was both practical and direct, "Why have you brought us out of Egypt to this barren land to kill us, our children, and our herds with thirst," Exod. 17:3. Moses, in turn, turned to God telling him that the people were "ready to kill me with stones." The Lord told Moses to convene the elders (leaders) of the nation and use the sanctified rod which you used back in Egypt on the Nile. Take the rod (staff) and I will show you a particular peak in the Horeb mountain range. Be sure that the leaders all see what you are doing, i.e., following the instructions of the Lord. When you strike the mountain of rock, water will gush forth, enough for the people and the animals. God promised that his (God's) presence would be evident in the process of water production, Exod. 17:6. Moses followed the Lord's instructions explicitly, and thereafter named the peak, as it produced ample water, Messah and Meribah which mean "tested" and "contention," because there the people of Israel tested God and contended with his leader Moses.

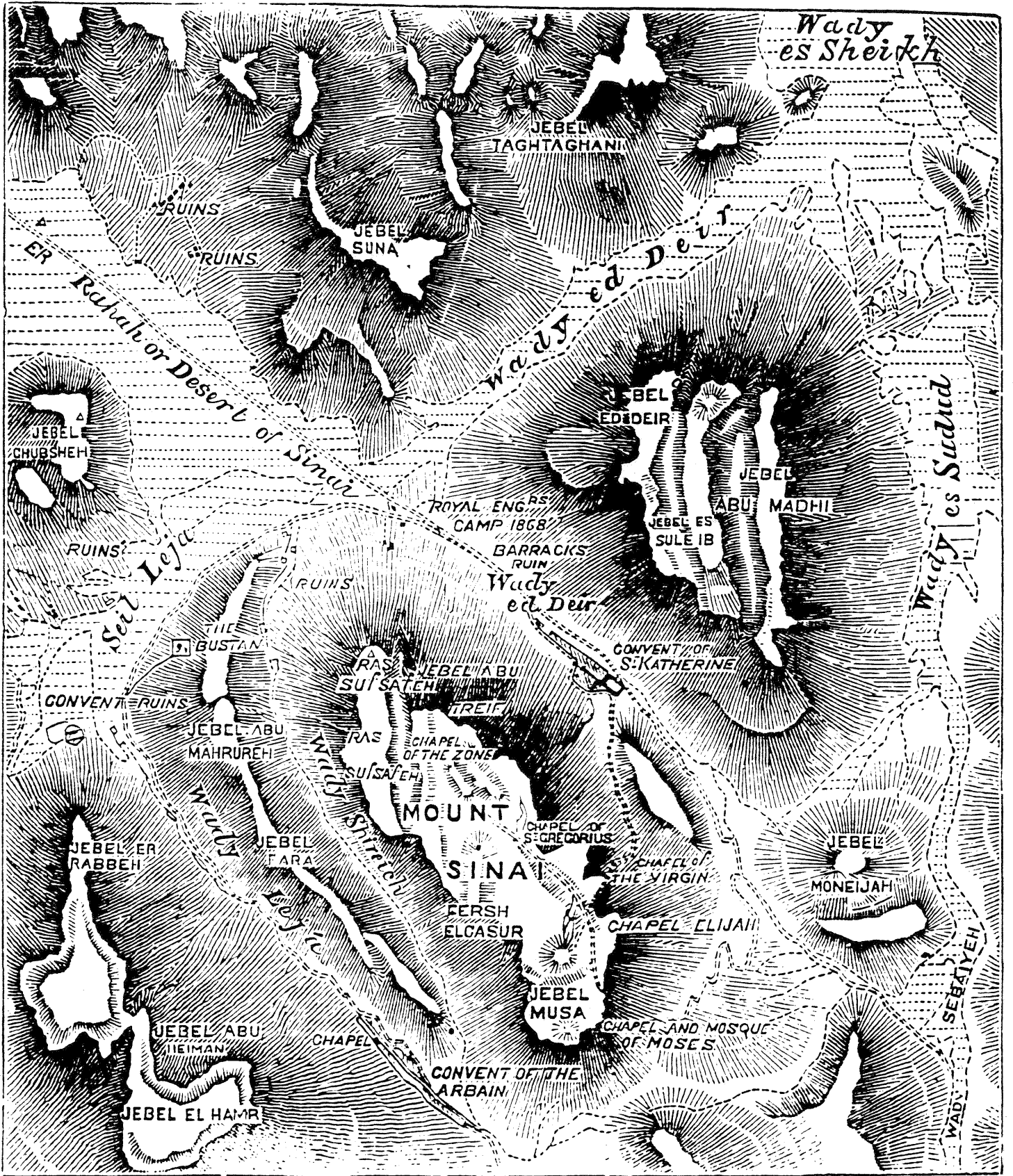
II. With the need for water satisfied, the next challenge for the Israelites was an encounter with the Amalekites. The Amalekites were a nomadic tribe whose wealth was their vast flocks and herds. They were the descendants of Esau, Gen. 36:12. Jacob's twin brother Esau had a son Eliphaz whose concubine Timna bore him the son Amalek. Esau (Edom) deliberately took his wives and concubines from among the Canaanites (Gen. 26:34-35) whereas Isaac made sure that Jacob took a wife from his own people, Gen. 24:1-7,37-38,67. Now on the Sinaitic Peninsula Jacob's and Esau's descendants meet in conflict again hundreds of years later! The Israelites were certainly not prepared for military endeavors as they were later, but Moses knew that their passage to Canaan could not be deterred. So Moses selected Joshua to conscript and command a group of men to overcome the Amalekite objection to their passage toward Canaan. Moses acted as a lookout on a nearby hill and with hand signals kept Joshua informed of how to engage in the fight. The signals were given

by Moses' arms, and during the day his arms became so tired that Aaron and Hur needed to help Moses by supporting his arms. The result was that the Amalekites were defeated. The Lord told Moses to include this incident in his writing of the Pentateuch. Also, Moses built there an altar, "Because the Lord has sworn that the Lord will have war with Amalek's descendants from generation to generation," Exod. 17:14-16.

III. By this time Jethro, Moses' father-in-law, had heard of Moses' leading the Israelites out of Egypt under the Lord's instructions and power. The Biblical evidence is that Moses' wife Zipporah and their two sons had stayed with Jethro while Moses had gone from Midian to Egypt to extricate the Israelites. We last knew of Zipporah's presence at Exod. 4:25-26 when she, at Moses' insistence, had circumcised their son. Apparently, Zipporah did not approve of the circumcision, for she, in disdain, said at the time, "You are a bloody husband, because of the circumcision." (See Gen. 25:1-4 regarding how the Midianites related to the Israelites.) Zipporah was willing at that time to leave Moses and return with their sons to Jethro's home back in Midian. Now when Jethro comes from Midian to Rephidim, he brings Zipporah with the two sons, Gershom and Eliezer. It appears to me that Moses and Zipporah do not seem to be on very close terms, for when they met no mention is made of their greeting each other after being apart for over a year. Moses' attention was devoted entirely to his father-in-law whom he bowed to, ushered into his tent and asked, "How have you been?" Moses and Zipporah could have reconciled, and he simply did not choose to give an account of the incident when he wrote about it later.

IV. Jethro appears to have undergone a change of heart about Moses' God with the deliverance of the Israelites from the strong nation of Egypt. Although Jethro was a religious person (a priest in Midian, Exod. 2:16), he did not recognize Moses' God as the one true God of the universe. Now at Exod. 18:11 Jethro states explicitly that, "Now I know that the Lord [Moses' God] is greater than all gods, for the things which he has displayed over the gods of Egypt." To emphasize his newfound faith, Jethro took a burnt offering and sacrificed to Moses' God. Moses, Aaron and the elders of Israel attended the sacrifice to God, and ate together with Jethro. The next day Jethro stayed with Moses as he conducted his affairs as God's leader of God's people. Moses acted as a judge representing God to the people of Israel from sunrise until sundown. When Jethro noted the amount of work and stress Moses encountered that day, he suggested to his son-in-law that he, rather than do all the work alone, select leaders to help lighten his own load. They can make decisions on less serious matters and refer the major problems to you (a multiple judicial system). Jethro's suggestion appealed to Moses so he instituted the change. God must approve the plan, Exod. 18:23, but Moses did not ask him. We should note also that this same type of judging the affairs of Israel continued on even through the Lord's days on earth in human flesh. The Sanhedrin (a council-chamber) was the Jewish leaders who condemned our Lord Jesus to physical death and his immediate followers, Matt. 26:57,59; Mk 15:1; Lk 22:66; Acts 4:1-31; 5:21.





Outline Map of Mount Sinai.

Dec. 20, 1998

"God's Ten Commandments"
Exod. 19-20

Couples Class
Wendell Alford,
Teacher

I. Up to Chap. 19 the new Israelite nation had been directed by God's presence. In the third month after fleeing Egypt, the Hebrews reach Mount Sinai in the Horeb range where they are to be given by God the option of continuing to be directly under God's leadership (grace) or serve the Lord by keeping a law given by him to Moses, Exod. 19:3-4. Now the great host of Judah's descendants have pitched their camp in the desert near the foot of Sinai. After the camp was set, Moses went up the mountain, and the Lord spoke to him out of the mountain. The Lord recalled to Moses what he had done in delivering the Israelites from bondage by destroying the Egyptian military force. God wanted Moses to remind the Hebrews of God's direct intervention against the Egyptians on their behalf. The Lord had sustained his people as an eagle and delivered them as a distinct entity (nation) for his own purpose. If you (the Hebrews) will continue to do my bidding, "you shall be a special people for me above all people, for all the earth is mine. And you shall be for me a kingdom of priests, a sanctified nation," Exod. 19:5-6; I Pet. 2:1-5. Moses went down from Sinai and told the nation what the Lord had said. The people gave unanimous consent to the Lord's proposition. This agreement meant that the Hebrews agreed to relate to all peoples (nonHebrews) as representatives (priests) of God. They were to influence all peoples of the earth by precept and example what God wanted the entire earth's peoples to be and do. God is now ready to proclaim for the Hebrews what lives they must practice to fulfill the covenant to which they had agreed.

II. In preparation to receive the precepts of God the Israelites were to prepare (sanctify) themselves for two days. They were to consecrate themselves and wash their clothes in preparation for the third day when the Lord himself will appear in fire, smoke and an earthquake. It is important to keep in mind that the people, including Moses, did not actually see God but the effects of his presence, Exod. 33:20; John 1:18. The Lord "set bounds" for the people in their approaching Sinai as God prepared for the third day of their encampment. The people were to keep a safe distance from the mount, for a touch of the surface of the mount would mean certain, instant death. An instrument was to be blown to indicate when the time was right for the people to come near the mount. Until after the Lord appeared, no sexual intercourse was to be practiced, Exod. 19:15. (Compare with I Cor. 7:1-6.) Early in the morning of the third day, the mountain was covered with fire and smoke, and Moses brought the people near the mount. The fire was as intense as fire in a furnace and Mount Sinai quaked. A trumpet sounded long and loud, and Moses and Aaron went up while the people, including the priests, were again cautioned not to approach the sacred mountain.

III. At the beginning of Exod. 20 Moses addresses the nation of Israel repeating the words of the Lord God of Israel. First, the Lord laid the foundation for all the law which was to be observed by the people. Exod. 20:2 is the key verse in the entire book of

Exodus: "I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slaves." Upon this foundation God then outlined what has become known as "God's Ten Commandments." I am the Lord your God, and, therefore, with the authority to expect you to observe the following commands. I am your only God, and there are to be no other gods recognized by you. This singular recognition is to exclude the making for yourself any graven image (likeness for a false god) of any thing in heaven, on earth or in the water below the earth. You are not to bow down (worship) such false gods nor serve them, for I (Jehovah, I AM, the only eternal living One) am a jealous God who will punish through the fourth generation those who hate me (by honoring false gods). On the other hand, I will be merciful to the many who love me by doing my will. You are never to associate my name with vanity (worthless, deficit, diminishable), because God will not hold anyone who does so, guiltless. The seventh day of every day or period is to be honored with special respect. This day is the Sabbath of God, for it was the day or period during which God rested after creating the heavens and the earth. You or any one under your jurisdiction is not to labor on that day, because the Lord has hallowed (made holy, dedicated) it as especially related to his being the only Creator. These first four commandments are the bases for the other six commandments, for without recognizing the authority of God over ones choices in life, nothing else will please God. Jesus our Lord said that this concept of God is the most important commandment of all, and the last six have a positive relationship with that concept, Matt. 22:34-40; Mk 12:28-31.

IV. If one would seek physical longevity in the flesh, he or she should bring honor to their parents, and God controls longevity. A person should not terminate another's physical life, i.e., murder is against God's will. I do not believe that this commandment is to control a nation's actions as compared to an individual's. Nations conduct war and punish with death its citizens who are a threat to the life of others in society. Jesus commended a soldier's faith at Matt. 8:5-13. God's Word states that a certain soldier was "a just man, and one that feared God." Human sexual activity with other than one's spouse displeases God. (See also Rom. 7:1-3.) To take another's property for one's own use is displeasing to God and therefore wrong. This also does not apply to a government's collecting taxes, Rom. 13:5-7. In a dispute between individuals, one is not to testify an untruth, because such false testimony is against God's will. To please God one must not enviously desire anything belonging to others. The Israelites, after hearing the voice of God directly along with the unnatural phenomena, begged Moses to speak for God and not God himself, because they feared for their lives. God again emphasized that the Hebrews should not create for themselves false gods. Even their altars were to be built of natural material and not adorned to emulate human pollution. The law is evidence that we are dependent upon God's grace rather than our ability to keep God's law, Rom. 7:22-25; Gal. 2:16; 3:24-29. Law demands, Grace gives; Law says "do," Grace says "believe;" Law says, "Do, and thou shalt live;" Grace says, "Live (spiritually), and thou shalt do (God's will)."