

Jan. 10, 1999

"God's Laws For Living"
Exod. 21-22

Couples Class
Wendell Alford,
Teacher

I. Following the Ten Commandments given by God to Moses in Exod. 20, the Lord gives to the Hebrews, through Moses, a list of ordinances which the Israelites are requested by God to keep. Today we would categorize these ordinances as basic human rights of individuals. One can see immediately that the tenor of the requirements relate to the recent history of the Hebrew experiences, i.e., living as slaves under a dominating people, the Egyptians. It is notable that the Lord does not condemn slavery, per se, but gives restrictions relating to the relations of slaves to their owners and vice versa. (See also Philemon in the New Covenant.) If a Hebrew should purchase another Hebrew as a slave, the slave is considered a free person after six years without further obligations to the owner. The family members which a bought slave brings to the owner originally are considered to be free after the six years with the slave head of household. However, if a male slave marries and has children during the six years, he himself is free after the six years, but his family belongs to the slave owner (master). If, on the other hand, at the end of six years this slave announces that he loves his owner, wife and children and wants to remain in servitude, the owner-slave relationship becomes a matter of law. The slave and owner are to appear before the judges (court) who declare that the owner must publicly, with an awl, punch a hole in the slave's ear which indicates that the owner owns the slave until the slave's death (forever). There follows procedures when there is intermarriage between the owner's family members and the slave's family.

II. Exod. 21:12-32 contain instructions relating to physical violence between individuals and between animals and people. The threshold of this discussion (vs. 12) is the most explicit biblical information about what we call "capital punishment." Here we must make a clear distinction between individuals and the duties of a sovereign nation. To understand the individual versus national responsibilities in human affairs, we should note the instructions of our Lord Jesus at Matt. 25:31-46. There Jesus states that when the end of the age comes he, as King on his throne, will gather the nations together and judge them. The Greek word for "nations" is ethnos which in today's population would mean ethnic groups. Our nation has been and is attempting to produce a conglomerate of all its citizens, as simply Americans, which ignores various groups of historical ethnic variations. In recent years there appear to be emerging, emphases by the different groups to sustain the differences of their ethnic people. Examples of the separateness appear on large university campuses where unions, places for meetings, for Christians, Muslims, Blacks, Spanish speaking, homosexuals, and, yes, females, are being demanded and granted by university administrations. Some requests, along with academic curricula, are being granted also, even with discipline majors in ethnic strengths. I believe that in the Matt. 25 passage cited above, Jesus is referring especially to adverse Gentile treatment of his own people, the Jews according to the flesh, Rom. 1:3; Gal. 4:4 ,

especially at the time referred to at Rev. 7:1-4, 14. At that time some nations will heed the proclamation of the Jews who will be proclaiming Jesus to be God's Messiah (Savior) while other nations will reject that evangelism. In Exod. 21:21 a slave (servant) is reckoned as his owners property. We believers were once servants of sin, Gal. 4:7.

III. At Heb. 10:1-18 direct reference is made to the contrast of offerings to God for people's sin through the blood of animals with God's sacrifice of the blood of his own Son. The overwhelming difference is because God promises to, when one places his or her faith in Jesus as Savior and Lord, dwell in each believer in the person of his Holy Spirit, Joel 2:28-32; Acts 2:15-18; Heb. 10:15-16. I mention this eternal freedom from spiritual separation from God by believers, because of the listing of the various relief from various penalties in human relationships in Exodus. Note, for example, in Exod. 21:22-27, the often quoted expression, "thou shall give [take] life for life - - eye for eye and tooth for tooth - - ." In the Heb. 10:9-10 verses noted above, God tells us that he was [in Christ] coming to earth to make holy (sanctify, make whole) those who put their trust in the sacrifice of Jesus' human body "once and for all [time]." Note the same sentiment of God expressed in his Word at Psa. 40:6-8 which should be compared with Heb. 10:5. God's grace of forgiveness is available continually to us believers through Jesus Christ in our daily lives, I John 1:8-10. The initial trusting in Jesus as Savior and Lord is the beginning of our spiritual journey, for we serve him and trust him through our individual faith for the coming culmination of our reward, Psa. 110:1; Matt. 22:41-46; John 14:1-3; I Cor. 15:25-28; Rev. 21:1-7.

IV. At Exod. 21:33 through Exod. 22:15 God gives, through Moses, the rights of the Hebrews to possess property. The "common sense" element of these rules is apparent. For example, if a man digs a hole or well and does not cover it and another's ox or donkey falls therein and is killed, the one who dug the hole pays the owner of the animal for the dead stock, but the dead carcass then belongs to the payee of the money. If one person's ox kills another's ox, the owner of the killer ox is to be sold and the money and the dead ox is to be equally divided between the two. However, if the killer ox is known to be a repeat offender, and its owner has not controlled it, he shall pay the killed ox's owner another ox and keep the dead ox. If one steals an ox or a sheep and kills or sells it, he shall restore to the owner five oxen for an ox or four sheep for a sheep. If a thief is discovered in ones household, and the thief is killed in the process, the owner is free from reciprocity. In some instances shades of difference can exist which are not explicit, and in those cases judges were available to make decisions. In other cases there were places where one could go and escape immediate punishment, "cities of refuge," Num. 35:11-15. The cities of refuge were for those who killed or harmed another accidentally or without intent. Families could not avenge one of its members so killed or harmed. Such an arrangement provided a "cooling off" period while all details were being considered. These cases were settled by the congregation, Num. 25:24-34. Exod. 22:16-31 will be considered with Chap. 23 next Lord's Day.

Jan. 17, 1999

"God Continues His Law"
Exod. 23-24

Couples Class
Wendell Alford,
Teacher

I. Recall that at the end of our discussion of Exod. 22 we noted that our lesson today would include the last part of Exod. 22 (vss. 16-31) in today's study. Those verses relate to what appeared on many of our report cards when we were in grammar school as "Citizenship," "Conduct," or "Social Habits," how do people "get along" with one another? For example, if a man "entice a young woman who is not engaged, and they have sexual intercourse," he is required to endow her (engage her) to become his wife." However, if her father will not permit the marriage, the male sexual offender is "to pay the going price of virgins," anyway. (See Gen. 34:11-14 for a specific example of the application of this principle concerning Shechem and Dinah, the only daughter of Jacob and Leah.) Sorcery was not to be allowed among the Hebrews. Practicing witchcraft or sorcery was a form of idolatry in that the practice "replaced" God as a source of guidance and strength. The Egyptians relied upon witchcraft. (See Exod. 7:11 where sorcerers, "wise men," Magicians, or soothsayers were consulted by the Pharaoh.) Another outstanding example of idolatrous witchcraft is shown at I Sam. 28:3-25. Here Saul, Israel's first king, had disobeyed God's command concerning the Amalekites at I Sam. 15:1-11. After Samuel had died, Saul who had by his own direction put away those who had familiar spirits out of the land, now turned himself to a witch at Endor for instructions in how to defeat the Philistines who were in array for battle with Israel. God told Moses to instruct the Hebrews at Exod. 22:18 not to permit such a witch to live among them. Bestiality, sexual relation of a human with a lower animal, is forbidden and is to result in the death of the person involved. (Also Lev. 18:23; 20:15-16) Both male and female persons are included in this admonition, and such activity is regarded by God as a perversion of appropriate human behavior, i.e., a deviation from how God created humans and beasts originally. Homosexuality is likewise also considered such a perversion of appropriate human behavior as noted in God's Word at Gen. 19:5,13,24-25; Judg. 19:22-24; Lev. 18:22; 20:13; Rom. 1:24-28. Only the Lord God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob is to be recognized by the Israelites (sacrificed to). Idol worshipers are to be "utterly destroyed." Aliens (strangers) are to be treated kindly, because the Hebrews were also strangers back in Egypt. Widows and orphans are to be respected. God will honor the cries of mistreated widows and orphans (fatherless ones). Money lent to another Hebrew is not to draw usury (interest). However, if a neighbor's clothing is received as a pledge, that clothing is to be returned before sundown for warmth during sleeping hours. All should keep in mind that all possessions are to be considered as God's, and persons are only stewards of such possessions. "Road kill" (by other beasts) is not to be consumed by Israelites.

II. Exod. 23:1-9 gives principles of justice which please God as the Hebrews live their daily lives. A mob spirit should not encourage an individual to give an untrue report about any situation. In other words, "do not follow a multitude to do evil, even if the accusation is against a poor person." When an animal has strayed

from its owner, take the stray back to its owner, even if the owner is your enemy. (See Jesus' instruction to us believers in him at Matt. 5:43-48.) A person's economic status should not alter a right justice for or against him, and never should a bribe be honored to "change" the facts for or against one accused. Strangers are not to be treated with abuse simply because of their alien status. Beginning at Exod. 23:10 and through Verse 19 God repeats some matters about the Sabbatical Year and the three national feasts to be observed to honor their continuing relation with Jehovah God. Other gods' names should never even be pronounced by a Hebrew! Every year three feasts are to be held: The Feast of the Passover (unleavened bread) to honor God's having delivered the Hebrews from the tenth plague back in Egypt; the Feast of Pentecost (harvest); and the Feast of Tabernacles (ingathering). Each feast recognized God's part in establishing and saving the nation of Israel. These gatherings were to maintain mutual encouragement within the nation to remember God's part in their history as well as their present circumstance. (Note a similar admonition for us believers from the beginning of the ecclesia even to the present at Lk 22:19-20; Heb.10:19-25.)

III. In Exod. 23:20-33 God assures the Hebrews that he will send an angel as they continue on to Canaan. God's direction and protection will depend upon their following the instructions of God's messenger (angel). God's promise to Israel, as they follow his messenger's instructions, is that he will be an enemy to their enemies and an adversary to their adversaries. Here God's Word notes some of the enemies whom they will encounter as they attempt to capture the land in Canaan which God had promised them. This promise had been made hundreds of years before to Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and to their descendants who will follow. The inhabitants in Canaan were listed by name: Amorites, Hittites, Perizzites, Canaanites,, Hivites, and the Jebusites. For us to understand better the years that followed during which the Israelites sought to conquer Canaan, we should pay close attention to the background of these people who occupied Canaan at the time God is promising to dispose of them in favor of the Israelites. Most of these people were descendants of the grandson of Noah, Ham's son Canaan. For some reason not explicitly given in the Bible, Noah placed a curse upon Ham's son Canaan rather than directly upon Ham himself. Recall that Ham's sin was uncovering his father Noah when the latter was drunk in his tent just after the Flood, Gen. 9:20-24. The Amorites, Hittites, Canaanites, Hivites, and Jebusites were of the family of Canaan as given in Gen. 9:25-27; 10:13,15-16. The Perizzites are noted in Gen. 13:7; 15:18-21. We should emphasize the importance of the Jebusites in this promise of God to Moses through the Lord's angel at Exod. 23: 22-23. Jerusalem was earlier a possession of the Jebusites and was named Jebus before Jerusalem, Judg. 19:10-11. Later, when David was king of Israel, he bought Mount Moriah at Jebus from a Jebusite named Ornan for six hundred shekels of gold, I Chron. 21:(25)18 - 22:10. On Mount Moriah is the place upon which David's son Solomon built a temple to honor God. Another emphasis: God commanded his people, "Thou shall not bow down to the Canaanites' gods, nor serve or covenant with them," Exod. 23:24-33.

Jan. 24, 1999

"The Covenant And Tabernacle"
Exod. 25-26

Couples Class
Wendell Alford,
Teacher

I. Just as content placed the last verses of Chap. 22 (vss. 16-31) with Chap. 23, so Chap. 24 leads into Chaps. 25 and 26. Therefore, we are examining Chap. 24 with the next two chapters. The scene set at the beginning of Chap. 24 is the Lord instructing Moses to come to him up on Mount Sinai along with Aaron, Nadab, Abihu and seventy of the elders. However, all except Moses were to worship God at a distance from God's presence. When the group had ascended the mount and then descended again to the host of Israelites, Moses announced to the people the ordinances which the Lord required of them. The peoples' response was, "All the words which the Lord has said will we do," Exod. 24:3. The response was unanimous. Moses then wrote the laws of God and built an altar at the foot of Mount Sanai fronted by twelve pillars representing the twelve tribes of Israel. Before the altar Moses offered burned and peace offerings to the Lord with the blood of some oxen which a group of young men had slain for that purpose. Moses took half of the blood from the oxen and sprinkled it upon the altar, and took the other half and sprinkled it upon the people after he had read to them God's requirement in the law. The people again confirmed their commitment to do what God wanted of them. In other words, the covenant of God with the people was sealed with the blood of the slain animals, Heb. 9:22. After this offering of the blood sacrifice, Moses and the special group noted above went again up the mount to see and feel the awesomeness of God and also to receive from God his ordinances which God himself had written upon stone, Exod. 24:12. After six days the others returned to the people, and Moses went alone up the mount where a cloud covered him. Moses had told the nation to rely upon Aaron and Hur considering any questions which arose during his absence. The instructions which Moses received during the next forty days and nights on the mount begin at Exod. 25:1 and continue through Exod. 31. The purpose of these instructions was to outline procedures for the design and construction of a tabernacle (where one dwells temporarily, II Cor. 5:1; II Pet. 1:13-14) which will be a center where Israel will worship their God while en route to Canaan, the land promised to them through Abraham.

II. The financial requirements for the materials needed for the building of the tabernacle was to come from all the Israelites who had agreed to the covenant with God. Each person giving should do so of a willing mind and heart. The specific items required are listed in Exod. 25:3-7. Remember that, as the Hebrews left Egypt, they were asked by Moses to receive from the Egyptians much gold, silver and clothing materials, Exod. 12:35-36. After the terrible ten plagues, the Egyptians were happy to see the Hebrews leave Egypt! There was to be built an ark of wood from the shittah tree which is a gnarled, rough-barked, thorny tree of the acacia genus. Its wood is yellow when first felled but turns dark over time. It is mentioned once in the Bible as a tree, Isa. 41:19, but wood from the tree is noted many times. The ark's dimensions and other details are given in Exod. 25:10-22. It was to be overlaid

with pure gold within and without. The ark was about four feet long, and the height and width were about two feet each. On each corner was to be attached a gold ring through which two staves could be placed for carriage from place to place. The staves, also made of shittim wood, were to be overlaid with gold, and never removed. In the ark were to be placed the written testimony (tablets) of God's covenant with Israel to which Israel had agreed. At one time or another the ark also carried manna in a gold pot and Aaron's rod which had budded after dying, Exod. 16:32-35; Num. 17:7-10; Heb. 9:4. The top of the ark was a mercy seat on which was mounted a cherub on each end of the ark. These two cherubs were to have wings held heavenward. God promised to meet and commune with the Hebrew worshipers "above the mercy seat," Exod. 25:22.

III. The furniture which was to be placed in the tabernacle are given and described in Exod. 25:10-40. After the ark, which was so holy that only the high priest was allowed to see or approach it annually, the table of showbread is described. This table was also made of shittim wood and overlaid with pure gold. It too had staves for carriage with four gold ring holders. The dishes and utensils used on the table were made of pure gold. The gold used in the tabernacle and its furnishings was considerable. Someone had estimated the current, total value of the materials used to have been over five million dollars! The bread on the table was renewed each week and placed on the table in two heaps or stacks. Since the table was three feet long and eighteen inches wide, it could hold enough unleavened bread for the week. Golden snuffers were kept with a pure gold candlestick which sat across the holy place entry from the table of showbread. An eighteen inch square by three feet high altar of incense was to be placed just outside the entrance to the most holy place (holy of holies). These instructions which Moses received while alone with God up on the mount provided for an outer fenced courtyard one hundred fifty feet long by seventy-five feet wide. The tabernacle itself measured fifteen by forty-feet and was located within the outer fence near the end of the courtyard farthest from the courtyard entrance. The holy and most holy places were located together under a temporary shelter (tent) separated from each other by a rich drape so that those who serviced the holy place with showbread, etc., could not view the ark of the covenant in the Holy of Holies. Chap. 26 contains God's instructions to Moses about those items which were to afford the divisions within the tabernacle, i.e., curtains, boards (framing), sockets (bases) and the veil which separated the outer holy place and the most holy place. Remember that this outline is only the instructions of how and of what the tabernacle would be made, and are contained in Exod. 25-30. Actual implementation of the instructions (blueprint) begin at Exod. 31. Curtains of fine twined linen were connected together to make the first of four covers to be placed over the holy place and the holy of holies. A second covering was to be made of goat hair and consisted of eleven curtains sewn together to fit over the holy and most holy places. A third cover of ram's skin dyed red, and a fourth cover of badger skins all protected the inner sanctuary of the tabernacle.

Jan. 31, 1999

"The Alter And Priesthood"
Exod. 27-28

Couples Class
Wendell Alford,
Teacher

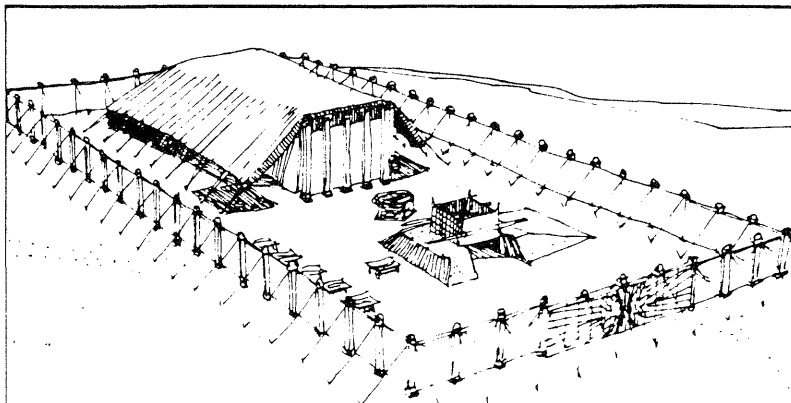
I. I have stated before that I believe that the messenger of God the Father who is with the Israelites as they left Egypt to return to Canaan is none other than the preincarnate Christ. Moses was not permitted to see the Lord, but could only see the effects on natural phenomena such as the heat, smoke and the earth quaking (earthquake). Moses was curious to see the Lord during this journey as noted at Exod. 33:18-23. Moses specifically requested to see God face to face, but the Lord said to him, " - - you may see my back parts, but not my face." Just before this statement of God, he told Moses, "There shall no man see me and live," Exod, 33:20. However, as God provided his New Covenant through Jesus, his Son and Messiah, Moses was finally permitted to see God, Matt. 17:1-8; John 14:8-9; II Cor. 5:19. As we begin to examine the items in the outer court surrounding the tabernacle proper, we see the use of a different metal, brass, which is and was much less valuable than the gold used in the location of the tabernacle wherein the Ark of the Covenant was to be kept. God had told Moses as he prescribed the plans (blueprints) of the tabernacle that he (the Lord) would commune with the Israelites directly above the mercy seat which formed the cover of the ark. The brass in the outer court represents God's judgment of sinful mankind. The people who approached God's presence must be judged by God and forgiven before they were allowed to approach the Most Holy Place where God would show mercy at the Mercy Seat. Even so, this forgiveness came only through priests who represented God. This priesthood was faulty because of mankind's proneness to sin, Heb. 8:7-13. The priests of the Old Covenant were ranked, with Aaron a high priest who was Aaron at first with his sons as lower ranked priests. Aaron's selection as the first high priest was his association with Moses his brother, Exod. 28:1-2. Also, they were from the family of Levi from whom came the priestly tribe of the twelve tribes of Israel (Jacob), Exod. 6:16-20; Num. 1:47-53; 8:6,14,18,20. Later in Canaan, when the land was divided among the tribes of Israel, the tribe of Levi was apportioned no land. Instead, the Levites lived among the other tribes and performed their priestly functions among all the tribes, Josh. 14:3; 21:41-42. The Old Covenant required a present priesthood between Almighty God and sinful mankind. God was greatly disappointed when at Exod. 32 Aaron, the first high priest of Israel, fulfilled the people's request to brake their covenant with God by fashioning a false god to worship and "lead them."

II. In the first two or three centuries after God instituted the Second (and final) Covenant, the believers, especially those Jews who accepted Jesus as their Messiah (Savior) of God, felt uneasy without a priest present to give detailed attention to God's directions as well as a pronouncement of forgiveness of confessed sins. God's Word in Hebrews speaks to how God had replaced the old priesthood with his own Son, Heb. 5. In fact, Heb. 6 admonishes the first Jewish believers (and us) to discount even the mechanics of believers entering God's Way, immersion, laying on of hands, the coming resurrection, and eternal judgment, Phil. 3:20-21. Lay

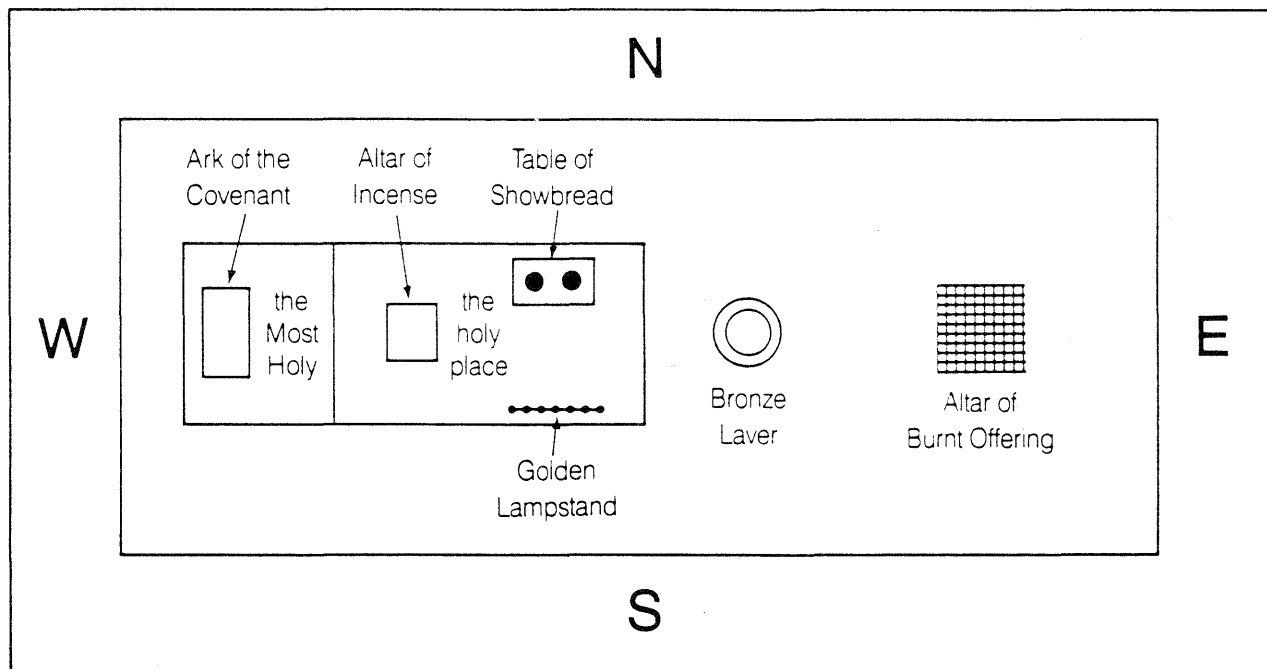
these aside and be anchored "within the veil (where God is)," because Christ Jesus has become our forerunner to enter into the very presence of God the Creator where he is our active high priest without end (after the order of Melchizedek, without beginning or end). Jesus is ever on duty on our behalf in the very presence of God the Father, Heb. 7:25. Further, he has sent God's Holy Spirit to live within us (John 14:26), as individual believers, to have forever God's direct and immediate attention of our every concern about our relationship with God, our Spiritual Father, I John 1:8-2:2. We need no other priest than Jesus himself, and it is this truth that makes us believers in Jesus a priesthood, Heb. 7:18-28; I Pet. 2:1-10. Note especially at I Pet. 2:12 that Peter (God's Word) is addressing Jewish believers since he refers to the Gentiles (unbelievers) in the third person.

III. The design and plans for placement to the items in the outer court were for definite purposes. The geographic directions were noted to assure that the arrangement was the same each time the Israelites moved to a new camp site. At the east end was the entrance to the outer court. The first item located inside the entrance was the brazen altar. This altar was made of shittim wood and covered with brass. Bronze is a metal made of copper alloyed with another metal, usually tin. Brass is an alloy of copper and zinc and was the metal used in making the brazen altar. In our day it is much easier to understand the significance of the tabernacle and the items therein if we relate them to our faith in Jesus Christ as noted in the New Covenant portion of the Bible entitled "Hebrews." Heb. 10:1 states that "the law (of which Exodus is a part) having a shadow of good things to come [through Jesus Christ], and not the very image of the things, can never with those sacrifices which they offered year after year continually make the comers to them perfect (whole)." So how does the brazen altar relate to our faith in Jesus as Savior? When we believers were first led by God's Holy Spirit (John 3:3; 6:44) to see our sin and how that sin keeps us separated from our loving Creator, the cross represents the law's brazen altar. As Paul makes clear at Gal. 6:14, only the way of the cross can lead us to our final home, to heaven, I Cor. 1:18-31. When the Israeli priests were approaching God toward the mercy seat in the tabernacle, the first step was to pass the altar of sacrifice. Before any person can approach God, there must be a sacrifice. The cross (Jesus' spilled blood, his life) was and is the final and only altar of sacrifice which God will honor today to make mankind righteous enough to fellowship with himself. Jesus is God's only Lamb of God that takes away the sins of anyone who will believe, John 1:26; 14:6. "[Jesus] was delivered by the determinate and foreknowledge of God," to the brazen altar for the sins of the whole world, Acts 2:23; I John 2:2. Exod. 27:9,16 give instructions about the court of the tabernacle with specific colors for the hangings which are to drape over the entry gate, blue, purple and scarlet which signify an entry to a royal palace. The remainder of the fence was to be draped over by fine twined linen. This linen was made of flax from which linen thread and linseed-oil are produced. Exod. 27 also tells of the olive oil which represents the Holy Spirit and was used in the lamp stand in the tabernacle.

The Plan of the Tabernacle

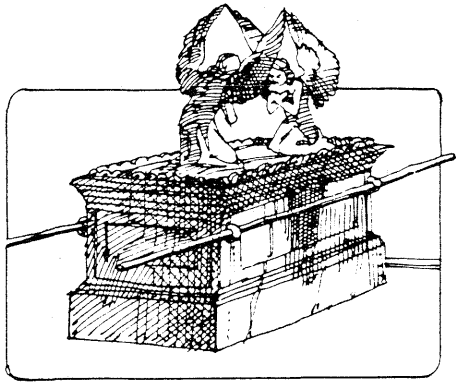


The tabernacle was to provide a place where God might dwell among His people. The term *tabernacle* sometimes refers to the tent, including the holy place and the Most Holy, which was covered with embroidered curtains. But in other places it refers to the entire complex, including the curtained court in which the tent stood.



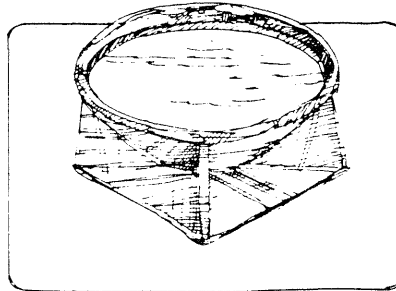
This illustration shows the relative positions of the tabernacle furniture used in Israelite worship. The tabernacle is enlarged for clarity.

The Furniture of the Tabernacle



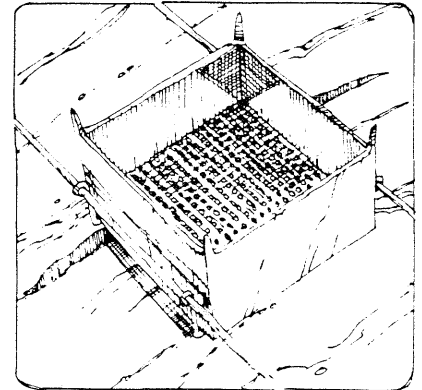
Ark of the Covenant
(Ex. 25:10-22)

The ark was most sacred of all the furniture in the tabernacle. Here the Hebrews kept a copy of the Ten Commandments, which summarized the whole covenant.



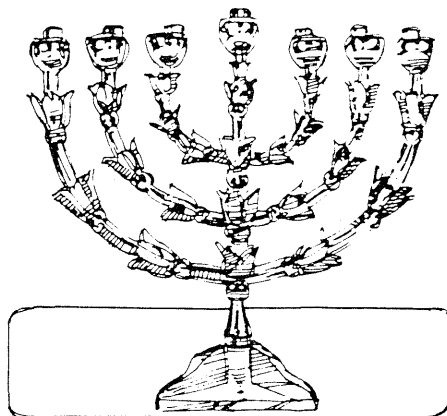
Bronze Laver
(Ex. 30:17-21)

It was to the laver of bronze that the priests would come for cleansing. They must be pure to enter the presence of God.



Altar of Burnt Offering
(Ex. 27:1-8)

Animal sacrifices were offered on this altar, located in the court in front of the tabernacle. The blood of the sacrifice was sprinkled on the four horns of the altar.



Golden Lampstand
(Ex. 25:31-40)

The gold lampstand stood in the holy place, opposite the table of showbread. It held seven lamps, flat bowls in which a wick lay with one end in the oil of the bowl and the lighted end hanging out.

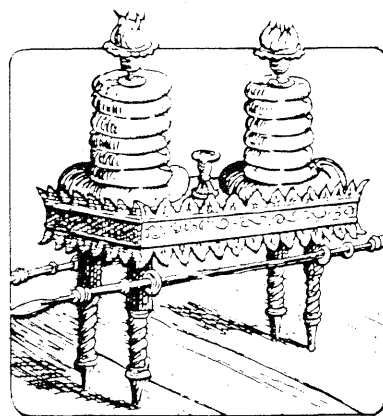
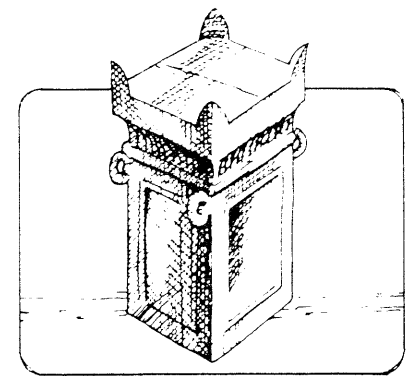


Table of Showbread
(Ex. 25:23-30)

The table of showbread was a stand on which the offerings were placed. Always in God's presence on the table were the 12 loaves of bread representing the 12 tribes.



Altar of Incense
(Ex. 30:1-10)

The altar of incense inside the tabernacle was much smaller than the altar of burnt offering outside. The incense burned on the altar was a perfume of a sweet-smelling aroma.

Feb. 7, 1999

"The Priests And Incense Altar"
Exod. 29-30

Couples Class
Wendell Alford,
Teacher

I. Last week we discussed the brazen altar which was the first item inside the east end of the courtyard surrounding the tabernacle proper. Today we examine the physical make up and significance of the last piece of furniture sitting immediately in front of the veil which covered the entrance of the most holy place that housed the ark of the covenant. Before we look at the altar of incense, we should note further the priests who served God and the people as intermediaries between the Lord and his people. Recall that last week we stated that Jesus alone serves in that capacity now during the New Covenant period. The Holy Spirit makes this blessing possible, John 14:26; Rom. 8:16; Rev. 1:5-6. The Old Covenant priests were dressed in the finest garments available as commanded by God to Moses. The high priest, Aaron, wore garments "for glory and for beauty," Exod. 28:2. The high priest wore a breastplate, an ephod, a robe, an embroidered coat, a turban (mitre), and a girdle (sash). The other priests were likewise dressed in grandeur and splendor, because God wanted his mediators to appear without ordinariness. The ephod consisted of two long pieces of cloth held together on each shoulder by an onyx stone. On one onyx stone was etched the name of six tribes of Israel and on the other, the names of the other six tribes. The breast plate was a beautiful vest which represented God's judgment of sin. The breast plate had pockets in which were kept the urim and thummin, devices which enabled the high priest to settle questionable propositions, I Sam. 14:3-4, 14, 17, 24, 37-45.

II. With the garment particulars given in Exod. 28, we come now to God's instructions to Moses concerning the consecration and dedication of Aaron and his sons to serve in the offices of the priesthood. This ceremony was a very meticulous and intricate series of actions which separated the duties of the Levitical priests from other types of activities of the other tribes of Israel. After the outer court fences, the tabernacle holy place and holy of holies where the ark was to be kept are constructed, is to follow the consecration of Aaron and his sons as God's serving priests. We should note that this information associated with this rite is given also at Lev. 8 and Heb. 4:14-5:4; 7:11-8:13. Exod. 29 gives the specific instructions from God to Moses regarding the consecration ceremony of the priests. The instructions for building the tabernacle are given at Exod. 31 (work assigned), finished at Exod. 39:32, and erected first in Exod. 40. To hallow the priests (separate them for exclusive service for God), first a choice is made of one young, male bullock and two male sheep. These animals must be without blemish and young (under one year). The animals are dressed and placed in a large basket with unleavened bread made with wheat flour and anointed with olive oil. The priests (Aaron and his sons, Nabab, Abihue, Eleazar, and Ithamar) are to do this and bring the basket to the door of the tabernacle. There they will wash the sacrificial elements in water, a symbolic cleansing for regeneration. In the New Covenant this process is noted at Titus 3:4-9. See especially vs. 5, "Not by works of righteousness which we [believers

in Jesus Christ] have done, but according to his [the Lord's] mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration [symbolically by immersion in water], and renewing of the Holy Spirit," John 3:3-6. After the Old Covenant priests had washed the elements clean, they donned their priestly regalia which included the mitre (turban) on their heads. Around the turban was a band of pure gold on which was inscribed HOLINESS TO THE LORD. These priests were representing God to the people and the people to God. They were special servants of God serving in God's place, not God, Exod. 28:3. This priesthood does not, nor has any ever, existed in that capacity in the New Covenant. A believer in Jesus Christ is a member of the ecclesia who are a priesthood of believers, I Pet. 2:4-5. When a believer witnesses to an unbeliever of God's Gospel, he or she is acting as a priest of God through his Messiah, Savior. We have only one priest between us and God the Father, and that priest is Jesus whose human mother was Mary and whose Spiritual Father was God's Holy Spirit. The Old Covenant priests' duties included instructing the people, sanitary and medicinal care for the Israelites' welfare, as well as the worship services at the place of worship, (tabernacle or temple). When God instituted the New Covenant, he came to live within those who are trusting Jesus Christ for eternal life, and daily instructions. Believers themselves are God's temple or tabernacle, I Cor. 6:19; II Cor. 6:16-18. We believers are God's dwelling place solely because of God's grace, not because we have consecrated ourselves to God, Rom. 3:21-31; Eph. 1:13-14; 2:4-10. Aaron and his sons were to bring a bullock to the tabernacle entrance, place their hands on the bullock's head, and kill it for their own sins. They were then pure enough to sacrifice animal blood for the peoples' sins. They offered two lambs each day. These burnt offerings continually reminded the Israelites of their sins. The Levitical priestly tribe received food from the various burnt offerings.

III. In Exod. 30 the description and purpose of the altar of incense are given. This altar was made of shittim wood and covered with pure gold. Staves were provided for rapid carriage also. On each of the top four corners were cornices (KJV, horns) which simulated a gold crown. This small altar, had a top of about eighteen inches square and was thirty-six inches high. This altar of incense was placed close to the beautiful veil which separated the holy place from the most holy place where the ark of the covenant was. Aaron was to burn incense thereon every morning and evening. Lighting incense twice each day kept a most pleasant aroma there at all times. Only the finest incense was to be burned which made this offering expensive, denoting deity. I believe that this aroma depicted the presence of Jesus there. Heb. 9:3-4 states that the altar of incense was located in the holy of holies with the ark, but in the tabernacle that altar stood outside the holy of holies beyond the veil covering the sacred ark with the mercy seat, God's presence. Why the difference? After Jesus' sacrificial death that veil was opened, Matt. 27:50-51, and Jesus had entered into the presence of God the Father. Today we believers can approach God directly only in the fact that Jesus is God, John 10:30; 14:9; 17:11,20-24 and is now with The Father for us believers, Heb. 9:24.

Feb. 14, 1999

"Work Assigned And Covenant Ignored"
Exod. 31-32

Couples Class
Wendell Alford
Teacher

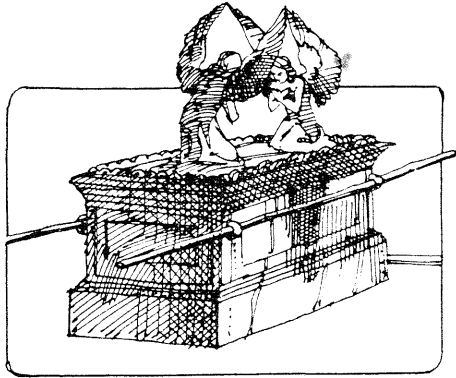
I. Moses is still up on Mount Sinai receiving instruction from God in Exod. 31. The Lord is completing his word to Moses about the construction of the tabernacle and its furnishings. God names two men in particular who are to oversee the fine workmanship necessary to implement his details of construction. The two men named are Bezeleel and Aholiah. The former is the grandson of Hur, of the tribe of Judah. His task is primarily in metal work, carpentry and masonry. He is a person of artistic ability with superior accomplishment in detailed craftsmanship. Aholiah of the tribe of Dan was skilled in weaving and embroidering. Together these two artisans participated in and taught others how to design and erect the tabernacle and its furnishings, Exod. 35:30-35, according to God's instructions to Moses. It is well, I believe, that we consider here the diversity of gifts which the Lord creates in each individual as distinct from others. Moses was very intelligent with a well-trained mind, the best training available in advanced Egypt (except for their religion). Moses, on the other hand, was not an artisan who could design and perform the skills to erect a tabernacle which would please God as a place where he (the Lord) would commune with his chosen people, the Hebrews. God gave Moses the design and types of materials to use for the worship place, but did not expect Moses to do the work or even serve as a priest in the new priestly functions. Aaron and his sons were not chosen by God to build the tabernacle but serve as priests. Moses and Aaron were both of the tribe of Levi. The emphasis being noted here is that God does not call all individuals to be good speakers, musicians, workers with ones hands, but distributes to each person special gifts which are all needed to glorify the Lord and Creator. The same principle is carried over into the New Covenant for the ecclesia, God's called out ones by his Holy Spirit. Such assignments of individuals in God's service are done in the same way. Notice that, concerning Bezaleel, God told Moses, "I have filled him with the Spirit of God, in wisdom, understanding, knowledge, and all manner of workmanship," Exod. 31:3. Now, look at I Cor. 12:2-11 ff where that same Spirit of God works with each individual in the ecclesia so that God's work is accomplished. Nor can any one individual claim a superior contribution in building and serving in God's ecclesia, I Cor. 12:22-31. In the ecclesia today not every person can serve in proclaiming God's Word, teaching, music, administration, giving the same offering, performing miracles, and speaking in a language other than ones own, etc., Rom. 12:8,13; Eph. 4:1-16.

II. Interesting is the fact that the Lord specifically emphasizes again to Moses one of the ten commandments (No. Four) which God had instituted at the beginning of creation, the importance of relating God to every seventh day. Here God had just established the Jews as a nation, and he wanted to identify his new nation, Israel, as a distinctive people on the earth. One of those distinctives was for them to honor the Sabbath Day. The emphasis in this relationship is that, "In the beginning God created the heaven and

the earth." The God of the Hebrews was and is the only Creator of all that exists, the only true God. God as Father, Holy Spirit, and Only Son are involved in this creation, Gen. 1:1,2; John 1:1-3,10,14. God wanted Moses to tell his people, the Israelites, that the Sabbath held special meaning concerning God and the Israelites. I do not believe that the Sabbath of the Old Covenant is the same as "the first day of the week" in the New Covenant, Exod. 31:13,17. Exod. 31:14 calls for the death of any Israelite who profanes the Sabbath of the Old Covenant. Many people today, who call themselves Christians, want to make the Christian "first day of the week" (Sunday) equal to the Jewish Sabbath of the Old Covenant. I do not subscribe to this position. The ecclesia reveres and honors "the first day of the week," because it is the day on which God the Father raised our Lord Jesus from physical death, Mk 16:9. Believers from the first century have worshiped God through Jesus, God's Messiah (Savior), on "the first day of the week (Sunday)," Acts 20:7; I Cor. 16:2. There is a distinct difference between the Old Covenant's Sabbath and the New Covenant's Lord's Day, although in both, the only Creator is One and the Same, of course.

III. We come now in Exod. 32 to see the thin, shallow faith held by the host of Israel, God's new national entity. Our thinking, to be fair, must take into account that the Hebrews had been slaves for hundreds of years to a strong people who did not recognize Jehovah God, the only true God. The Egyptians had thousands of gods. Two of the main ones were the sun god Ra and the god of strength for fertility, Apis, represented by a bull. Moses had been up on Mount Sinai for weeks, and the people became weary about whether Moses would return. They looked to Aaron for leadership, rallied around him, and asked him to make them a god to lead and to protect them! The Bible does not indicate that Aaron gave any counsel to the people of a contrary opinion. We are told that the peoples' concern was whether Moses would return as leader. They looked to Aaron as leader as Moses had told them, Exod. 24:14. We can ponder the question: If Aaron would not seek to dissuade the people from ignoring their promise to God to follow him only, why did the Jewish elders not object to idolatry? According to the Bible's revelation, Aaron immediately asked the people to bring together their golden earrings to him. The people did as Aaron requested, and he cast from their gold a calf (bull). The people then, with utter sacrilege, pronounced, "This be our god who brought us out of Egypt!" Aaron even built an altar for the false god, and proclaimed, "Tomorrow there will be a feast "unto the Lord," Exod. 32:5. Exod. 32:6,19,25 can mean that the "feast to the Lord" was a lustful display of idolatrous reverence to the Egyptian fertility god, Apis the bull. (The American movie industry has made much of this incident, because human lust and debauchery sells in this nation and around the world, unfortunately.) The Lord God told Moses up on the mount what was happening among his people and pronounced them to be a stubborn people. Referring to their faithful forefathers, Moses begged God not to give the Egyptians reason to say that God did not answer their prayer to him. God agreed not to destroy them, but Moses disciplined them by having the Levites kill about three thousand men. A plague came upon them, because of their sin of idolatry.

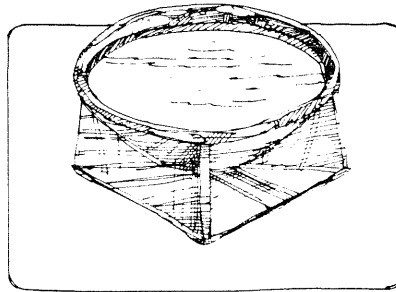
The Furniture of the Tabernacle



Ark of the Covenant

(Ex. 25:10-22)

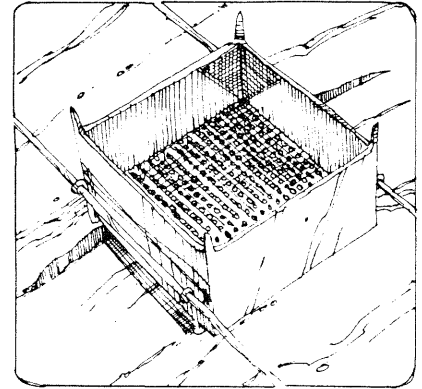
The ark was most sacred of all the furniture in the tabernacle. Here the Hebrews kept a copy of the Ten Commandments, which summarized the whole covenant.



Bronze Laver

(Ex. 30:17-21)

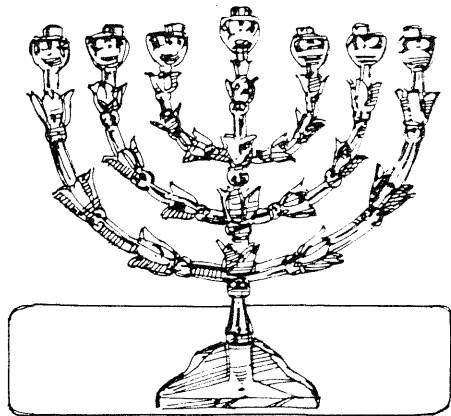
It was to the laver of bronze that the priests would come for cleansing. They must be pure to enter the presence of God.



Altar of Burnt Offering

(Ex. 27:1-8)

Animal sacrifices were offered on this altar, located in the court in front of the tabernacle. The blood of the sacrifice was sprinkled on the four horns of the altar.



Golden Lampstand

(Ex. 25:31-40)

The gold lampstand stood in the holy place, opposite the table of showbread. It held seven lamps, flat bowls in which a wick lay with one end in the oil of the bowl and the lighted end hanging out.

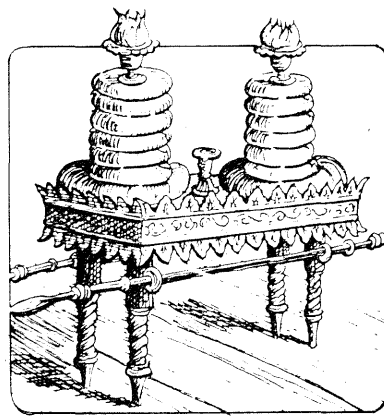
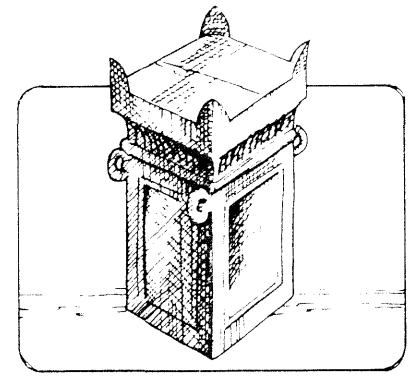


Table of Showbread

(Ex. 25:23-30)

The table of showbread was a stand on which the offerings were placed. Always in God's presence on the table were the 12 loaves of bread representing the 12 tribes.

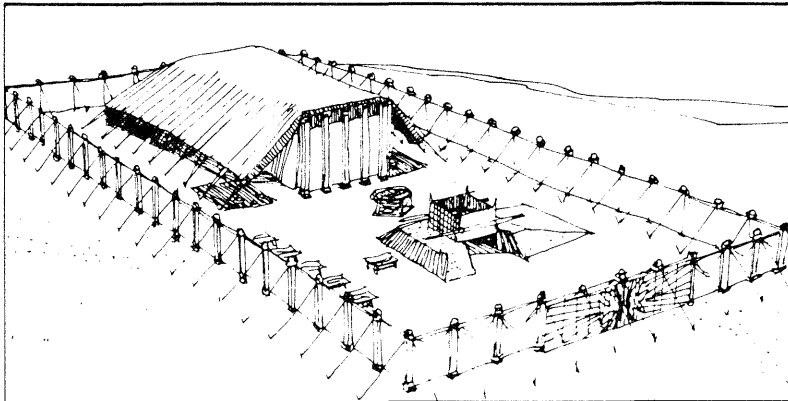


Altar of Incense

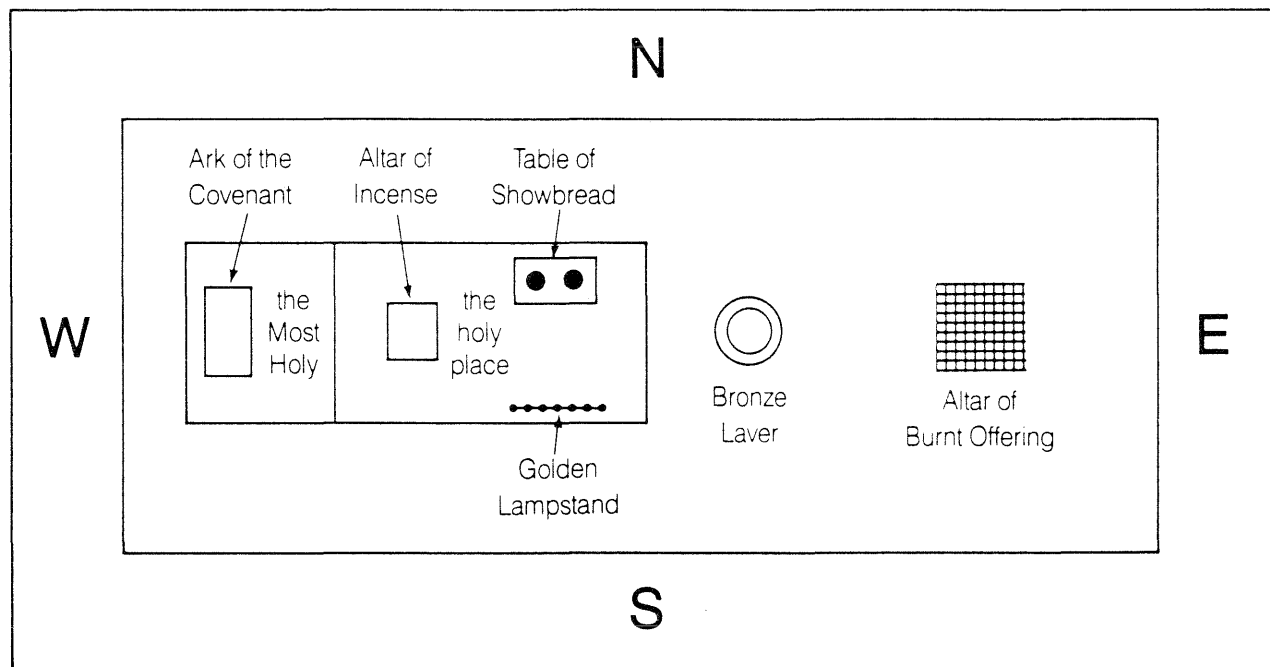
(Ex. 30:1-10)

The altar of incense inside the tabernacle was much smaller than the altar of burnt offering outside. The incense burned on the altar was a perfume of a sweet-smelling aroma.

The Plan of the Tabernacle



The tabernacle was to provide a place where God might dwell among His people. The term *tabernacle* sometimes refers to the tent, including the holy place and the Most Holy, which was covered with embroidered curtains. But in other places it refers to the entire complex, including the curtained court in which the tent stood.



This illustration shows the relative positions of the tabernacle furniture used in Israelite worship. The tabernacle is enlarged for clarity.

Feb. 21, 1999

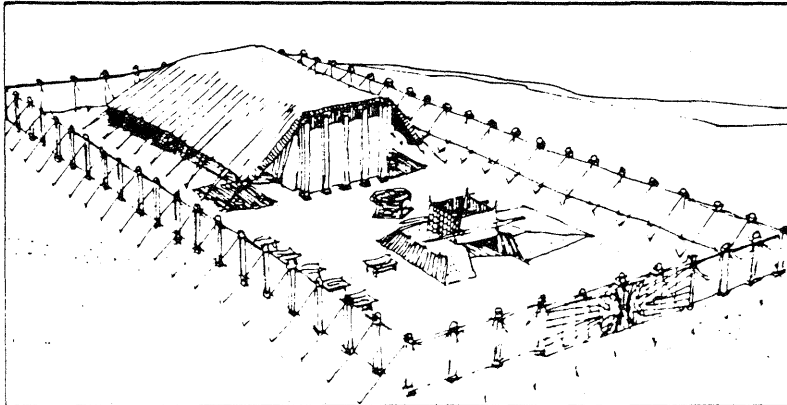
"The Tabernacle And The Law"
Exod. 33-34

Couples Class
Wendell Alford,
Teacher

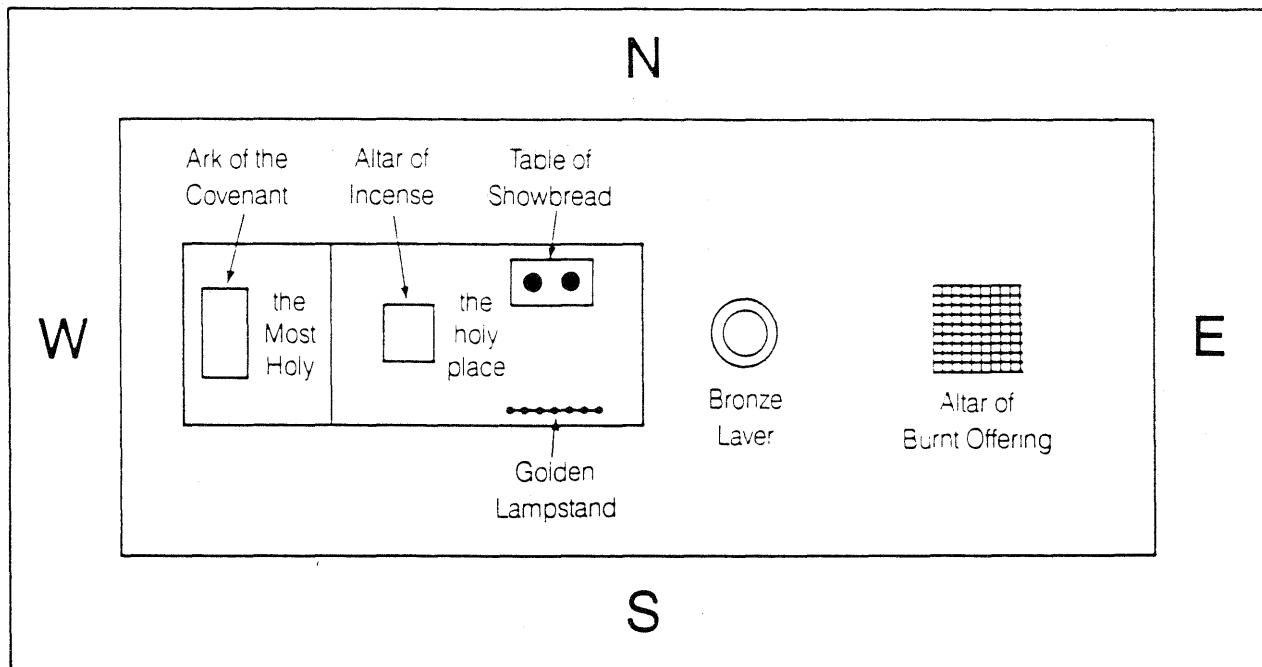
I. Now the people of Israel have the reputation of being "stiffnecked," because they had practiced idolatry under Aaron's leadership. They had given an idol credit for having delivering them from servitude under the Egyptians! God reminds Moses of the purpose of their journey through the desert. They were on their way to the land which God had promised to their forefather, Abraham, hundreds of years before. (God is faithful even though his people were and are stubborn, Rom. 3:4.) God told Moses to continue on the journey and promised to send an angel on ahead to prepare for the Israelites' arriving in Canaan, the "land flowing with milk and honey," Exod. 33:3. God promised to distance himself from the Israelites, "lest I consume you as you travel." The people feared God's reprimand and removed their body ornaments, especially their earrings (See Gen. 35:1-5;), because they had displeased God with their idolatry. The tabernacle was now being constructed, and Moses took the raw materials some distance from where the people were camped. The site where the tabernacle was being erected was on a ridge where it could be seen by the people at their tents. Moses went up and entered the tabernacle area, the people observed him from their tents as he neared the holy tent. I believe that the preincarnate Messiah (Jesus, the Christ) was the "Angel of the Lord" who spoke before to Abraham at Gen. 22:11, Jacob at Gen. 32:30, and is the same one who is now talking with Moses at Exod. 33:9. A pillar of cloud overshadowed the tabernacle, and the people could not see Moses and the Lord. However, the sight was so magnificent that every Israelite stood and worshiped the Lord who was with Moses, Exod. 33:8-11. Exod. 33:11 states explicitly that, "the Lord spoke to Moses face to face, as a man speaks to his friend." This revelation, I believe gives credence to the Lord's being God's Messiah before his coming to earth to be sacrificed, II Cor. 5:19. Moses was not talking face to face with God the Father, but to God the Son, Exod. 33:20-23; John 1:18.

II. When Moses came down with the ten commandments and witnessed

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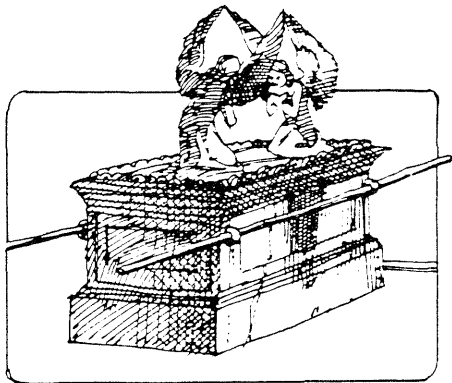
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2-21-99

the idolatry of the people, he was angry and broke the plates at the base of the mount, Exod. 32:19. Now the Lord told Moses to prepare another two plates, take them up the mount, and God promised to rewrite the ten commandments there. God came in a cloud and proclaimed the Lord's mercy and forgiveness, Exod. 34:6-7. The Lord did not promise to "clear the guilty" for the consequences of such sexual diseases as could be taken during such orgies as had happened in Exod. 32. In fact, such sexual diseases could affect the offspring even to the fourth generation. What God is telling Moses is that the physical results of sinful practices can be painfully evident even though God cleanses a person's spirit, i.e., God can forget confessed sins against him, but the physical consequences will, nevertheless, remain in effect, Jer. 31:34; Heb. 8:12. In Exod. 34:6 an interesting point can be noted: the double use of "the Lord" as though there are two persons involved. I believe that the two Lords are God the Father and God the Son. Jesus quoted Psa. 110:1-4 at Matt. 22:41-46 to challenge the Jewish leaders, the Pharisees, concerning the Messiah's relationship to his heavenly Father.

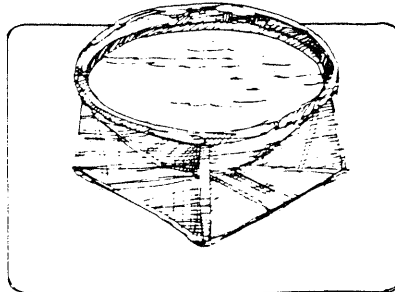
III. God's appearance to Moses with mercy and forgiveness humbled Moses who quickly bowed his head in humility. He then prays to God to accept his worship and continue with Israel even though they are stiffnecked with a proneness to disobey God. He asked the Lord to accept the Israelites as his (the Lord's) own inheritance. When God chose Israel as his own nation in the earth, he did not do so because they were better morally or otherwise superior, obviously. (Lest we should feel spiritually superior to the Jews, we should read Isa. 53:6; Rom. 3:21-23.) God renews his covenant he had made with the Israelites and claims Israel as his own nation. He commands his people not to make a covenant with the people of Canaan. The Hebrews are to eliminate every vestige of those peoples' religious activities. Israel's God is a jealous God, and his people are to continue to observe the Sabbath and the feasts. After weeks Moses returned to the people with the new commandment stones, and a gleaming face reflecting having been in God's presence.

The Furniture of the Tabernacle



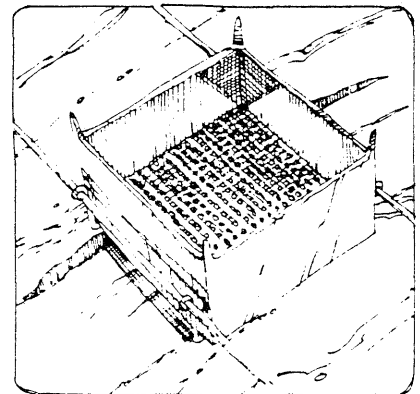
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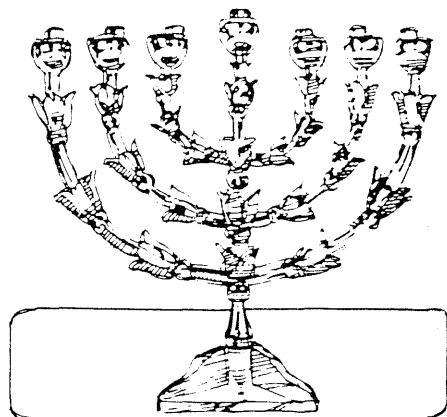
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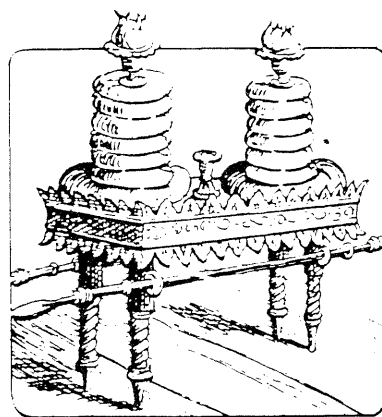
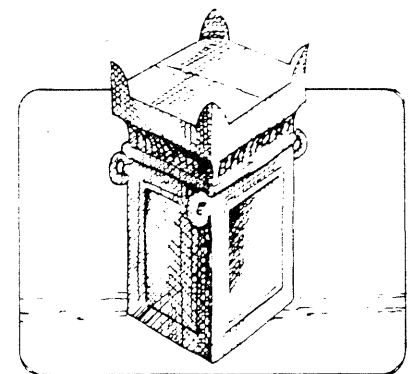


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Feb. 28, 1999

"The Sabbath And The Tabernacle"
Exod. 35-36

Couples Class
Wendell Alford,
Teacher

I. When Moses had descended from Mount Sinai with the second copy of the two tablets containing the Ten Commandments, he called a general meeting of "all the congregation of Israel." He had been up on the mount with the Lord for forty days and forty nights for a second time, Exod. 24:18; 34:28. The Israelites had seen the glory of God still shining from Moses face. His reason for assembling the entire nation was to outline for them God's instructions which he had given to Moses on the mount. The first word from God was to reemphasize the nation's special relation with the Creator, as Creator. They were to maintain this relation by perpetually observing that their God created everything and rested on the seventh day, the Sabbath, Gen. 2:1-3. The people were to reverence every seventh day with their very lives, i.e., if one did not keep that day holy (separate, distinctive), he or she was to be put to death, Exod. 31:14; 35:2, or separated from the congregation (put outside the encampment). Not even a fire was to be kindled on the Sabbath, either for warmth or cooking, Exod. 35:3. This recurring reference relating the new nation of Israel with God as the Creator, and only God, should tell any serious student of the Bible how important God considered observance of the Sabbath Day by Israel to be, and they were to become God's special Law keepers, Deut. 4:5-9; Rom. 3:1-2.

II. Next on Moses' agenda relating God's instruction to Israel, after the Sabbath, was an offering of their material possessions. The specific purpose of these offerings was to build a stockpile of necessary materials for erecting the tabernacle and its furnishings. God had already assigned the tasks of supervision and teaching of others to Bezaleel of Judah and Aholiab of Dan. The former excelled in working with brass, wood and masonry, and the latter in cloth and needle work, Exod. 31:1-6. At this point in the Exodus account, a detailed list of items to be donated by the people is given, Exod. 35:5-36:3. These offerings were to be given by "whoever is of a willing heart," Exod. 35:5,29. We should note that, not only was the materials to be brought, but volunteer work was also a contribution to the building of the tabernacle. God's Word makes specific mention of the women's contribution to the work of the house of worship, Exod. 35:25-26,29. Most of these materials and instructions for the tabernacle was given earlier in Exod. 25-27 as well as the request for offerings from the people, Exod. 25:1-2. However, the inventory list of the materials is more detailed and complete in Exod. 35-36. It appears strange to us that these Israelites could possess so much valuable precious metal and expensive materials in cloth. We should keep in mind that God had promised his people that they would leave Egypt with great wealth, Gen. 15:14, "-- that nation [Egypt], whom they will serve, will I judge: and afterward they [the Israelites] will come out with great possessions." And this promise was made hundreds of years earlier to Abram for his descendants, even before Abram and Sarai were parents! This promise was kept by means of the ten plagues brought upon the Egyptians by God in Moses' day, especially the

tenth plague during which every Egyptian family lost its eldest child. This event led to the establishing of the Passover observance which the Jews have practiced perpetually ever since. The actual transfer of the possessions from the Egyptians to the Israelites is described at Exod. 12:29-36. The worth of all the materials which were used for the tabernacle was in excess of six million dollars at today's prices. A calculation was made several years ago which exceeded five million dollars. Noted should be the fact that the Israelites' gifts were free will, not the tithe which was first established in Gen. 14:20 when Abram gave the mysterious Melchizedek, king of Salem and priest of the most high God (Jehovah), a tenth of the spoils of Abram's victory over the kings of the Sodom and Gomorrah area in rescuing his nephew Lot, Heb. 7. The tithe was later made a regular requirement for the Jews in the Law at Lev. 27:30-34. Free will giving is not "giving 'til it hurts," but rather, "if it hurts, don't give." In other words, "give gladly with joy, or not at all," II Cor. 9:7. The Israelites, on this occasion, were glad to give, because the two construction engineers, Bezaleel and Aholiab, informed Moses, "The people bring much more than enough for the service of the work, which the Lord commanded to make." Moses put out the word that, "Let neither man nor woman make any more work for the offering for the sanctuary. So the people were restrained from giving. For the stuff they made was sufficient for all the work to make it, and too much," Exod. 36:6-7. Fantastic, what a generous people they were! When did we ever see such an example of generosity for the Lord's work? Undoubtedly the people were remembering the Lord's forgiveness at Exod. 34:5-9 after their idolatry at Exod. 32:1-10,14.

III. The remainder of Exod. 36 is given to another explanation of the items made for the holy tabernacle including the court around the tent within the fenced in area. I say "another," because these items were described earlier in Exodus when Moses was given by God the original instructions on Mount Sinai, Exod. 24-27 and 30-31. The reason for the repetition is that the instructions for materials and workmanship were first given, and now in Exod. 35-36 the actual building is being done. Exod. 28-29 are the giving of instructions for the priests' regalia and purification. Exod. 39 relates the implementation of the priests' apparel from the instructions given earlier. I believe that when Moses was writing the Law (Pentateuch, first five books of the Bible), he repeated the details of the first national worship place for the Israelites because of its significance in the ultimate plan of God for humanity, not just for the Jews. The symbolism of the tabernacle and its furnishings found in the New Covenant and the final plans of God are evident when one gives careful attention to these relationships. We touched on this fact in Paul's second Letter to the Corinthians last Lord's Day. And, of course, the letter (Hebrews) to the Jews who had accepted Jesus as their Savior (Messiah) and Lord, spells out, in considerable detail, the relationship of the Old Covenant with the last, New Covenant, e.g., Hebrews Chapters 8-10, et al. "Therefore has he [God] mercy on whom he will have mercy, and whom he will he hardens. You will say then to me Paul (God's Word) why does God still find fault? God is The Potter, humanity is the clay," Rom. 9:18-21.

Mar. 7, 1999

"Review Of The Tabernacle"
Exod. 37-38

Couples Class
Wendell Alford,
Teacher

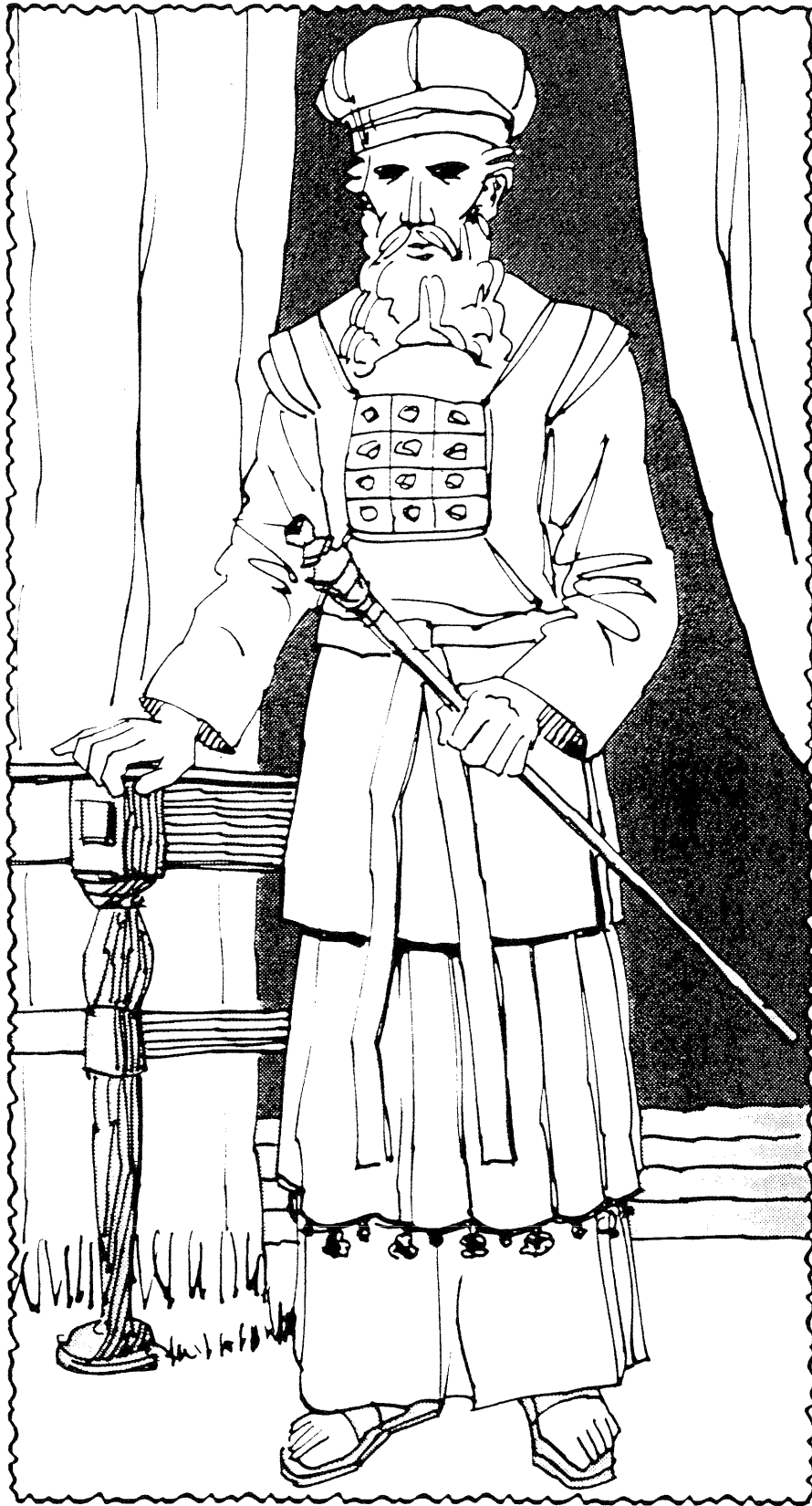
I. I have stressed several times in our study of Exodus the importance of the design of the first tabernacle and the furnishings used for worship in and around the tabernacle. Because of that importance I have elected to relate in Exodus 36:8-38:31 a detailed explanation of the significance of the tabernacle and its associated items to God's communicated will to mankind. There were two items of furniture in the outer court on the east end of the tabernacle installation. When one entered the linen entrance to the tabernacle outer court, the first item encountered was the altar of burnt offering. The concept of burning animal flesh was first given in the Bible at Gen. 22:2-19 when God asked Abraham to sacrifice his only son, Isaac, to test Abraham's loyalty to God. Recall that when Abraham was following God's command here to the letter (Even though Abraham could believe that to do so would sever the possible fulfillment of God's promise at Gen. 15:6,18.), he was pleasing God, because God's plan was to do the same thing thousands of years later for the sins of the whole world, Isa. 53:10; Acts 2:22-23. Of course, God stopped Abraham and provided a lamb for Abraham to sacrifice after the Lord knew that his servant was sincere in sacrificing his only son. Burnt offerings are mentioned by a scribe at Mk 12:28-34 when Jesus was asked by the scribe, "Which is the foremost commandment?" Jesus commended the scribe for stating that, "Loving God above all else and ones neighbor as oneself is worth more than all burnt offerings and sacrifices." At Heb. 10:1-10 the burning of animal flesh for sacrifice is mentioned in vs. 6 as the writer quotes Psa. 40:6-8 and relates such burning to God's own sacrifice, Jesus the Messiah, God's Savior for all who will believe, John 1:16; 3:17-18. One can see that, by understanding the significance of the altar of burnt offerings, every item connected with the tabernacle held an important place in God's communication with mankind. Communication from God to mankind was and is extremely significant for mankind's welfare, because, "In the beginning was the Word [Communication], and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. And the Word became flesh and lived among us [humanity], (and we beheld, Matt. 17:1-3, his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth," John 1:1-2,14.

II. The second item of furniture inside the outer court of the tabernacle was the bronze laver. After the priests passed the burnt sacrifice in the altar of burnt offering, they were required to cleanse themselves in the bronze laver. This cleansing in the New Covenant is represented by the cross on which God's Lamb died for spiritually cleansing every believer in Jesus as God's Messiah (Savior). Jesus was "the Lamb of God, which takes away the sin of the world," John 1:29. It is not insignificant that when John the Immerser was immersing his followers in the Jordan River and elsewhere because "there was much water there," the question of water purification came up for discussion, John 3:22-25. On that occasion the Jews asked about Jesus and John's immersing his disciples in water. John then made a clear distinction between

cleansing by water and receiving God's favor, because, he said, "A man can receive nothing, except it be given him from heaven," John 3:27. The substance of what John was saying was, "He that believes not the Son shall not see [spiritual] life, but the wrath of God remains with him," John 3:36, which is a repeat of John 3:3,8 where Jesus told Nicodemus, "Truthfully, truthfully, I say to you, 'Except a person be born from above [spiritual rebirth through God's Spirit], he or she cannot see (understand) the kingdom of God.'" As the priests washed at the bronze laver for purification, they were depicting what the symbol of immersing in water to identify with God's sacrifice of Jesus, God's Lamb, on the cross, means to believers in Jesus in the New Covenant.

III. After the burnt offering was finished and the priests had cleansed themselves symbolically by washing themselves in the water in the bronze laver, they were then, and only then, qualified to enter the holy place within the tabernacle building (tent). The priests had daily duties in maintaining the holy furnishings kept there. One of these furnishings was the table for showbread to the right (north) as they entered the holy place. The showbread on this gold table consisted of twelve baked cakes, made of fine flour. It was the duty of the priests each Sabbath Day to place fresh, hot bread on the table. In the time of David, when King Saul was attempting to kill him, David approached the priest in the tabernacle for bread for himself and his men. The priest, Ahimelech, was reluctant to let David have the holy showbread, and he had no ordinary bread. However, he relented and let David take the hallowed bread for food, I Sam. 21:2-6. Our Lord Jesus answered the criticism of the Pharisees for not keeping the Jewish Sabbath law. Jesus stated that David broke a strict interpretation of the law regarding the eating of showbread by one who was not a priest, the profaning of the Sabbath by the priest, and omitting of mercy for the sake of a mechanical sacrifice. Jesus stated simply, "The Son of man is Lord even of the Sabbath day," Matt. 12:1-8. The showbread is a foretelling of Jesus as the bread of life without error (yeast), perfect as God's sacrifice for all sin of those who will trust him as God Messiah (Savior) and Lord.

IV. The gold candlestick sat across the aisle from the table for showbread just inside the holy place. The "candlestick" was really not a stand for candles, but it held seven richly-adorned oil lamps. The lampstand was not molded, but "of beaten work," and was worth tens of thousands of current dollars since it was made of solid gold. It consisted of a central stem with six branches, three on each side of the stem lamp. The lampstand was about five feet high and was lighted every evening and dressed every morning. Each of the seven lamps was supplied with cotton and about two glasses of the purest olive oil, sufficient to keep it burning during a long night. This bright light (in its day) was the forerunner of our Lord as the light of the world, John 1:35; 8:12; 9:5. Next Lord's Day we should finish our study of Exodus. We shall continue examining the completion of the tabernacle, look again at the priest's dress, the inspection by Moses of the tabernacle, and the glorification (dedication) with the Lord's presence.



The high priest's dress represented his function as mediator between God and people.

Mar. 14, 1999

"The Grand Finale"
Exod. 39-40

Couples Class
Wendell Alford,
Teacher

I. Today we will continue the theological significance of the tabernacle furnishings. Last week we examined the provisions for burnt offerings, cleansing by water (laver), unleavened showbread, and the gold stand for light. We now look at the altar of incense, the veil between the holy place (room) and the most holy place and the ark of the covenant with its mercy seat behind that veil. The altar of incense was the last item before the veil which restricted the priests from the symbolic presence of God Almighty. This incense burning made the holy place pleasant, because it contrasted with the harsh odor emitted from the burned animal flesh outside the entrance to the tabernacle. The incense burned on this altar was unique and was used nowhere else by the Hebrews. The altar was small (1.5 feet square and 3 feet high), but the rim around the top four sides was peaked on all four corners and therefore appeared as a crown for a king. Israel's priests at this time (Aaron and his two sons) were mediators between the Israelites and their God, Jehovah, and vice versa. With the exception of the annual visit by the high priest, no one was allowed into the holy of holies. I believe that the incense aroma and stand were a figure of the presence of God the Son and a place of prayer, Psa. 141:2; Lk 1:5-10; Rev. 8:1-5. At this time our Lord had not been sacrificed for the sins of all who will believe in and trust him. Jesus still stands between God the Father and God's people, the ecclesia, John 17:9; I Tim. 2:5.

II. The veil which separated the holy place from the holy of holies, held a very special place in God's (our heavenly Father's through our faith in Jesus his Messiah, Savior) plan for humanity. The veil was a figure of Jesus Christ, because the only, exclusive way to know God the Father is by means of our Lord, Jesus Christ. Jesus is the way, the truth, and the (eternal, spiritual) life, John 14:5-7. Throughout the Old Covenant period the way to please God was to keep his Law. The Old Covenant was imperfect, not because of God's provisions in the Law, but because of mankind's insufficient response in honoring God's commands, Heb. 7:11,19,25; 8:9; 9:12-15. At what point did the New Covenant become effective? I believe that it began at the instant Jesus said on the cross at his physical dying, "It is finished!." What is the antecedent of "It" in Jesus' affirmation? I believe it was God the Father's plan of spiritual salvation (eternal life) through the shed blood (physical life) of his Son, Jesus the Messiah. And what does God's new plan (Covenant) have to do with the tabernacle (then Herod's Temple)? The answer is given at Matt. 27:50-51, "Jesus, when he had cried with a loud voice [John 19:30, "It is finished!"], yielded up the ghost (his spirit, physical life). And, behold (perceive), the veil of the Temple was rent in twain [torn into two pieces, was opened] from the top to bottom - - ." The opening in the veil signified that Jesus had finished the work assigned to him by his heavenly Father, John 17:1-5, and joined his Father in heaven, Heb. 9:24-28.

III. Lastly, in our examination of the long range implication of

the tabernacle's furnishings, we look at the last but most important representation in the tabernacle, the ark of the covenant. The veil covering the entrance to the most holy place in the tabernacle where the Hebrews worshiped, covered the very spot representing the dwelling place of God as the Israelites traveled to Canaan. God had told Moses that the law which God himself had written was to be kept in a special container (about four feet long with the height and width about two feet each) made of shittim (acacia) wood and completely covered within and without with pure gold. This container was to have a cover made entirely of pure gold including two figures (cherubims) with two upstretched wings each. This cover on the ark of the covenant was to be the mercy seat to represent God's mercy for those who confessed their sins through the high priest to God. Once every year the high priest (Aaron) would enter the holiest place after having especially prepared himself to offer an atonement for the sins of himself and all Israel, Lev. 16:34; Heb. 9:7,24,28. The ark of the covenant contained (Heb. 9:4): manna representing God's prophet whom God the Father sent from heaven (John 6:32-33); Aaron's rod which had become alive after it had been dead, representing Jesus' resurrection, and his becoming the eternal high priest of God; the ten commandments of God which God had written himself on stones (a synopsis of the whole law of God) representing the kingship of Jesus whom God the Father would send, Rev. 1:5-6; 17:14.

IV. The regalia for the Israeli priests, Aaron and his two sons, Eleazar and Ithamar, was given meticulous attention in God's instructions to Moses. The priests were conspicuous as they served God and the people in and around the place of worship, the tabernacle and later the temples. The high priesthood followed the lineage of Eleazar until the time of Eli who was of the house of Ithamar. However, Solomon returned the high priesthood line to Zadok of the house of Eleazar. As the high priest mingled with the people, the aroma in the holy place made his presence ever apparent as well as those of the other priests. Because of this condition their presence served as a role model for the citizens. Therefore, their garments also were very important, and the Lord gave explicit and forceful instructions to Moses concerning those garments. In Exod. 39 where the priests' regalia is reexamined, the phrase, "as the Lord commanded Moses," appears a total of nine times, vss. 1,5,7,21, 26,29,31,32, and 43. Today, when God has elected to dwell in the person of every believer he calls (the ecclesia) by the person of his Holy Spirit, there is no priest necessary except Jesus, our eternal High Priest, Acts 2:17; Heb. 7:22-28; I Pet. 2:5,9; Rev. 1:6. The last chapter of Exodus (40) tells us that the tabernacle was to be set up on the first day of Abib (March-April). The tabernacle was finished on the first month of the following year, and Aaron and his sons were dressed in splendor for the worshiping of God. Moses had done everything "according to all that the Lord had commanded him," Exod. 40:16. When Moses was done, immediately a cloud covered the tabernacle and the glory of the Lord (Shekinah) filled the new place of worship, Exod. 40:34. God's presence dwelt with the Israelites in this way as they continued toward Canaan. God's presence today is represented by God's Holy Spirit.

Apr. 25, 1999

~~October 17, 1993~~ - Mental Disease Supp. - Wendell Alford, Teacher

I. Mental Disease: All illnesses whose manifestations are primarily behavioral disturbances, whether the primary cause be physical or psychological, and also those diseases, often called "psychosomatic," in which there is a mixture of emotional cause and physical effect. A. Mental retardation - due to congenitive or hereditary defects and can be contracted through illness or abnormal conditions of the mother during pregnancy.

B. Dementia - loss of mental/emotional capacity through physical changes in the brain which can be due to brain destruction through accident, cancer, infection (can be sexually or intimately transmitted), or hardening of the arteries through diet/age.

C. Psychoneurosis - disorders so designated are illnesses when the problem progresses beyond a certain degree and thereby impairs ones capacity to carry on satisfactorily the personal business of living. Basic to neuroses is a sense of anxiety and ways to overcome the causes of that anxiety. These causes can be real or imagined. Fear or real danger to ones well-being is normal as is actions to relieve the danger. However, there are obsessive fears (phobias) such as fears of closed spaces, high places, crossing the street, certain animals, crowds, public speaking, etc., which can be real or mental fabrications. Mild depression caused by certain neuroses can be normal such as grief caused by natural events, e.g., loss of a loved one, loss of ones livelihood. Everyone experiences mild neuroses from such events beyond ones control, and such experience is normal. Prolonged neuroses which are intense enough to effect normal acitvities should have professional attention.

D. Psychosis - a major, serious mental disease which should be referred to a professional. A person so inflicted can suffer serious confusion of facts with fiction (unreality), hallucinary, or delusinary ideas. Prolonged, intense negative feelings of ones own self worth or the opposite, elated feelings of self, and especially such feelings (positive and negative) following each other reveal psychotic illness. Prolonged (days) of intense feelings of depression (inability to overcome profound anxiety) also constitutes psychotic illness. Sometimes suicidal impulses occur during deep depression. Pronounced suspicion of others intentions of harm to oneself (paranoia) can fall into this illness. One who is psychotically ill is a danger to him or herself and/or others also.

II. Treatments for mental illness:

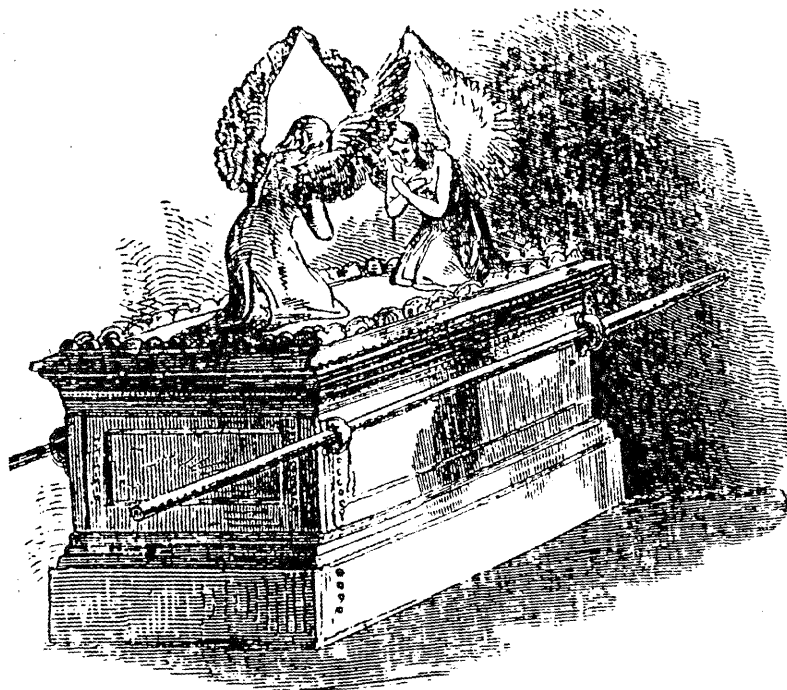
A. Psychotherapy - most commonly administered. Social (one to one or group) context for awareness of normality.

B. Drugs - establishing chemical balance to achieve normal mental processes, e.g., lithium, prozac, sedative. MD prescription only.

C. Hypnosis - by specialists exclusively.

D. Hospitalization - for dietary, laboratory checks, and controlled treatment by specialists for either short or long-term care. Usually for special or more serious cases.

III. Character disorders - some people find it difficult to accept as illness: certain sexual practices, e.g., homosexuality, pedophile and pederast behavior; social activities, e.g., criminal and other antisocial behavior; individualistic behavior such as substance abuse (including alcohol), self-destructiveness.



Ark of the Covenant.



Figure of Ashtoreth.

June 13, 1999

"The Jews in the Latter Days"
Dan. 10

Couples Class
Wendell Alford,
Teacher

I. It is evident that God in his Word refers to personages in secular history to mark the time of his revelation to mankind. This arrangement establishes the timing of biblical events to the record keeping which men of all persuasions have been diligent in keeping thorough accounts through the ages. Only recently we are seeing a determined effort on the part of some to "rewrite history" to make former events conform to what current strategists want their contemporaries to believe. There are those who profess to be Christians who have added to and/or interpreted the Bible to make it conform to what enhances their own self-interests. But the Lord has maintained a true copy of his Word so that during our day of a profusion and confusion of ideas and communications, we can follow Jesus' admonition, "whoso readeth, let him understand," Matt. 24:15. Another advantage which those who are trusting Jesus' righteousness for being in God's favor is that the Lord has promised the indwelling power and guidance of his Holy Spirit during our time in world history, John 14:22-26; Acts 2:16-18. So now we can peg the time rather closely when God revealed this vision of Dan. 10-12 to us (and particularly to his people, the Jews) as during the third year of the reign of Cyrus, king of Persia (Iran). As Cyrus (Hebrew transliteration of Cyrus is "Koresh." Recall Waco, Texas incident.) began to rule the Persian Empire, which he founded, about 540 BC, we are told thereby that the vision begun in Dan. 10 was about 537 or 536 BC. Before King Cyrus died in 530 BC, he showed a kindness to the Jews as noted by some of God's Old Covenant prophets, II Chron. 36:22-23; Ezra 1:1. Daniel served King Cyrus until during the first year of his reign, Dan. 1:21. Therefore, Daniel could have been in retirement from governmental service with an ample pension when this vision of Chaps. 10-12 occurred in the third year of Cyrus' reign. At Dan. 6:28 we learned that "Daniel prospered in the reign of Darius, and in the reign of Cyrus the Persian." There were three Dariuses (Dynasties) and one Cyrus.

II. Chap. 10 begins by stating clearly that Daniel had revealed to him a "thing," (word or message), an understanding of a vision which involved a long appointed time. The understanding was communicated to the prophet in a method which is not told to us, but we are told that the message received by Daniel was very sad. In fact, Daniel mourned for "three full weeks," vs. 2. Just how sad was the aged prophet? "I ate no pleasant bread, neither came flesh nor wine in my mouth, neither did I anoint myself at all, till three weeks were fulfilled," vs. 3. He is saying here that he fasted and did not even care for personal hygiene (bath?) for twenty-one days. I believe there are two reasons for the prophet's grief and unhappiness. One, Daniel learned that the Jews' precarious condition would not be helped for a long period, and two, according to the Scripture references cited above (II Chron., Ezra, and Isa.), in Cyrus' first year of reign he gave the Jews permission to return to Jerusalem. However, when Zerubbabel (head of Judah's tribe) prepared to lead the Jews back west to Israel, so few volunteered to return that Zerubbabel had a delay in finishing the Temple which

Cyrus had authorized for sixteen years, Isa. 44:28-45:1. The opposition of the Samaritans to the Jews' return further complicated the operation. The scarcity of the returning Jews was a burden to Daniel, because he loved his homeland and would have loved to return himself. He was now over ninety years of age and retired. (For details of the struggles to erect the new Temple and Jerusalem, review the prophets Ezra and Nehemiah.)

III. After learning of the long time before the salvation of his people, the Jews, Daniel went down along the Tigris River (Hiddekil) bank, and, on April 24 (Nisan), he apparently meditated upon the sad message he had learned. While thinking of the sad situation the Jews, his people, were facing, he looked up and saw a spectacular man in extraordinary attire. The man was dressed in fine linen with a gold band around his chest and a body of beryl (a steel-gray, metallic element). The man's face appeared as lightning, his eyes were as flames, and his arms and feet shined like bright brass. The person's voice sounded like a multitude of voices in unison when he spoke. The majesty and awesomeness of the being was visible to Daniel only, although other people were there also. (See a like instance in Acts 9:1-8.) As the earth shook in the area, the people with Daniel ran for safety. After the others left, the prophet was left alone on the river bank. The vision of this glorious person (vss. 5-9) was so awesome that Daniel's physical strength drained from him. Prostrate upon the ground, the prophet drifted into a deep sleep. Another man (a heavenly messenger) in the vision touched Daniel and brought him upon his all fours and asked him to stand. Daniel stood trembling and heard again that he was "greatly beloved." The man in the vision said an unusual thing regarding how he had been delayed for three weeks because of duties with the prince of Persia (Cyrus, Isa. 44:24 - 45:5). The messenger stated that he had come to reveal to Daniel what would happen to his people, the Jews. At this point the prophet became speechless and bowed his face to the ground. Daniel again became weak, and when he confessed this condition to the heavenly messenger, he again identified Daniel as one "greatly beloved." He touched Daniel, strengthened him, and told him not to fear but be strong, vss. 18-19. The revealer to the prophet of heavenly things again referred to the prince of Persia and said that prince would be followed by the prince of Greece (Alexander the Great). This thought appears to be a reaffirmation of what has been revealed in earlier chapters. The angel then again mentions the angel Michael who is following the orders of the person from heaven described in vss. 5-9.

IV. Just who is the forceful being in this vision (vss. 5-9) of Daniel? I believe that he was the same one who appeared to Peter, James, John, Moses, and Elias in Matt. 17:1-13, who appeared to Paul the Apostle in Acts 9:3-9, and who appeared to John the Apostle in Rev. 1:10-17, i.e., God's glorified Son, Jesus. God's messengers lend mystery to God's activities on earth. At the end time it will be Michael who will lead a force of angels to purge heaven, Rev. 12:7; 20:10, and Satan will oppose him with his angels but lose his last battle. We believers are blessed, I Cor. 2:9-10.

July 4, 1999

"Jesus Uncovers The Future"
Rev. 1

Couples Class
Wendell Alford,
Teacher

I. What was hidden from Daniel at Dan. 12:9, about 600 years before Jesus revealed the information in the last book of God's total recorded communication to mankind, is uncovered in the Revelation of Jesus through John, the Lord's servant. More and more attention has been given to end-time events since WWII, especially in the last two or three decades. Between the two World Wars many Bible students believed that WWI, which was hailed as "the war to end all wars," would bring in a period of peace. That period of peace would create a world situation in which the Messiah would come and set up his promised Kingdom of God on earth. This possibility of Bible interpretation was, in part, in keeping with the early period of church history in the minds of some. However, Origen (AD 185-254), in contrast, spoke against Chiliasm which doctrine involves a literal exposition of the eschatological pictures of the New Covenant. It includes the teaching of the millennium, the period of one thousand years given in Rev. 20. Later, Augustine (AD 354-430) made his contribution to Christian philosophy after the Roman Empire had high-handedly taken over the Christian Religion as its own under Constantine I in c. AD 323. Augustine essentially made the Christian Church synonymous with the Kingdom of God. In other words, the Roman Church disallowed God's ever maintaining the Jews as a nation and dealing with them as a congregate people again. Further, the Roman Church in 1870 determined the head of that group to be infallible in matters of religious faith and morals. The Roman Church still forbids its members to believe in the millennial period as a kingdom period in which God's early Covenant with the Jews will be fulfilled. (Catechism of the [Roman] Catholic Church, 1994, p. 177, Paragraph 676, "The [Roman] Church has rejected even modified forms of this falsification of the kingdom to come under the name of millenarianism, especially the 'intrinsically perverse' political form of a secular messianism.") They take this position because they presume the Roman Church to be the same as the Kingdom of God. I make this point to say that Christendom is far from unified in its understanding of what the Revelation of Jesus Christ involves, Matt. 20:24-28.

II. In light of the above information I believe that we should reaffirm what God's Word states at Acts 15:13-19; Rom. 11:25-29. There are many other Scriptures which relate the same position. Jesus' Revelation tells of the relatively short period (seven years, Dan. 9:27) in which the entire earth and especially the Jews will undergo a severe persecution of which Jesus spoke in Matt. 24:21. I believe that during that time the ekklesia will have been taken away from the earth to be with the Lord. In addition to this seven-year period of unique persecution in Chaps. 6-18, the prior ekklesia period is given in Chaps. 1-3. Chaps. 4-5 reveal the scene in heaven with the Lord and the ekklesia in preparation for the marriage of the Lamb, the Lord Jesus, and his bride, the ekklesia (the called out ones) in Chap. 19; Eph. 5:28-33. Chap. 20 reveals the one thousand year reign of Jesus on the earth, and Chaps. 21-22

make the transition between the millennial kingdom and eternity after the last, final judgment of all unbelievers before the great white throne in Chap. 20. This prophecy will make believers happy (blessed), vs. 3, because it reveals the past, present, and the future, vs. 19. In vss. 4-7 Jesus reveals the emphasis of the local congregations whose members (the ekklesia) are being "kings [for being "in Christ," Eph. 1:10-14] and priests unto God," because we have been the ones whom God loves and has "washed [separated] us from our sins in his own blood." We are assured in vs. 7 that Jesus will keep his promise to return in the clouds (Matt. 24:30-31). Upon his return "every eye shall see him, they [the Jews] which pierced him," Acts 2:22-23,36, in consort with the Romans, John 19:12-16. In vs. 8 Jesus reveals who is giving to John the information in the Revelation, "I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the ending, which is, and which was, and which is to come, the Almighty." Note well the last word "Almighty," the everlasting God, Isa. 9:6. Relate that affirmation with vss. 17-18 where Jesus repeats the duration of his existence and asserts that he is the one who has the keys to hades (place of the physically dead) and death (spiritual separation from God). In vss. 9-10 John identifies himself and his circumstance during which he received God's Revelation. He was on the Isle of Patmos in the Spirit on the Lord's Day (Sunday), and behind him he heard a trumpet sound which was the voice of our Lord. The voice directed John to "write in a book" which was to be sent to seven local congregations, and which he named. Those local congregations were located in Asia, an area which we today call Asia Minor, Turkey. They were at Ephesus, Symrna, Pergamos, Thyratira, Sardis, Philadelphia, and Laodicea, vs. 11. John had been the pastor at Ephesus, and these surrounding congregations he knew and were known by him.

III. I want to reiterate for emphasis here what is being revealed to John by Jesus Christ concerning the importance of the local congregation as entities which relate directly to the Lord. Jesus could have used the same approach which James did at Jam. 1:1-2 (all Jews who had come to believe in Jesus as the Messiah), or as Peter did at I Pet. 1:1-2, i.e., to the general (catholic) group of believers throughout the world, but Jesus did not. I believe that this local congregation emphasis was precisely because of what was happening (II Thes. 2:7) and what would continue to happen to the "general church" as it developed in later years. The first part (Chaps. 1-3) of Jesus' Revelation to John is intended, I believe, to represent the period between John's time and the time in which we live and until Jesus comes for us believers, John 14:3. In Chaps. 4-5, after the ekklesia has left the earth we will be with our Lord in heaven in preparation for participation in the forthcoming Kingdom of God which Jesus will come and establish on earth. We will be with him to reign with him during that long period of one thousand years and beyond, I Cor. 6:2; II Tim. 2:11-13; Rev. 5:10; 20:6; 22:5. The Lord Jesus, who will be in absolute control during the entire Revelation period, is introduced in Rev. 1:13-17 in his glorious divine majesty. When John saw him, "I fell at his feet as dead. And he laid his hand upon me and said, 'Fear not; I am the first and the last: I am he that liveth, and was dead; and, behold I am alive for evermore, Amen.'" PRAISE HIM !!!!!

July 11, 1999

"Local Ecclesia Messages - I"
Rev. 2

Couples Class
Wendell Alford,
Teacher

I. In Chap. 1 of the Revelation of Jesus Christ to his servant John (and to us), we are told in vs. 20 that the seven candlesticks which John saw were the seven local churches and which the apostle discusses in Chaps. 2 and 3. Further, in 1:20 Jesus says that he holds "in my right hand" each of the local congregations. He mentions the messengers, vss. 4, 20, who were special Spirits sent by God at this time to each of these congregations. As we begin consideration of Chaps. 2 and 3, we learn that Jesus has an intimate, personal knowledge of the activities of each local group. He knew their personalities, their strengths and weaknesses. As we examine the Lord's observations of these families of faith in him, we learn what pleases and displeases the Lord Jesus as local bodies of immersed believers in Jesus as their (our) Lord and Savior. An obvious message for us today is contained in these admonitions and commendations of these seven congregations (churches). How do we demonstrate those services which please our Lord? What about those activities of the congregation which displease him? Not only does the Holy Spirit instruct and encourage us believers as individuals, but he also corrects and encourages us as families of believers in Jesus Christ, John 14:22-27; Rev. 2:2. As I mentioned in Chap. 1, I believe that there appears to be an historical revelation in the treatment of the groups from the first, Ephesus, through the last, Laodicea. We now have the historical record through two plus millennia to note the changes. There were problems in the congregations during the very first century of the New Covenant, Acts 15:4-5; I Cor. 5:9-13; Gal. 2:11-14; II Thes. 2:7; II Pet. 2:1-3; Jude 3-4. When this book of Jesus' Revelation was written by John in the last decade of that first century, the Lord made it clear that he is "walking in the midst of the congregations [in the person of the Holy Spirit, I believe]," and therefore has an intimate knowledge of the activities of each spiritual family.

II. The first of the seven congregations Jesus notes is at Ephesus where Paul had worked in establishing the congregation on his third journey for missions. Later in the century John the apostle came there and served as pastor. During his tenure he was taken to the Isle of Patmos as an exile because of his faith in Jesus as the Messiah. After his exile he returned to the congregation, and tradition has it that he was buried at Ephesus. The city of Ephesus was a religiously evil city. The huge Greek temple of Diana was rebuilt there by Alexander the Great, because an earlier wood temple had burned to ashes on the day of Alexander's birth. Worship in this temple involved evil at its worst. The rites practiced there were sensual and sexual in nature with social sexual orgies as a normal part of the ceremonies. Also, materialism was the prevailing economic philosophy relating to the extensive trade and commerce activities in the vicinity. As Jesus judged the spiritual health of the believing congregation, he recognized their good works. We should recognize that these works are not for spiritual salvation but for service, evangelism, righteous living, and encouragement for fellow believers in Jesus Christ. Through Paul the Lord had

told these Ephesians (and us), "For by grace are ye saved through faith; and not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: not of works, lest any man should boast. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God hath before prepared that we should walk in them," Eph. 2:8-10. Their good works as believers were not going unnoticed. They were worked to the point of being weary. The Holy Spirit (Eph. 5:18), however, gave them patience as they labored, knowing that they were in a social circumstance of evil people. Their patience was the result of trusting God's faithfulness to keep his promise, "for my namesake," vs. 3. One test for having been designated as a true apostle was whether one had seen the resurrected Christ (as Paul had, Acts 22:7-1; I Cor. 9:1; 15:8-11). Of some who so claimed, Jesus said, "were liars," vs. 2. We still today have persons claiming such a status. Jesus, I believe, would classify them as liars, for the apostolic ecclesia ceased when the first and only apostles died physically by about 100 AD. This period of about sixty years from the coming of the Holy Spirit (Acts 2) to 100 AD approximates the historical period covered by the Ephesian congregation in the Revelation while God was calling out his elect from among the Gentiles and all Jews who would accept Jesus as God's Messiah, Savior. Jesus' one negative judgment against the Ephesian congregation was that their devotion to the person of Jesus had waned, "left their (best) first love." Our devoted love for Jesus as Savior and Lord of our lives is extremely important. We love other believers because of their relationship to the same person, Jesus, (John 13:34-35; 15:12,17), our same spiritual family!

III. The Lord's letter to the Smyrna believers indicates that this group was poor and persecuted. That suffering would be short-lived ("ten days," vs. 10), and that period is relatively brief compared to the long time remaining in the "times of the Gentiles." Therefore, the period which Smyrna covers is from about 100 AD to about 323 AD when Constantine I embraced Christianity for political purposes and issued an edict giving tolerance to Christendom, i.e., giving that religion equal status with the Roman pagan religions. He later made Christianity the official religion of the Roman Empire. Next, the Lord Jesus speaks to the Pergamum Church which was an amalgamation of the Church and the Roman Empire. Even so, the group did have some members of the true ecclesia, but some of these were martyred by those who would make the ecclesia members a part of the Roman governmental bureaucracy. (Antipas is specifically named as a faithful martyr for not having "denied my faith [faith in me]," vs. 13.) They (the congregation) were charged to repent by Jesus as John had admonished at I John 1:9. The last church in the historical period summarized in Chap. 2 is the congregation at Thyatira and represents the era known as the Dark Ages by historians. It lasted from about 600 AD to about 1000 AD. The Roman Church in this period was antagonistic toward political entities other than the "Holy Roman Empire," and the Church and State combination was becoming universal (catholic) throughout Europe and expanding toward the East. The woman Jezebel is recalled at vs. 20 and indicates that paganism was being brought in among the ecclesia members, I Kings 16:31-33. To each local congregation Jesus said, "[Listen to] what the Holy Spirit saith (my italics) unto the ecclesia."

July 18, 1999

"Local Ecclesia Messages - II"
Rev. 3

Couples Class
Wendell Alford,
Teacher

I. Today we examine God's Revelation to us through his Son, Jesus Christ, an angel (messenger), John the apostle, to seven local first century groups of the ecclesia in Asia (Turkey), and finally, to all members of the Lord's ecclesia from wherever on earth God calls them into his kingdom in centuries to follow. In particular we look at Chap. 3 which continues the messages to the seven local congregations as well as, I believe, the general historical changes which are to happen to the ecclesia from John's day to when the Lord calls his people to himself from the earth into the skies above. We looked last week at the local groups at Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamos, and Thyatira. Today we are told Jesus' messages to Sardis, Philadelphia, and Laodicea. After today we shall have examined all seven congregations, and it is well, I believe, to give a general overview of the spiritual temperature of each of the local groups. Three of the groups were judged by the Lord to be mixed in their service: Ephesus, Pergamos and Thyatira. Ephesus was reprimanded only for giving Jesus a waning love in their service even though they were doctrinally correct. Pergamos not only disallowed the Lord Jesus as singular in importance, but attempted to divide their ultimate loyalty between Caesar and the Lord (Acts 4:19). Thyatira let sensual desires and current affairs emphasis sap their spiritual energies which amounted to a type of Jezebel idolatry. All three of these congregations had good works, i.e., they were zealous in their witnessing as congregations to those who had not heard the Gospel. The two groups of the ecclesia at Smyrna and Philadelphia received no words of condemnation from the Lord. Smyrna was a poor group insofar as earthly possessions were concerned but rich in their spiritual status. The former group were severely persecuted by the Roman Empire, and the latter were very active in missions beyond their local area. Both Smyrna and Philadelphia dealt with a common problem correctly according to Jesus' messages to them (2:9; 3:9). Some were claiming to be Jews but were perhaps Jewish only genealogically and had apparently left their Jewish faith and were attempting to fellowship with believers but had not placed their faith in Jesus as Messiah (Savior). The true believers recognized the difference in trusting Christ and his righteousness for eternal life as over against trusting being offspring of Abraham as Paul (God) told the ecclesia at Rome in Rom. 9:6-8. Jesus in his teaching explained the same problem at John 8:31-44. Today we have in the world hundreds of religious variations which trust many things, persons, and ethical positions other than the person of Jesus, God's Savior, for eternal life. I believe precisely what Jesus said, "I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man [person] cometh unto the Father [God], but [except] by me," John 14:6. In John 14:7 following that exclusive position of Jesus between the Creator and all humanity, the Lord continues, "If ye had known me, ye should have known my Father also: and from henceforth ye know him, and have seen him." In this teaching Jesus equates himself with God, I believe, as he does also at John 10:24-33; 17:11.

II. The two congregations to whom Jesus gave no commendations but

all condemnations were Sardis and Laodicea. In the ongoing history of the church in the world, Sardis, I believe, covers the period of about 1500 to 1800 when there was an uprising against the Roman Church (by now Catholic) which had become, in effect, a national sovereignty among the nations of the earth. The chief persons who championed the evils which the Roman Church was introducing into the Word of God (traditions) were the bishops of the headquarters at Rome. That seat of authority came to be known as the Vatican (Lat. Vaticanus, the name of the hill on which it was located, one of the seven hills on which Rome sits). A person who did much to countermand the religious/political (Matt. 20:20-28) authority of the Roman Church was Martin Luther (1483-1546). His Reformation motivation came from his study of God's Word, most especially of Rom. 1:17, "For therein [the Gospel] is the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith: as it is written, 'The just shall live by faith.'" Others protested the deviations from these Bible truths, e.g., John Calvin, John Knox, John Bunyan, John Wesley, John Moffatt, William Carey, etc., but many of their followers have today grown away from the Word. Philadelphia received only commendations from the Lord. Why? I believe for two main reasons: First, the Reformation guided believers away from the added Roman Catholic Church teachings, and secondly, many members of the ecclesia were engaged in a vital missions plan. At Rev. 3:8 Jesus said that he had placed before them "an open door," and at 3:10 they were exercising patience. It is during this period of patiently spreading the Gospel (missions) that Jesus promised to "come quickly." Also at 3:10 Jesus said that because the ecclesia members during that period have endured by keeping his Word, he will "keep thee (believers) from the hour of temptation, which shall come upon the [entire] earth." I believe that Jesus is saying that it will be during this Philadelphian period when he will take his true ecclesia from the earth, Matt. 24:36-44; John 14:3; I Cor. 15:51-52; I Thes. 4:13-18. How very important is the Word of God to us believers today and our complete, singular devotion to Jesus as Lord and Savior!

III. When the ecclesia is taken from the earth, there will be organized churches, even groups which will envelope the entire earth, but God's Spirit will not be leading them as groups. This action will make the condition right for Satan to take over completely these organizations and allow the one, who will defy all that the Lord Jesus stands for, to come. Satan will seek to establish his "kingdom" under his "ruler," the antichrist, II Thes. 2:3-4; I John 2:18. The result will produce the "Church" during the Laodicean period. Jesus says of this worldwide group "they are neither hot nor cold (They are compromising the truth of God's Word)," and he will, therefore, "spit (vomit) them out of his mouth," Rev. 3:15-16. Even though the "Church" leaders and others are saying that they are "rich and lack nothing," Jesus says that they are "wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked," vs. 17; I Thes. 5:1-3,9. But the same verse states, in effect, that they do not realize their true spiritual condition before God. Even at this late hour Jesus admonishes individuals to repent and accept his love. "Behold, I stand at the door and knock: if any man [person] hear my voice and open the door, I will come in to him, and will dine [fellowship] with him, and he with me; - - He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the ecclesia," vss. 20,22.

July 25, 1999

"From Earth To Heaven"
Rev. 4

Couples Class
Wendell Alford,
Teacher

I. In Chap. 1 we saw the glorified person of our Lord, Jesus the Savior, and in Chaps. 2 and 3 we examined that resurrected Lord as he "walked among the local congregations" instructing and noting their strengths and weaknesses for their spiritual nourishment (and ours). I believe also that the Lord wants us to see the panorama of the history of his ecclesia outlined in the discussion of the seven local groups in Chaps. 2 and 3 from Ephesus to Laodicea. That historical period continues from Jesus' sending his Holy Spirit (John 15:26; Acts 2:1-4) to establish his ecclesia until his return to receive his body (Col. 1:18; Eph. 5:23) at the end of the age (world order), Matt. 24:31; John 14:3. Now we look at the account in Chaps. 4 and 5 of the Lord's ecclesia in which Jesus comes into the vicinity of the earth he created and takes out his bride-to-be, his own purchased ecclesia, those who are trusting Jesus for eternal life, I Thes. 4:13-18. During the period of Chaps. 4 and 5, the Lamb will prepare his coming bride for their coming Marriage Feast (Rev. 19:7) which will take place after the Great Tribulation outlined in Rev. 6-18. In Rev. 1:19 Jesus told John to write the things which you have seen (the glorified Christ in Rev. 1), the things which are in process (Chaps. 2-3), and, finally, the things which shall be hereafter, the Tribulation and beyond (Chaps. 4-22). The seven years which we learned about in our study of Daniel at Dan. 9:27 will take place during Rev. 6-18. Recall that in the middle of that seven year period the political beast will take over and destroy the religious harlot, the apostate "Church." Therefore, the last half (three and one-half years) of that seven year period will be a time of trouble, more severe than at any other time in the history of mankind, Dan. 9:27; Matt. 24:21. The ecclesia (now the bride-to-be) which was taken from the earth to be forever with the Lord Jesus (I Cor. 15:51-52; I Thes. 4:15-18) will not be on earth during the seven-year period. The Jewish people will undergo especially "the time of Jacob's trouble" (Jer. 30:7), but they, as a nation, will "be saved out of it," Rom. 11:25-36.

II. The New Covenant's main theme is that God the Creator Father sent his Son (God manifest in human form, a man, II Cor. 5:19) and later his Holy Spirit to convict, to teach and to sustain those who would accept God's Good-News-Plan for human spirits to become one with God and therefore receive eternal life. When the time is full (fully completed, only God knows when), he will send angels (messengers) to gather together all who have believed his promise in and through Jesus, the Christ, Matt. 24:31. At that fixed time, the Holy Spirit who has resided in the ecclesia (I Cor. 3:16) will be taken away, and people can then be reconciled to God only in the Old Covenant way, Rom. 9:13-23. God's Holy Spirit will be withdrawn (II Thes. 2:7) who was sent when Jesus came to earth the first time for the special purpose of calling out the ecclesia. John 1:17; 6:44; 14:26; 11:25; I Pet. 1:3-4. God's special "times of the Gentiles" in Daniel's chronological scheme of the seventy weeks, Dan. 9:24-27; Lk. 21:24 is ending the seventieth week of the period. Both Paul and Peter make special mention of this

ecclesia period at Eph. 3:1-12 and I Pet. 1:10-12. Both claimed a special revelation was needed to make this plan known to them.

III. Now look specifically at Jesus' Revelation to John the apostle at Chap. 4 at which time John sees that "a door was opened in heaven," vs. 1. As the door opened, John heard a voice which was loud (like a trumpet) and talked directly to the apostle. The voice instructed John, "Come up here, and I will show you the things which must be (take place) after this [the ecclesia period of grace]," vs. 1; Rev. 1:19. Instantly the apostle was "in the spirit," and I believe that he left his physical body in order to comply with the voice's request to enter heaven, vs. 2. As John looked at what was before him, he saw a heavenly throne (seat of authority), and the one who sat thereon was like jewels in resplendent color and glory. Now, for the first time, the ones to whom our Lord Jesus is engaged, the ecclesia, (those called out during God's ecclesia period) see their new, eternal home. The ones who accepted God's only begotten Son, are home at last! Their earthly journey is completed (I Thes. 4:17; I Cor. 15:51-52), and they are finally free from Satan's snare of sin and rebellion against their merciful, forgiving Lord. The group of God's people whom he has called out are realizing the fulfillment of God's promises, his faithfulness, John 14:1-3; I Cor. 1:9; I John 3:20-23. As Noah saw the rainbow long ago to signify the earth's freedom from the dangers of a flooded earth again, now the Lord's redeemed see around God's throne another rainbow signifying that the Lord's chosen bride will never again be compassed about with the perils of sin's temptations, vs. 3; (Rom. 7:24-25). Salvation is now complete and marriage to the Lord is soon to become the order of God's loving business. The former ecclesia now is characterized by the twenty-four overseers who will reign with Christ. The organization still on earth at this time and which refers to itself as the "Church," is an apostate, self-deceived organization. It is called in God's Revelation, "the harlot." The "Church" of Laodicea is lukewarm and Jesus has "spewed" it away from him, no longer claiming it as his. However, Jesus' chosen ones will not experience the Tribulation about to happen on the earth, I Thes. 5:4-11; II Thes. 2:13-17; Rev. 3:10.

IV. John and all of God's elect continue to marvel at the glorious sight around the throne of God. An expanse of clear crystal on which are four creatures with eyes all around are seen. The creatures were a lion, an ox (beast of burden), a man, and an eagle. Many (I tend to concur.) Bible readers have likened these four creatures to the four Gospels: Matthew, Jesus as king, the lion of Judah, Gen. 49:9-10; Mark, Jesus as servant, Isa. 53:4-5; Luke, Jesus as the son of man, God in human form, I John 4:2-3; and John, Jesus as God and Spirit, (eagle in air, pneuma), Exod. 19:4-6; John 4:23-26; 10:30; 17:11. These four creatures never cease worshipping the Lord God, "Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty which was, and is, and is to come." (Isa. 6:1-3) This characteristic concerning the eternal one is referring to Jesus, Rev. 1:8. Many people wonder if heaven will be boring. No! Worshipping our loving Lord will be an extremely satisfying, full time blessing without our present flesh-and-blood limitations, I believe, I Cor. 2:9-16.

Aug. 1, 1999

"Who Is Worthy To Open The Book?"
Rev. 5

Couples Class
Wendell Alford,
Teacher

I. Chap. 5 continues to reveal the information begun in Chap. 4 which the Lord gave to John the apostle (and us) about the Lord's receiving unto himself the ones to whom he has chosen to become betrothed, Eph. 5:25-32. (See also Matt. 22:23-32; I John 3:2-3.) Jesus is fulfilling the promise he made to those who would commit themselves to him for eternally safe keeping. Like all newlyweds the husband and bride long to be together. So it was that Jesus said at John 14:1-3, "Do not be upset; for [because I have said that we will be apart for a while, John 13:33] you know you can depend upon the Creator God, and my word is as sure as his (we are one, John 10:30). Where my Father lives there is infinite room for expansion. If such were not the case, I would tell you precisely the way things are there. When I take temporary leave from you, I will be going to prepare a place for you. It follows, then, if I go for that purpose, I will return and receive you for myself, because I want us to be together." Truly, the groom longs to be with his bride. John the apostle was a beloved of our Lord, John 13:23; 20:2; 21:20, and I am sure that these words were profoundly significant to John who was the youngest of the apostles at the time of John 14:1-3. And now at the time of the Revelation (c. 96) that same John is "in the spirit" witnessing in a vision the fruition of Jesus' earlier promise. At the time of Jesus' Revelation to John, the apostle was probably about ninety years of age. Recall that Daniel was about that same age when God through Michael, the archangel, revealed end-time things to the prophet, Dan. 10:13,21; 12:1. I bring Daniel's prophecy to our minds again as we examine Rev. 5, because at the end of Daniel's message the prophet was told to seal the book in which were written the names of God's elect, Dan. 12:1,4,9,13. Further, the book's opening was to be at the time when, "there shall be a time of trouble, such as never was since there was a nation even to that time; and at that time thy people [Daniel's, the Jews] shall be delivered (Rom. 11:25-36), every one that shall be found written in the book," Dan. 12:1. (See also Matt. 24:21, where Jesus said, "For there shall be great tribulation, such as was not since the beginning of the world to this time, no, nor ever shall be.")

II. Now, with the above information in mind, we look at John's Chap. 5 of God's Revelation. A coordinating conjunction introduces the thoughts in Chap. 5 to be a continuation of Chap. 4. On the throne in heaven sat the Creator God who holds a book in his right hand, a book written within and on the backside (a scroll written on both sides). But the information cannot be read, because the book (scroll) is sealed (tied up) with seven seals. Even with a "strong angel" at the throne, there is a major problem, because no one is found able to open the book. The problem had to do with worthiness. John hears the question asked by the strong angel, "Who is worthy to open the book, and to loose the seals thereof?" As John observes the operation, a search is made throughout heaven, the entire earth and even among the dead for someone who is worthy enough to open and read the book, vss. 2-3. The anticipations

and expectations were so intense that John wept, "because no man could be found worthy to open and to read the book, neither to [even] look thereon," vs. 4. What could be so different and intriguing about the book and its contents? In the Rom. 11:25-36 passage cited above, in vs. 27, God revealed to Paul the apostle (and to us), "For this is my covenant unto them [the Jews], when I shall take away their sins." The Word in this passage is contrasting God's treatment of two of all the earth's peoples, the Jews and all nonJews (Gentiles). The mention of a covenant in this context, Rom. 11:27, to be engaged in the future (after Paul's day) between God and the Jews ("those beloved for the Father's sakes," Rom. 11:28) could be a Third Covenant after the Old and New Covenants with which we are familiar. This Third Covenant could prevail during the forthcoming Millenium Kingdom period noted in Matt. 5:17-48; and Rev. 20:1-6. If so, the person to be in charge (to reign) must be worthy beyond any doubt in God the Father's eyes. For Father God to place in the care of his creation, anyone, that one must be ultimately worthy above any other. This sealed book is, in effect, the deed of title to the earth and everything related to it.

III. In vs. 5 one of the elders told John to cease weeping, because the Lion of Judah's tribe has overcome all obstacles and is able, not only to open the book, but to loose the seven seals which hold the scroll tightly. Figuratively the sealed book represented ownership of possessions, and anyone worthy of unsealing it would, by so doing, gain possession and complete control of what it (the deed) described, I Cor. 15:20-28. Sure enough, a Lamb who had been slain and who was at the throne area (Mk 16:19), came and took the book from the Father's right hand. As the Lamb handled the book, the four live creatures (representing God's Good News) and the twentyfour elders (representing Jesus' bride-to-be, the former ecclesia while on earth) fell down before the Lamb (Jesus), played harps, and released delightful aromas (representing the prayers of God's redeemed) from bowls of incense. They sang a new song whose words stated that Jesus is worthy to take possession of the earth which he created and redeemed. And not only that, Jesus has redeemed a people from the earth whom he has made, "unto our God kings and priests and we (trusters in God's Messiah, Jesus the Savior) shall reign [with Jesus] on the earth, vs. 10; I Pet. 2:4-10. At this point God's Revelation to the apostle states that he saw and heard a host of angels gathered around the throne of God along with the four living creatures, the twenty-four elders, and a large [infinite] number saying, "Worthy is the Lamb (John 1:29,36; I Pet. 2:24-25) that was slain to receive power, riches, wisdom, strength, honor, glory, and blessing." All creatures everywhere were agreeing, "Blessing, and honor, and glory, and power, be unto him that sits on the throne [God], and unto the Lamb for ever and ever," vs. 13. The four living creatures said, "Amen." The bride-to-be of Jesus Christ fell down and worshipped him that liveth for ever and ever."

Sing the wondrous love of Jesus; Sing his mercy and his grace.
In the mansions bright and blessed; He'll prepare for us a place.
When we all get to heaven, what a day of rejoicing that will be.
When we all see Jesus, we'll sing and shout the victory!

Aug. 8, 1999

"Six Seals Are Opened"
Rev. 6

Couples Class
Wendell Alford,
Teacher

I. A very strong emphasis should be noted beginning with Chap. 6 that the communication of Jesus to John changes. Attention is now to decisions which are made by the Lord Jesus as Judge of his creation including the earth, its people and all aspects of its being. Today we are affected by political forces, fiscal forces, social forces, but we believers should be affected primarily by the leadership of God's Holy Spirit since we have placed our entire future into the hands of our Savior, Jesus Christ. In Chaps. 4 and 5 the Lord removed his holy bride-to-be (made so by faith in Jesus' righteousness) in preparation for a purging justice of the earth and its people. This period of purging is referred to throughout the Bible as "the Day of the Lord." Remember in our study of Isaiah's prophecy how the Lord revealed to God's people that in the last days God would "shake terribly the earth," Isa. 2:12, 19, 21. We should recall our study of both Isaiah and Daniel as well as the Gospels in order to understand what is prophesied in John's Revelation from the Lord. God's Word makes understanding God's prophecy therein dependent upon a believer's perspective of God's entire prophetic message. Note at II Pet. 1:19-21, "Knowing this first [basic to understanding Biblical prophecy], that no prophecy of the Scripture is of any private interpretation (origin)." What God's Word is telling us is that no facet of God's plan of prophecy can be known entirely by only one prophet's message, but a synthesis of the entire Bible's prophetic information must be taken into view. The key, then, to understanding lies with the Holy Spirit's guidance in that understanding, because it was God's Holy Spirit who gave the prophetic information to the various prophets originally. As Peter stated it in II Pet. 1:21, "For the prophecy came not in old (any) time by the will of man: but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Spirit." God's Word in II Pet. 2 immediately follows this instruction concerning Biblical prophecy with a warning about false prophets and teachers.

II. To summarize our Revelation study so far: Jesus' glorified position in heaven is noted in Chap. 1 with the introduction of the seven local congregations (ecclesia); Chaps. 2-3 give an historical account of the church period from fifty days following Jesus' resurrection to his removing his bride-to-be (the former ecclesia) from the earth; and Chaps. 4-5 reveal the entrance of Jesus' bride up to the throne of God (heaven), taken from the earth in preparation for the great tribulation. We now approach Chap. 6 where we see the beginning of the tribulation spoken about directly by our Lord at Matt. 24:21. This singular time of tribulation is activated by the "One who is worthy" to open the seals to the book discussed in Chap. 5. We should keep in mind that Jesus, the Lamb of God, is the one who is removing the seals which hold tightly the scroll (book). He is Lord and the only one completely worthy to execute judgment on the world he made and redeemed by his blood. During God's period of free grace (free to mankind because Jesus paid the necessary price for God's redemption of all people), everyone had a choice of accepting God's plan of eternal life.

But now the time of God's judgment has come (vs. 17), and God's Son, Jesus Christ, is in complete control. The world order has collectively chosen to defy God's will and purpose beyond worldwide redemption. The light (revealer of God's truth) and salt (preserver of order in the world), has been taken from the earth (in the ecclesia), and Jesus taught that, "If salt has lost its savour (effectiveness), wherewith shall it [the world] be salted? It is thenceforth good for nothing," Matt. 5:13-14. God's restraint (the Holy Spirit), II Thes. 2:7, will be gone from the earth, and Satan feels free to increase his rebellious activities among the earth's population. At the beginning of the tribulation period social inertia will prevail to some extent, and therefore, the ultimate rebellion against God will creep upon the people gradually but thoroughly, I believe. All of the events beginning with Chap. 4 and through Chap. 22 are to happen in the future, beyond today. Some Bible scholars have tried to weave these happenings into past and present world history. I disagree with them after Chap. 3.

III. Without further ado we look in vss. 1-2 at the loosing of the first seal. When Jesus unties the seal, John hears a thunderous noise which brought forth a rider on a white horse. Although this rider was given a crown, I believe that it is a false, temporary, fake symbol of royalty. It is the pseudonymous one, the antiChrist and Christ pretender, Matt. 24:23-26; II Thes. 2:1-12. The second seal is sent forth by the Lord in heaven. A red horse of war will usher in a calamitous, truly world-wide war. During his activities, no place on earth will know peace. WWI and WWII were rather localized in just portions of the earth, e.g., outside the Western Hemisphere, but no area will be spared under the red horse. The third seal is released and a black horse rides the earth bringing sorrow through famine and a severe reduction of those items which especially support luxurious, sumptuous living. That which supports physical life will become so scarce in time that the fourth seal is broken and forth goes a pale horse, Death. As this horse went about, he was followed by Hades, the place where unredeemed human spirits reside after the physical body perishes. (cf Lk 23:43.) If God did not deliberately shorten this tribulation period, no flesh could survive, Matt. 24:22. Death will finally be destroyed, I Cor. 15:26; Rev. 20:14. The fifth seal release reveals the place underneath the altar where are kept the spirits of those who were killed for believing God's Word and their confession of belief in God's promises. The longings of those spirits to be fully justified by God's final judgment on those who killed (physically) them is given, vs. 10. Each one under the altar was given a white robe (representing Jesus' righteousness). They were told to maintain their rest until others, about to be so sacrificed for their belief, will join them. The sixth and last seal to be released in Chap. 6 reveals the cosmic upheaval to take place. The sun will stop shining on the earth, the moon will be blood red, and matter (stars) from heaven will hit (fall upon) the earth. When this happens the last half (the worst) of the tribulation has begun. The leaders of the earth will seek refuge in the earth's crevices and beg to be hidden from God on his throne and, "from the wrath of the Lamb, for the day of his wrath is come." In conclusion, we should review, in order, Joel 2:28-32; Isa. 61:1-2; Lk 4:16-21; Acts 2:14-23; Mal. 3:1; 4:5 Matt. 11:10-15; 8:10; 15:21-28; 24:21-22, 27-31.

Aug. 15, 1999

"Jewish Evangelism"
Rev. 7

Couples Class
Wendell Alford,
Teacher

I. It is basic to any segment of humanity to want others to join themselves in their views. This arrangement is wonderful if those who desire to change others are right themselves, e.g., agree with God's perfect will for mankind. But such is not always the way it is. In this political year the main parties are literally spending hundreds of millions of dollars to persuade others to join them and their positions. When Jesus was on earth in human form, the Jews were in a favorable position in Jerusalem to spread their religion far and wide. The Herod Temple was practically finished, and Jews and their proselytes came from the entire area around the Mediterranean Sea at certain times for religious festivals to Jerusalem. Perhaps the peak times for those visits were on Passover (March-April), the Day of Pentecost (Harvest Feast of Weeks in late May), and the Feast of Tabernacles or Booths (Ingathering) in September-October. At a celebration of Pentecost (fifty days after Passover) we see in Acts 2:5-11 that Jews and their proselytes had come from many countries to celebrate Passover and Pentecost. Also, the eunuch from Ethiopia had come to Jerusalem to worship God at Acts 8:26-39. On these occasions the Jews were actively seeking those who would become Jewish in their faith. I note the foregoing information to demonstrate Jesus' position on this Jewish "evangelism." At Matt. 23:13-15 Jesus condemned the Jewish religious leaders for their influencing others to become Jewish proselytes. These leaders thought that they were bringing "outsiders" into the kingdom of God (under God's rule to do God's will), but Jesus said, "You compass sea and land to make one proselyte, and when he is made, you make him twofold more the child of hell than yourselves."

II. The above information is very pertinent to Rev. 7, the chapter for today, and the message reveals a stunning development in God's end-time plan for humanity. We saw at the end of Rev. 3 how the "Church" during the Laodicean period of the history of the ecclesia became lukewarm and disgusting to the Lord Jesus (He spewed it out of his mouth, disowned it.). During the preceding Philadelphian period the Lord takes the true ecclesia from the earth to heaven which move is described in Rev. 4-5. Last week in Rev. 6 Jesus begins to instigate the great tribulation mentioned by Daniel at Dan. 9:27 and by Jesus at Matt. 24:21. This one-of-a-kind time of trouble and sorrow is caused by the ultimate rebellion of the earth's population against their Creator God and Father of our Lord, Jesus Christ, Rom. 11:32,34; II Thes. 2:1-12. In Matthew's Gospel account, Chaps. 24 and 25, Jesus outlines many facts concerning end-time activities. In fact, every word in those two chapters except 24:1,3 is a direct quote of our Lord Jesus, a total of ninety-five verses. These verses describe God's final examination of the history of mankind. Judgment time has come, and, although Revelation appears mysterious to many, God's vision to John is simply another way of describing God's final judgment of humanity. We believers should not fear this judgment, because we have placed our complete future into the hands of our Lord Jesus Christ. Further, he has specifically told us not to fear this time, John 14:1-3; I Cor.

15:51-58; I Thes. 5:1-11. Interestingly, the ecclesia is not even mentioned in the events having to do with the tribulation in Revelation. While the ecclesia was on earth, the Holy Spirit through them controlled evil so that the ecclesia could do God's bidding in proclaiming the Gospel, electing human spirits for Jesus' bride, and sanctifying (developing, maturing) those saints for the kingdom of God. Now during the awful time of the tribulation, the Holy Spirit is snatching individuals from the fire, Lk 12:49-51; Jude 23, through fear of what is happening on the earth. When God's grace was free (based on Jesus' sacrifice), most people refused it. Now the brute force of God's judgment must be reckoned with. In Rev. 6 we learned of the calamities which God produced: war, famine, death, the cry of those martyred for their faith in God's Word (Jesus), and, finally, cosmic interruptions of the stars, etc. The great day of God's wrath has come! The earth's people had reached the ultimate proposition involving nowhere to hide.

III. "After these things" begins Chap. 7 meaning, after the awful, horrible troubles of the opening of the first six seals in Chap. 6. There is an interlude in John's vision between seals six and seven for an unusual reason. Four angels (messengers of God) are situated in positions to reach the entire surface of the earth. These angels caused wind on the whole earth to cease all motion, and another angel came from the east bearing the seal of God Almighty. It was to stop God's judgment which is indicated by a cessation of all natural catastrophes. God has a divine purpose, I believe, in allowing this interlude, and the angel with the seal is to begin God's special assignment. That angel "cried with a loud voice" and announced that he would put God's seal upon the foreheads of a number of his special servants. (II Cor. 1:21-22; Eph. 1:13-14.) The exact type and number of people to be so sealed are given in vss. 4-8. They are from among the Jews throughout the earth, twelve thousand from each of the original twelve tribes of Israel. Some have referred to ten of those tribes as having been lost, but God knows exactly where all of his Jews are. Further, there are to be sealed from among those Jews a total of 144,000 who will be sealed by God. I believe that when these Jews are sealed by God's messenger, they will realize God's will (position) and accept Jesus as God's Son and Savior, the Messiah whom God promised through his prophets of old, Psa. 22; Isa. 7; 9; 53. One of the amazing aspects of God's relating to the Jews since the day of Abraham is that there has always been what the Bible refers to as a "remnant," I Kings 19:10-18; Jer. 31,32; Rom. 11:1-5,11-24. As the last citation asserts, God has always maintained a remnant of Jews who have accepted God's Messiah, Jesus, even during the ecclesia period of gathering Jesus' bride, Rom. 9:8; During the tribulation that remnant will consist of 144,000 Jews who will be the Lord's enthusiastic evangelists of God's mercy through his only Son, Jesus Christ. And, can you imagine the impact of all those Jews proclaiming how to be saved through trusting God's Jesus?! The result will see an infinite number of Gentiles accept the Lord for about seven years. When these multitudes accept Jesus Christ, the Lamb will meet their every need, vss. 9-17. Now these all join the others around the throne of God praising God the Father and his Lamb. These are Jesus' "other sheep" not the ecclesia, John 10:16, and note the divisions of the earth's peoples in I Cor. 10:32.

Aug. 22, 1999

"The Seventh Seal, Then Trumpets"
Rev. 8

Couples Class
Wendell Alford,
Teacher

I. Last week we saw in John the apostle's vision a pause between the loosing of the first six of seven seals which represent the activities beginning the great tribulation of God's wrath upon the earth and its people at the end-time. In that pause an unusual event happened, for 144,000 Jews became flaming evangelists with testimonies regarding the lordship of Jesus Christ as God's Messiah (Savior). That pause was characterized by a cessation of all violence through natural forces. An untold number of Gentiles, "a great multitude which no man could number," Rev. 7:9, will be reclaimed by God during the period of the severe, devastating tribulation. The cost in misery and persecution will be great. How grateful we who are being called out (sealed) during the grace period (time of the ecclesia) should be! We believers are to escape the frightful period of the tribulation, because we are looking forward to that blessed hope of Jesus' coming for us, John 14:1-4; Titus 2:11-14. Therefore, we are not to anticipate with fear this time when God will judge the world because of its rebellion by refusing to accept his only begotten Son, Jesus Christ. As we learned in Rev. 4-5, the Lord takes us (the ecclesia) to heaven for a time of preparation for the marriage feast, Rev. 19:7-10. During this preparation we will not be judged for spiritual salvation, because God's Word makes our proper relationship with our heavenly Father a matter of faith in his Son, our Savior, Jesus the Messiah (Savior). That same Word of God tells us that we will be judged concerning our willingness to have served the Lord while in the flesh, I Cor. 3:3-17. Remember, we are sealed by God's grace for eternal life because of our faith in God's promise through Jesus Christ. However, there are to be rewards, "for we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ; that everyone may receive the things done in the body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad," II Cor. 5:9-10, 14-15. This fact should encourage us to take advantage of every opportunity we have to be Christlike in our attitudes and actions. We do this as we are led by the same Spirit that was in Christ, God's Holy Spirit, to fulfill the law of faith, Rom. 3:21-31; 13:10.

II. Following the exodus (Rev. 4-5) of the ecclesia from the earth to be with the Lord in the air (I Thes. 4:17), the absence of war between nations will cause the world's people to believe that humanity has finally brought peace on the earth, Matt. 5:9; 24:6; I Thes. 5:3-4. We should examine the two principal methods of making peace. First, one can ask and persuade another, through love, to have no hatred in his heart and therefore do no harm to another, Rom. 13:10, cited above. Secondly, one can, through judgment by physical force, cause another to conform to that which is right. In this life the second method, judgment, is exemplified by the admonition given at Prov. 13:24; 19:18; Heb. 12:5-11. To prepare for right to prevail in the future and forever, God is now using the love method and is stating forcefully in Jesus' Revelation that he will eventually use the judgment method to give people one last chance to conform to God's perfect will. This period of judgment lasts through several chapters in the Revelation using several symbols. Those symbols

include seals, trumpets, personalities, and vials or bowls. To understand best this segment of the Revelation, one can identify these symbols by categories. Seals relate to God's judgment on evil mankind's willful rebellion; trumpets represent the direct activity of God against evil; various personalities (the woman, red dragon, child of the woman, etc.) through whom Satan fights against our Father God; and the vials or bowls which represent the ultimate and final judgment against both Satan's and mankind's last rebellion against God's Truth, Jesus Christ. The fact that symbols are used does not mean that they will not each have a mechanical, physical fulfillment. They will happen literally. Some Bible students have noted that some of these promises of God's judgment are similar to the awful plagues which God exercised against Egypt as Moses led God's people from the slavery of Egypt's Pharaoh. Although this similarity is true, I believe the severity of these last judgments will be much, much more devastating than what happened to Pharaoh in Moses' day, Matt. 24:21. In fact, I believe that these end-time judgments are so terrible that mankind's imagination cannot fathom their full awfulness, hence the symbols.

III. Now we come to the opening of the seventh seal. For a short period (half hour) there was a deep silence in heaven. In this short time the Lord Jesus orders a lull in the action after the Jews have become ablaze proclaiming Jesus as God's Messiah (Savior). Rebellious mankind apparently took this silence as an end of God's judgment, so they set out to return to their evil ways as before. God is love, therefore nature has been "acting up of late." But truly this is a "lull before an awful storm" of God's further judgment. Seven angels (messengers) received seven trumpets from God to sound a final call to cease rebelling against God. A trumpet was likewise used earlier to assemble the ecclesia for departing the earth, I Cor. 15:51-52. In that instance Jesus' voice itself gave the command to leave the planet, I Thes. 4:16-18; Rev. 1:10. (Note the similarity at Num. 10:4.) Now seven trumpets are being sounded to rally the Jews to their homeland promised to Abraham, Gen. 12:1-3; 13:14-16. The first trumpet is sounded as another angel receives the prayers of the elected ones and offers those prayers to God. From the altar the angel pours God's power of judgment upon the earth. God's message (voices) causes thunderings, lightnings, and an earthquake. The first angel sounded, and fire and blood were cast upon the earth. One-third of all trees and other vegetation was burned up, II Pet. 3:10. The second angel sounds, and a huge mountain catches fire, falls into the sea, and one-third of the sea turns to blood; one-third of the sea creatures die; and one-third of the ships are destroyed. The third angel's trumpet sounds and causes a huge star to fall from heaven afire. It landed upon the earth's streams and springs making one-third of all fresh water toxic and killing many people as they drank the poison water. When the fourth angel sounded, a third part of the sun, moon and stars was struck. Natural laws are radically changed, and an angel flying through heaven is crying loudly, "Woe, woe, woe to all people, for the three remaining trumpets are yet to be sounded." Remember Jesus' promise, "Immediately after the tribulation of those days shall the sun be darkened, and the moon shall not give her light, and the stars shall fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens shall be shaken," Matt. 24:29.

Aug. 29, 1999

"Trumpets Five And Six"
Rev. 9

Couples Class
Wendell Alford,
Teacher

I. We come to Chap. 9 which has weird symbols and bizarre events, and because these events are unique (none other like them ever before or since), they could not have revealed exactly what was occurring or would ever occur at any other time in human history. Therefore, the significance of this portion of the prophecy could have meant nothing more than a promise for the future to those to whom it was written in John's day. Some Bible students refuse to accept any interpretation of all of the Revelation which did not have an immediate application to the believers who were physically alive at the time it was written. I disagree. It was Jesus who said that the events of this end-time tribulation would happen at one time only, Matt. 24:21, and never before or afterwards. The only meaning that a communication describing details of the tribulation events could have had for believers in John's time (after Chap. 3) would have been that Jesus Christ would eventually prevail over Satan and Satan's disciples, Lk 21:28; I Thes. 5:1-11; Rev. 20:7-10. On the other hand, these events will be very real to those who go through them while they are occurring as we learn from Chap. 9. Recall how in Chap. 8 the Revelation indicates that these last three "woe" trumpets would be even more destructive than those of the first four, Rev. 8:13, and during those first four a huge burning mountain fell into the sea; hail and fire mingled with blood fell upon the earth burning up one-third of all vegetation; a star fell from heaven poisoning one-third of the earth's potable water so that one-third of the earth's population died; and, finally, a third of the sun, moon and stars gave no light (one-third of the earth received no light). And then we were told that the last three would be even more woeful! It is no wonder that we see the oddity of the events in the fifth and sixth trumpet sounds in Chap. 9.

II. Since we trusters in Jesus Christ have been taken from the earth in Chaps. 4-5, we will not go through this period of testing in the great tribulation. What a blessed hope we have through our faith in Jesus, our Lord! (Tit. 2:13) When the fifth trumpet sounds, another star falls from heaven and collides with the planet earth, but this stellar object is alive and has gender. Vs. 1 states that "to him was given the key of the bottomless pit." (For other information on the abyss [bottomless pit], see Matt. 12:40; Lk 8:30-31; Eph. 4:8-10; [Psa. 68:18]; I Pet. 3:19-22.) That fact is a mysterious phenomenon since a key represents authority and an entrepreneur status, and, furthermore, the key to the abyss was in the sole possession of our Lord Jesus according to his own statement at Rev. 1:18, "I am he that liveth, and was dead; and, behold I am alive for evermore, Amen; and have the keys to hades and death." In vs. 2 he, the star which had fallen from heaven, opened the shaft (entrance) to the abyss with the key! A massive smoke came out of the abyss like smoke from a huge furnace. The sun and atmosphere were darkened by the voluminous smoke. Let's examine why whoever he (the star) was, was given the key when we learned in Rev. 1:18 that the key belonged to Jesus. It is obvious, to me, that the star symbolizes a being, because he had the

attributes of someone with a will and the ability to exercise that will. I believe that at this juncture in the tribulation catastrophe, the Lord Jesus voluntarily permitted Satan (the star) to have temporary permission to express his evil nature on the earth. Why? Perhaps the Lord is "giving him enough rope to hang himself." In the Bible we are not given an extensive, detailed account of Satan's nature, but we do know that, according to Job 1:6-12; 2:1-7, he can operate on earth only at God's prerogative. That Satan can be what he is in Rev. 9:1, a star who can fall from heaven, is noted in Isa. 14:12; Lk 10:18; II Cor. 11:13-15. We should, as believers in Jesus as our Savior, rest assured that today Jesus alone has the key to the abyss. Only by his special permission will Satan be allowed to control the entrance to Hades, the abyss. Peter (God's Word) states at II Pet. 2:4-9 that God threw fallen angels into Hades to await final judgment.

III. In the smoke that came from the abyss shaft were locusts which covered the earth. These locusts were like scorpions which we know in that they were able to inflict great pain. However, they were unlike locusts (many call them grass hoppers), because they were commanded not to eat vegetation. Rather, they were to attack human beings who had not been sealed by God at Rev. 7:3, i.e., who accepted God's Messiah, Jesus Christ. An unusual power given to these locusts was that they could only torment (torture?) unbelievers for five months, but not kill them. This torment caused an acute pain like scorpion stings. The pain will be so intense that those bitten will try to die, beg to die, but they can only continue to live physically. We are not told the size of the locusts even though they are shaped like horses arrayed for battle. On their heads were gold-like crowns, and their faces were human-like. They had long hair as a woman, teeth like a lion, breastplates of iron, wings, and tails with stings like scorpions. These hordes of locusts had a king over them who is the angel (Satan and temporary) of the abyss, and his name is Destruction or Destroyer.

IV. The second "woe" begins with the sixth trumpet sound. A voice comes from the golden altar before God announcing the loosing of four messengers (angels) who were designated a very specific time and place to kill a third of all mankind. These four angels were bound at the Euphrates River (east of Israel). They were accompanied by a large army of 200 million military troops mounted on horses. These troops wore breastplates of fiery red, bright blue (hyacinth), and bright yellow. The horses had heads of lions with fire, smoke, and brimstone (burning sulfur) issuing from their mouths. Their power to kill a third of all people on earth is located in their mouths. Death came because of the fire, smoke and brimstone which came from their mouths. The two-thirds of the unbelievers who were not killed refused to repent like the inhabitants of Sodom and Gomorrah who underwent a similar destruction (Gen. 19:4-5, 15, 24-25) because of their practice of homosexuality. The horses in this sixth trumpet revelation are symbols of weapons of war which will be available at the time of the tribulation. No doubt they will be even more destructive than those of today. Why the location at the Euphrates River? The Tower of Babel was located there where mankind's social rebellion first occurred. Most of the earth's population lives east of that river today, and that population overwhelmingly consists of unbelievers in Jesus Christ as Savior. After all this calamitous punishment, the unbelievers did not repent but continued to worship idols and live sinfully, Rev. 9:21.

Sept. 5, 1999

"Another Interlude, And The Book"
Rev. 10

Couples Class
Wendell Alford,
Teacher

I. Let us recall that during several chapters of the Revelation, there is a series of seven different factors of the tribulation involved. And even during Chaps. 2 and 3 there were seven divisions of the history of the ecclesia period before she (the bride of Christ) is taken to heaven in Chaps. 4 and 5 to prepare for the marriage feast and before the tribulation gets under way. There were seven Spirits before God's throne who served the Lord bearing God's message, Rev. 1:4; 3:1; 5:6. The number seven has a continuous significance throughout the Bible. God's creative process of the earth itself involved seven periods of time (days). Noah was told that he should enter the ark because seven days later the flood would begin to destroy the earth, Gen. 7:4,10. The Israelites were told to circle Jericho for seven days to conquer the city, Josh. 6:4. Seven was the number of weeks (sevens) given in Dan. 9:25 relating to the coming of the Messiah and his being cut off (suffer the death penalty). Jesus made seven statements as he died on the cross including, "It is finished, completed," John 19:30. In the Revelation there are given seven seals (5:1), seven thunders (10:3), seven heads and seven crowns (12:3; 13:1; 17:9), seven kings (17:10), seven stars (1:16,20; 3:1), seven angels with seven trumpets (8:2), seven plagues (15:1), seven horns and seven eyes (5:6), seven golden bowls or vials (15:7), and a scarlet colored beast with seven heads (17:3,7). Seven appears to characterize that which is complete or representative. Time set aside to worship God, the only Creator, is every seven days under both the Old and New Covenants. Seven is certainly a prime number in the Revelation. The completeness idea signifies that God is completing his world order, and we are given the information about what is to be involved when God will make complete what he began in the Garden of Eden. A major theme of the Revelation is that God will complete his covenant with Abraham at Gen. 12:1-3; 13:14-17. God never makes a promise which he does not complete. In Genesis the earth was created, but in Revelation the earth passes away, Rev. 21:1. In Genesis Satan first rebelled, but in Revelation Satan's last chance to rebel is finished. In Genesis sin enters, but in Revelation sin exits. The curse upon mankind pronounced in Genesis is finally removed in Revelation. Death, sorrow and human suffering began in Genesis, but in Revelation sorrow and tears are eliminated. The doom of Satan pronounced in Genesis (Gen. 3:15) is executed in Revelation (Rev. 20:10). One can see why the completing of the age represented by the number seven is so prominent in the Revelation.

II. During the unwrapping of the seven seals which held the book (scroll) and which only our Lord Jesus was worthy enough to unloose, there was an interlude between seals six and seven. In that interlude God sealed 144,000 Jews who then proclaimed Jesus as the Messiah, and an infinite number of Gentiles accepted Jesus as God's Lamb and Savior. The seventh seal loosing brought about the blowing of seven trumpets which each caused a catastrophe in God's judgment, a continuation of the long promised tribulation. Now after the sixth trumpet blew, another interlude occurs as happens after the

six seals are loosed. Chap. 10 relates the happenings which are to occur between the sixth and seventh trumpets. This interlude continues through Rev. 11:14. The principal thought in Chap. 10 is, I believe, the fact that Jesus Christ is in complete control of all the events happening on earth during the tribulation. Jesus' authority is represented by another mighty angel. The first mighty angel at Rev. 5:2 was unable to do what only Jesus was worthy to do. Now that Jesus' authority is manifested the Lord designates an angel to execute the Lord's authority. The authority of the mighty angel so realistically represents Jesus Christ that his appearance even simulates that of Jesus. The similarity is so striking that many Bible students interpret the description to mean that the angel is, in fact, Christ himself. I disagree, because John's record of the vision identifies the angel as "another" angel (messenger). I believe that Jesus is God (John 14:7,9; 10:30; 17:11), and, therefore, would not bear God's message. If Jesus is God, as I believe, he would not be referred to as another angel. Jesus cannot be identified as another anyone. After Jesus was glorified when God raised him from human death, he was changed and now holds a different status. We, too, can look forward to another status, because of our faith in him, Phili. 3:20-21; I John 3:2.

III. Truly the mighty angel represented Jesus' authority, for he was clothed in a cloud and had a rainbow on his head. His face shone as the sun with his feet appearing as columns of flames. The rainbow signified that as God had the authority to cleanse the earth with water, now he is purging the earth with fire, II Pet. 3:1-7. We have mentioned again, vs. 2, the book which also represents Jesus' authority to do what is happening in God's worldwide tribulation upon the earth and its people. The angel placed one foot on the sea and the other on the land and cried with a thunderous voice. The reply to his voice was seven thunders which gave to John information which he was told not to record by a voice directly from heaven (Jesus, I believe). Why is something even mentioned when it was not to be a part of the Revelation? Apparently, John, who was suffering in exile away from the believers whom he loved, needed the information as a special benefit. Further, the time of the tribulation is happening very fast, and about one-half of the seven years are finished at this juncture. John is told that when the seventh trumpet sounds, the first phase (half) of the tribulation will have been completed, vs. 7. The mighty angel raised his hand to heaven and swore by God, the Creator, that the old world order is undergoing a profound change as God had witnessed to humanity through the prophets, vs. 6. The delay is to be no longer, and to underscore that fact, John is told by the angel to take the little (now little because most of its information had been fulfilled) book and eat it. The apostle found that the book was sweet to his taste but then soured in his stomach. Prophecy is sweet to believers, because they know that God will reward their faith in his Word (Jesus), but they have a bittersweet feeling because of the necessary final purging justice of God on rebellious unbelievers. The angel told John that this, the Revelation, will be a prophecy that would be appropriate in the future years for many people of all nations, tongues and nationalities, vs. 11.

I. A main point which has been stressed in our examination of God's Revelation is that, following Chap. 4, the ecclesia is no longer in the chronicle of end-time events on earth until the very end of Chap. 22 in vss. 6-21. Those last verses are conclusionary and give solemnity and truthfulness to the entire Revelation with a warning to those who would change its contents or modify its message. Those verses also extend God's invitation to all who will accept God's plan of spiritual salvation which anyone is free to take "of the water of life." Throughout all human history the ecclesia is a special people to become the bride of God's only begotten Son, Jesus Christ, Titus 2:14. Though we believers are a special people, we are not to presume God's grace to be without limits, Hos. 3:1-5; Rom. 11:21-24. This truth is related to the church as a group not to true individual believers. Individual believers are sealed for eternity as we learned at John 10:29-30; II Cor. 1:21-22; Eph. 1:13-14; 4:30. The massive falling away from God's truth in Jesus Christ happens in Rev. 3 during the Philadelphian period of church history and reaches its rebellious climax of the "Church" in the Laodicean period in Rev. 3. That "falling" had begun even during the apostolic period, II Thes. 2:7; Rev. 2:2. But even during this last period of the calling out by God of his bride, there will be individuals whose faith rest alone in God's free grace for eternal life. However, they will be a part of the huge number saved during the tribulation period, because Jesus takes out the bride, the ecclesia, during the latter part of the Philadelphian period of church history. We will learn in Rev. 17 that the group whom the world knows as the "Church" during the tribulation period will be referred to by God as "the great whore," Rev. 17:1, and see Rev. 3:16 also.

II. If, as stated above, the ecclesia is not dealt with in the Revelation after their departure in Chaps. 4-5, who is the primary people with whom God relates on earth. They are the Jews, in keeping with God's covenant with Abraham at Gen. 12:1-3; 13:14-15. This development is evident especially at the outset of the chapter we are looking at today, Chap. 11. It begins with a discussion of the temple of God as a place where people gather to worship God. Before the beginning of the tribulation and during the ecclesia period, the temple of God was the bodies of all true believers, I Cor. 3:16; Eph. 2:18-22. Now John's vision indicates that the apostle was given a measuring device, a reed like a rod, with which he was told by an angel to measure God's temple and the number of Jews who came there to worship. But the measuring was not to include the outer court, for that court and the city of Jerusalem (the holy city) "shall they (the Gentiles) tread under foot for forty and two months." This period of time, three and one-half years, strikes a familiar note since we learned at Dan. 9:27 that "in the midst (middle) of the week (seven years) he (the antichrist) shall cause the sacrifice and the offering to cease - -." Jesus also spoke of this period at Lk 21:24, "and Jerusalem shall be trampled by the Gentiles, until the times of the Gentiles be fulfilled." This

time, apparently represents the last three and one-half years of the tribulation. The Gentile authority will continue until the very last when Jesus comes back to set up his kingdom. Many church leaders today refuse to believe that God will, in fact, relate to the Jewish nation as an entity ever again. See our discussion at Rev. 1,I.

III. During this terrible time for the Jews, the last of the tribulation, John is told that there will be two special people giving testimonies (witnessing) to God's truth. The duration of their prophecy (telling what God is doing) is mathematically the same length of time as the times of the Gentiles, three and one-half years or forty-two months. These witnesses will not be dressed nattily but in sack cloth expressing sadness to the Jews. Also, the fact that there were two witnesses held a special significance for Jews, Deut. 17:6; Zech. 4, and Jesus stressed this arrangement at Matt. 18:16,20. A wide, divergent opinion about who the two witnesses are to be is held by various Bible students. Elijah is a first choice of many based upon his character, attitude and actions, as well as Mal. 4:5 and Matt. 17:10-13. Enoch has been suggested by some, because he "walked with God for three hundred years" and was translated, i.e., as Elijah was, taken away from the earth without experiencing physical death. Others have suggested John the Immerser whom Jesus referred to as the one who was filling the promise of God through Malachi at Mal. 4:5. Jesus made his statement regarding John the Immerser at Matt. 11:14-15 as the one fulfilling Elijah's office, "if ye (the Jews) will receive it, this is Elijah, which was for to come." The Jews, of course, did not receive him. Since the Bible does not say specifically who the witnesses are to be, I do not know, but my best guesses are Elijah and John the Immerser. These two witnesses were given miraculous powers by God to annihilate their opponents, to control rain, to turn water into blood, and to smite the earth with plagues at will. They are, at the end of the three and one-half years, put to death by the beast (the antichrist) who then has the whole earth under his control, Rev. 12:12. Their dead bodies will lie in the street for three and one-half days and will be seen by all peoples of the earth (television?) who will be so glad that they will express their glee by sending gifts to one another since their message of truth tormented them. God puts life back into them, they stand up, and great fear falls upon those who witness God's miracle and who see them called by a great voice from heaven back to heaven.

IV. The second woe now comes (see Rev. 9:12) in the form of a strong earthquake in Jerusalem. A tenth of the city fell, seven thousand people were killed, and the remnant (sealed Jews), though afraid, gave glory to God. Then the seventh trumpet sounds (the third woe does not come until Rev. 12:12), and a great voice from heaven (Jesus', I believe) gave comfort to the sealed (saved) ones on earth. The big voices in heaven announce that the earth's nations are coming under the direct command of our Lord Jesus Christ, and "he shall rule for ever and ever." The nations of the earth are angry, Psa. 2; vss. 16-18, but God's plan for the earth and its people is no longer a mystery. Jesus will then rule the entire earth as one kingdom. Our prayers asking for Jesus' kingdom to come and his will to be done on earth as it is in heaven will be answered by our Father in heaven.

I. The message and meaning of much of the Revelation is lost, I believe, if one misinterprets the place of the Jewish nation, Israel, in the end-time events. Many Bible students equate the church in the New Covenant with Israel in the Old Covenant. They believe that God intended that the church would gradually overcome evil, Satan, fleshly weakness, sin against God, and make the earth a placid place for Jesus' return. The church would be the extension of Jesus' authority on earth. In any case, God had turned his back on the Jews, and they no longer would be a part of the earth's history as they once were. I believe that what happened to reestablish Israel as a nation again in 1948, after no national status for about 2,800 years, was a prelude to what will proceed into the tribulation period. Many elements of Christendom have placed their bureaucratic thrust into a social organization which subverts the influence of God's Holy Spirit's work with individuals. Jesus was a Jew as a flesh-and-blood human being, and many separate the fact that, not only was he immersed in the Jordan River by John the Immerser (Matt. 3:13-17), but he was also circumcised as a Jew (Lk 2:21-24) according to the requirements of the Law of Moses. God has not dismissed his covenant with Abraham, Gen. 12:1-3; 13:15-16. Jesus said, "Think not that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfill [cause to happen]. For truthfully I say to you, 'Till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled,'" Matt. 5:17-18. Jesus' emphasis in this assertion is fulfillment. His shed blood, death, and resurrection established God's righteousness which through faith in, one is given by God eternal, spiritual life. That is a given but many overlook the emphasis of fulfillment of many promises made by God in the Old Covenant which included not only the grace period in human history created by the sending of a Messiah, Psa. 6,22,40,110; Isa. 11, 40-66, but also special promises to the Jews. Someone has suggested a poem: "Roses are reddish; violets are bluish; If it weren't for Jesus, the world would be Jewish." As it turned out, the Jewish leaders were unwilling to accept Jesus, the Messiah, whom God the Father sent to earth the first time to include Gentiles in God's kingdom, and now many Gentile church leaders are unwilling to accept God's keeping his promises to the Jews.

II. The above information is necessary, I believe, to comprehend the perspective of seeing the reality of the first of the several personages, the woman, and how she fits into the tribulation events. There are seven such personages, and the woman is the first of these and symbolizes Israel, not Mary, not the Roman Church, nor the church of all the ages! The other four in Chap. 12 are: the red dragon, Satan; the child of the woman, Jesus Christ; Michael, the archangel; and Israel's remnant, the 144,000 sealed Jews. The two wild beasts in Chap. 13 are the remaining two of the seven personages. Another factor that makes Israel the woman is that she it was who gave birth to our Lord Jesus. Heb. 7:14 (God's Word) states that, "For it is evident that our Lord sprang out of Judah." Paul at Rom. 9:4-

5 asks, "Who are the Israelites?" and then in his answer he includes the fact that, "-- the promises; whose are the fathers, and of whom as concerning the flesh Christ came, who is over all, God blessed for ever. Amen." Satan tried his best to overcome Jesus Christ even before our Lord began his public service, Matt. 4:1-17. Until what will happen in the Revelation period, Satan has been with considerable power and authority in the world, Lk 4:5-8; John 12:28-31; 14:30; 16:5-15; Acts 26:18; Eph. 6:10-17. There is no question who the second person introduced at vs. 3 is. He is amazing, because he has seven heads with a diadem on each and ten horns. He has a tail motion which slaps one-third of the stars onto the earth. He is here displayed as standing before the woman who is in labor as she delivers a male infant (Jesus Christ) who is the one who will rule all nations of the earth with a rod of iron. The child was taken to heaven (Acts 1:9-11) out of the danger of the dragon (Satan). However, the woman (the Jews) remains on earth and is forced to flee to a place out of the way where she is maintained by God. Only God could provide a place of refuge during the ravenous time of the tribulation which has three and one-half years left, vs. 6.

III. Beginning in vs. 7 the fourth of the seven personages is given, Michael the archangel. War in heaven is hard for me to envision, but Michael and his forces (angels) fought against the dragon (Satan) and his forces (angels). Recall that Michael is God's archangel who evidently is especially responsible for the Jews. We noted this fact at Dan. 10:13,21; 12:1, and that Gabriel appears to be charged with Gentile affairs in human history, Dan. 8:16; 9:21; Lk 1:19,26. These two angels are the only two named in Scripture. At Dan. 12:1 God told Daniel exactly what is to happen at Rev. 12:7-8. Michael and his forces won the battle by casting Satan and his angels out of heaven, but this purging of heaven meant trouble for the earth's inhabitants. Vs. 11 makes clear that the real power came from the blood of the Lamb, Jesus Christ. While there is rejoicing in heaven among all who are there (including us, the ecclesia), Satan's coming to earth creates the third and last woe (Rev. 8:13; 9:12 11:14; 12:12). John is told that the third woe brings great wrath to the whole earth. Satan's evil activities are especially vile, "because he knows that he has but a short time [left]," vs. 12. (Note also Lk 10:17-24.)

IV. Because Satan's territory is concentrated now entirely on earth (He had been operating in both heaven and earth, evidently.), he gave his central attention to the woman (the Jews), vss. 7-8. It was they who had given birth to him who is to bring Satan's ultimate demise, Jesus Christ. God gave the Israelites special protection that she could fly to a place of sure refuge. The protection involved what John saw as "two wings of a great eagle, that she might fly into the wilderness, into her [special] place where she is nourished for three and one-half years out of reach of the serpent," vs. 14. This last part of the tribulation is the most destructive part. The Jew's can remember an earlier time when God also carried them in his power away from Pharaoh's bondage "on eagles' wings," Ex. 19:1-8. Satan spewed a flood of water (hordes of people, note details at Ezek. 38-39), out of his mouth directed against Israel, including the remnant of 144,000 who are now sealed and proclaim Jesus as God's Messiah. This remnant is the fifth and last personage in Chap. 12:17b.

Oct. 3, 1990

"The Two Beasts"
Rev. 1 3

Couples Class
Wendell Alford,
Teacher

I. Now in this chapter we have, in John's vision of the Revelation, a discussion of the last two of the seven personages which we noted in Chap. 12. Remember we called attention to the term "beast" as used in Chap. 6 when the first four seals were loosed. The four "beasts" were said to be narrators during the appearances of four horses, a white, a red, a black, and a pale. We should recall that the "beasts" listed in Chap. 6 are incorrectly interpreted in the King James Version as "beasts" but should be "living creatures." However, the beasts of Chap. 13 are definitely wild beasts, i.e., animalistic-type people who are villainous and who are inhuman in their motives and desires. In fact, they are devilish, self-centered egotists, willing to sacrifice all who would hinder their own satanic goals. All of us have known individuals who have had such traits, but none who has had worldwide authority as the two beasts of Chap. 13 will have. Oh, we have seen the attitude and actions of an Adolf Hitler who in a wholesale fashion murdered millions of one ethnic group of the earth's population, the Jews. We have also lived through the WWII era when Russia's leader, Joseph Stalin, purged with torture and death all who openly opposed him politically and/or personally. But during God's final judgment of humanity's rebellion against the only righteous, holy, eternal, God and Creator of all creation, these two beasts will have a world wide (but temporary, thank God!) influence and control. We learned in Chap. 9 that God, for a reason we do not fully comprehend, permits Satan to have this temporary control of the key to the abyss (bottomless pit), the place where angels who have rebelled against God are imprisoned until a future time. I believe also that rebellious unbelievers of all ages are there. While Satan had the key to Hades, he conscripted many of his disciples from there to invade the earth under his leadership. When Jesus was in the country of the Gadarenes on the east coast of the Sea of Galilee, he related to a mad man who the Word states simply was the dwelling place of demons (Satan's henchmen). The man fitted the description of a beast, a lower animal. He went about the countryside naked and had to be, at times, bound with chains for his own and others safety. He had no home but lived in the wilderness, and at Lk 8:29 we learn that he was "driven of the devil." Jesus asked him for his name, and he said, "Legion," because, "many demons were entered into him," Lk 8:30. Then in the following verse, "And they (the demons) begged him (Jesus) that he would not command them to go into the abyss." Can we not conclude from this that a human who can be characterized as a "beast" is the one who is the home of one or more of Satan's disciples, a demon or demons?

II. In vs. 1 John is evidently standing near the surf on the coast of the little Patmos Island. As he was standing there, he saw the first beast rise up out of the sea. The beast was described in essentially the same way as the red dragon in Chap. 12:3. As the beast arose from the waters (peoples), he had seven heads and ten horns upon which were ten crowns. On the seven heads were seven unholy, blasphemous names. The beast was like a leopard, with feet

of a bear and mouth of a lion, treacherous! This beast sat on a throne which means that he had political authority. We then learn that this authority and even the throne itself were given, not by God, but by the dragon, Satan. This means that Satan's temporary world authority is still given by the omission of God's direct intervention. The beast appears then to be reigning over a resurrection of the power of the Roman Empire in its heyday as indicated later at Rev. 17:12. There are seven divisions of the Roman-like world government, and their rulers all worship Satan from whom their power is derived. They cede to Satan the power of God which is blasphemy as noted by Jesus at Matt. 12:31 concerning the Pharisees who refused to believe that Jesus is One with God, i.e., Jesus is divine, John 10:25-33. This first wild beast out of and over all the world's people (seas) is the antichrist and ultimate man of sin. The whole world worships him except those sealed by God. Our study of Dan. 7-8 outlined four kingdoms which would rule the world from Daniel's time until the entire earth would come under one person. Before that happened there would be four great empires, Babylon, Media-Persia, Greco-Macedonia, and Rome. The last was to be different and is noted in Dan. 7-8 as the "little horn." Interestingly, Daniel's vision portrays these four world powers as four beasts, and their total periods of reign as "the time of the Gentiles." We have learned many details concerning the end of this Gentile period in Matt. 24-25; Rom. 11; I Cor. 15; I and II Thes., and II Pet. 3. Now God's Revelation is revealing the end of God's final judgment. One of the unusual aspects of the last empire (Roman) is that its power will initially be very strong, then it will diminish, only to be reconstituted at the end-time, Rev. 17:7-8.

III. The first beast is to be political, but the second will be a religious leader. I believe that this religious leader will claim to be the Messiah whom God promised in the prophets, and the Jewish nation will accept him as such (John 5:43), except those whom God has sealed. His pseudo power will be parallel to the first (political) beast, but, oddly, he will be in subjection to the first. This religious leader will deceive all peoples of the earth by means of great miracles. One of those miracles will involve causing fire to come down from heaven as Elijah did at I Kings 18:30-40. Also, at Exod. 7:8-13 Pharaoh's magicians were able to match a miracle which God performed through Moses. To enhance his own power and the power of the political beast, the second beast makes an idol in the likeness of the political beast and places it in the holy place in Jerusalem. The religious beast is miraculously able to enable the idol to appear to be alive, even to speak. Beast II requires each person to worship the image of Beast I upon the penalty of death. I believe that this image brings about the desolation spoken of at Dan. 9:27 and Matt. 24:15. At this time each person is required to have a mark in his or her forehead to determine who will be allowed to buy or sell. Without this mark, "666," ones activities will be severely limited, and no business will be permitted without ones indicating allegiance to the son of perdition, Beast I, the antichrist. Both Beasts I and II are antichrists, the first embodies all that is against what Christ stands for, and the second imitates Christ. They both will qualify according to the Word's definition of an antichrist at Matt. 24:24; I John 2:22; 4:3. Politics and religion will, at the end-time, join hands causing a show of God's awful vengeance Deut. 32:35-37; Rom. 12:19-21.

Oct. 10, 1999

"Service and Announcements"
Rev. 14

Couples Class
Wendell Alford,
Teacher

I. With the dramatis personae given in the seven personages (the woman, Israel as a nation; the red dragon, Satan; the child of the woman, our Lord Jesus Christ; Michael, the archangel charged especially with the Jews' affairs; Israel's remnant, the 144,000 sealed Jews; the two wild beasts, the political and religious antichrists), we now begin to see in the vision given to John the scenario of the last half of the seven year tribulation of God's vengeance against the world's humanity, Rom. 12:19-21; II Thes. 1:5-10; Jude 7. That humanity generally has become without hope because of their reprobate rebellion against the Holy Father, the Creator and Father of our Lord. While this condition will be the lot of most of humanity at the time of the tribulation, there will be a number of sealed Jews as well as an infinite number of saved Gentiles, Rev. 7:4,9. Last Sunday we discussed the last two characters, the political and religious beasts (antichrists) in Chap. 13, and now we look at Chap. 14 which begins by noting an emphasis on Jesus the Lamb on Mount Zion in Jerusalem. The vision to John continues to place Jesus as the chief force (Absolute Monarch) in God's final judgment on mankind's final rebellious spirit against God, John 5:26-27. This recognition of our Lord as the supreme authority is consoling to us believers after the view of the two atrocious, devilish antichrists in Chap. 13. Note here also that as Jesus the Lamb is mentioned, the sealed remnant of Israel still number 144,000, not one has been lost to Satan, because they were sealed by God just as we believers are sealed by God forever, Rev. 7:2,4; II Cor. 1:18-22; Eph. 1:13-14; 4:30. We believers can, as it were, "stick our tongues out" at Satan when he continually attempts to thwart our close relationship with our Lord Jesus Christ and our service for him, because we know we are sealed for heaven and his kingdom. Nothing can separate us from his love and safekeeping, Rom. 8:34-39.

II. After Jesus' authority is noted in vs. 1, John hears a voice from heaven as a host of voices sing a new song. While the voices sang in heaven, they played on harps. They were led in the new song by the sealed Jews on earth, because only they knew the new song. The picture here is a new harmony of us, Jesus' bride, and the earthly Jews who have finally accepted the same Lord we have, Jesus, God's Messiah. If you have ever experienced two or more of your children who "don't get along," you will know, perhaps to a lesser degree, the joy of God in knowing of this harmony of all his children. We can see in this harmony what life will be like in the coming Millenium, Rev. 20:4. Vss. 4-5 have been controversial through the centuries (and still are), but I believe it not to be very mysterious or strange when a couple refrain from sexual activities during this horrible seven and one-half year tribulation period. What happens during this time can be compared to what was happening to some believers in the first century of the church. At I Cor. 7:1-7,25-29, Paul was persuaded that, during the first century persecution, some marriages could, from a practical viewpoint, be a burdensome arrangement. So Paul (Holy Spirit led)

advised against sexual activity for some believers also during a period of severe crises for those engaged in special service in God's kingdom at Corinth, I Cor. 7:29-35. Now at the end time that same Rome has again raised her ugly head and is continuing to persecute God's sealed ones on earth, Rev. 17:8b. Those sealed ones have elected to serve God by continuing to sow the seed of the Gospel with all their time and therefore have given all their time to that task rather than marry or even for those already married to spend time together satisfying their sexual desires. This complete dedication to service to God under these circumstances pleases God although in normal times God's Word makes it explicitly clear that marriage is honorable for all believers, Heb. 13:4, and not to be forbidden, I Tim. 4:1-4. During the tribulation God honors those who serve him in deference to spending time satisfying their otherwise appropriate nuptial activities, vss. 4-5. These sealed ones are "without guile and fault," not because of their service, but because they are spiritually spotless for trusting Jesus' righteousness as God's Savior, Messiah. Further, Jesus said at Matt. 24:19 that pregnant women and those nursing infants will have an especially difficult task during this particular period.

III. At this time of God's judgment, God keeps several (six) of his angels busy as messengers giving some final, appropriate news. The first tells the earth's inhabitants to be patient and continue to hold our God in awe, worship him, and give him glory. Another angel foretells the fall of Babylon which city here symbolizes the political antichrist, the first beast of the sea in Chap. 13. The next angel assures those who worship the beast that they will feel the brunt of God's wrath and eternal punishment. The sealed ones are admonished to maintain their faith in Jesus and serve God. A voice from heaven reaffirms that these servers of God's cause will indeed receive their full rewards, Matt. 20:14-16. Their efforts will not be forgotten. John sees Jesus sitting on a cloud (Acts 1:9-11) who then, with an angel helper, use sharp sickles to shed blood which reaches up to horse bridles in depth, about four feet.

IV. This use of sickles to put to death masses of unrepentant mockers of God's holiness and will for mankind, seems so different from the milieu of the church today. Has Christendom become so callous toward unrighteousness and God's hatred of immorality that the world's unbelievers cannot see God's will being done in us? Are our political leaders in the world encouraging their people to be more Godlike? As we see in God's final Revelation that the earth's people will become so irreverent toward God and his holy will for them, our holy God cannot allow the earth's order to continue. Our purpose according to Matt. 13:24 is to share the seed (Word), and God will send angels to reap at the end time, Matt. 13:39. But note that in this Matthew account, Satan is also sowing his own tares. Satan is doing a good work as far as his own purpose is concerned. The Revelation is a testimony to the evil fruits of his efforts. Nevertheless, it is our testimony that our Lord will definitely win the war even though many battles with Satan must be fought with our Lord's strength and encouragement. God's sealed ones in the Revelation will also have that same undergirding.

Oct. 17, 1999

"Setting For God's Judgment"
Rev. 1 5

Couples Class
Wendell Alford,
Teacher

I. The Revelation is not related in a strictly linear flow of events, but certain related facts are given in capsules to expand in more detail the general overview already related. Some historians relate history in much the same fashion. They will give a linear flow of events from the political viewpoint and then tell what was happening in other areas of mankind's activities such as the fine arts, archeology, trade and commerce, etc. There are other places in Scripture where such treatments are given, e.g., in the account of early creation in Genesis 1 we are given how God created the earth including mankind. But then note in Gen. 2 the Holy Spirit of God reveals further details relating to the creation of the earth and its amenities, e.g., the wonderful Garden of Eden and a companion for the male human. Likewise, God gave the Law to Moses in Exodus, but interpretations and applications of that Law are given in detail in Deuteronomy. The Revelation in like manner is a detailed description of what was predicted in Matt. 24-25 by our Lord. Such a prediction was repeated in II Thes. 2:2-12 and I John 2:18. The forces leading to the climax of God's final judgment were already begun in the first century of the Christian Era, and the Revelation is the further details of that judgment revealed to us by God's vision through Jesus, to an angel, and then to John the apostle, Rev. 1:1. Even within the Revelation itself, there are interludes of information which are expanded details of information that are given in a general way in the account of the seven and one-half year period of God's final judgment. For example, in Chap. 13 we are told of the two antichrists, even though they continue until Rev. 19 when Jesus returns to earth with us, the ecclesia, his bride.

II. Chap. 15 is an interlude just before the most severe demonstration of God's distaste of a world peopled primarily by a Jesus-rejecting population. The main theme of Revelation is God's judgment and our Lord's exercising his authority to carry out that judgment. We have learned that Jesus as God's Son had several assignments in coming to earth, to sacrifice himself for the sins of all who will believe (trust) in him and exercise faith in Jesus' righteousness alone, a priest, a prophet, and finally a king who will eventually rule the entire earth with a rod of iron, Rev. 2:27 [Psa. 2]. There are those who have usurped for the corporate "Church" these assignments of Jesus, and such usurpation began, as noted above, during the first century of the Christian Era, II Cor. 11:13-15; II Thes. 2:27; Rev. 2:2-3. Chap. 15 begins with what is revealed to John to be "another sign in heaven" which makes this chapter another in a series with the sign in Rev. 12:1 where the sign is a woman representing Israel from whom our Lord came, Judah, Heb. 7:14. This sign in heaven in Rev. 15 is another group of seven angels, Rev. 8:2, who are to dispense the last and most severe plagues upon the earth. Remember we noted in our discussion of Chap. 10, I, that, "Seven appears to characterize that which is complete or representative." The plagues administered by our Lord's seven angels are to make God's tribulation punishment complete,

" - - for in them is filled up the wrath of God," vs. 1b. In vs. 2 John sees again, Rev. 4:6a, a view of a throne in heaven, but this time the "sea of glass" is mixed with fire, God's Spirit, Matt. 3:11; Acts 2:3, indicating that, now, some of the ones who have been saved by God have been victorious over the beast (the antichrist of Chap. 13), the beast's image, his mark, and his number, 666. These saved ones are those who were sealed by God and who would not have been able to withstand the severe persecution, Matt. 24:22. At this point in the Revelation we get some insight into the new song mentioned in Rev. 14:3. This new song combines the Song of Moses (Exod. 15:1-21 and Deut. 32:1-43) and the new song mentioned in Rev. 5:9-12. We are reminded again of the harmony of all of God's people who have pleased God in both Covenant periods. Those of the First Covenant trusting that God would send a Messiah (Savior) and those of the Second Covenant believing and trusting that Messiah when God sent him, even Jesus our Lord and Savior. In Peter's second sermon at Acts 3:20-26 the apostle noted this forthcoming harmony of all of God's people, those to the First Covenant with those of the Second Covenant. Noting this marvelous harmony reminds us again of God's Word at Rom. 11:25-36. How glorious it is to be sealed by God's love in Jesus Christ, Rom. 8:35-39; Eph. 1:13-14!

III. This interlude in Chap. 15 is a merciful intermission before the awful wrath of God is poured out upon the earth in Rev. 16. The new song confirms the greatness and marvel of God's actions, for he is the Lord God Almighty, ever just and true. Is God still just even if he punishes the unbeliever? God's Word speaks to that proposition at Rom. 3:3-6, "For what if some did not believe? Shall their unbelief make the faithfulness of God ineffectual? Certainly not: yea, let God be true, but every man a liar; - - - But if our unrighteousness demonstrates the righteousness of God, what are we saying? Is God unrighteous who inflicts wrath? (I speak as a man [a creature made by God].) Certainly not, for then how shall God judge the world?" In other words, God is without an equal and cannot issue an edict which is in error. He alone is worthy to judge all else, John 5:22-24, and to forego judgment by substituting an appropriate (to God) substitute. His substitute for one to avoid judgment is faith (trust) in his only begotten Son, Jesus Christ, John 3:14-18; Rom. 9:30-33. Who is the person who should fear God, Job 28:28; Prov. 9:9-10, and glorify his name? God alone is holy, and all nations (peoples) should come and confess that he alone (singularly) is worthy of worship. In the Revelation period all people should recognize that the manifestation of God's judgment is fair, just, and entirely appropriate. The seat of God's dwelling place (tabernacle) is revealed to John. From God's sanctuary proceed the seven angels clothed in pure, white linen and with chests reinforced with golden bands. One of the four living creatures gives to the seven angels seven gold bowls (vials) of the wrath of the eternal God. God is alone (none was permitted to enter the temple) during the fulfillment of the seven plagues, vs. 8, but smoke filled the temple revealing God's glory and power. Next week in Chap. 16, we will examine the seven bowls of wrath poured upon the earth. "But you, believers [all who are trusting Jesus] are not in darkness, that that day should overtake you as a thief. For God has not appointed us to wrath, but to obtain salvation by our Lord Jesus Christ," I Thes. 5:4,9.

Oct. 31, 1999

"God's Bowls Of Wrath"
Rev. 1 6

Couples Class
Wendell Alford,
Teacher

I. After the interlude of Chap. 15 to confirm the absolute justice of our Lord, we now see outlined in today's Chap. 16 what could be referred to appropriately as the epitome of God's wrath upon the earth's people who have, by this time, gone morally amok, against God's plan and purpose for humanity. A Biblical yardstick for mankind's being at the bottom of that moral depravity is homosexuality. When God instructed his prophet Isaiah to assess the moral climate of Israel (Judah), God's Word referred to Israel's rebellion like unto Sodom and Gomorrah, Isa. 1:2-3,9-10. The basis for gauging Israel's morals as being so low is referring to the Word's account in Gen. 19:4-11,24-25,29. The people of Sodom's exceedingly sinful practices were mentioned as early as Gen. 13:10-13. Sodom and Gomorrah at the time of their destruction by God had none or less than ten citizens who were pleasing to God, Gen. 18:32. For further use of Sodom and Gomorrah as a yardstick for unrighteousness, note also Deut. 29:23; Isa. 13:19; Jer. 23:14; 49:18; 50:40; Amos 4:11; Matt. 10:15; 11:23; Rom. 1:18, 24-28; 9:29; II Pet. 2:1-9; Jude 7; Rev. 11:8. One could ask the following questions: Is acceptance of practicing homosexuality a growing phenomenon in our nation and around the earth in our day? Is it "politically correct" to embrace homosexuality as normal and natural? Is Jehovah God's view, as Biblically stated, being taken into account? God has spoken. He is just to judge and condemn!

II. God's answer to the world population's defying his holy will is succinctly given in the Revelation, and in particular at the chapter we examine today, Chap. 16. At Neh. 9:16-17 God's Word reveals our Creator's reluctance to display his wrath, "But they (the Israelites) - - refused to obey, neither were mindful of thy wonders that thou didst among them; but hardened their necks, and in their rebellion appointed a captain [Aaron] to return to their bondage: but thou art a God ready to pardon, gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness, and abandoned them not." But at Gen. 6:3 God says, "My Spirit shall not always strive with man, - -." And at II Thes. 2:6-8, I believe that God is telling us believers, the ecclesia, that at the end time God's Holy Spirit will be restrained leaving mankind without direct Godly guidance except for a given number whom he will especially seal. "For the mystery [hidden truth] of iniquity [lawlessness, disregard for God's will] does already work: only he [God's Holy Spirit] who now [in Paul's day] letteth [restrains] will let until he [God's Holy Spirit] be taken out of the way. And then shall that Wicked [Lawless One, the one who utterly disregards God's Law and will, the antichrist] be revealed, whom the Lord [Jesus Christ] shall consume with the spirit of his mouth [breath], and shall destroy with the brightness of his [second] coming." (See also Rev. 19:20.) God's temple during the church (ecclesia) period is the persons of believers, John 14:16-17; I Cor. 3:16, but all believers will be removed from the earth and taken to heaven before the events of Rev. 16 take place, I Cor. 15:51-52; I Thes. 4:13-18; Rev. 4-5.

III. For reasons known only to our Father, Almighty God, the consummation of the age will happen when he alone decides, Matt. 24:36; Acts 1:6-8. (Note in the Acts passage that Jesus does not disallow that when he returns, he will again treat the Jews as a nation.) The end time will experience a change in God's patience according to the Revelation which the Lord is revealing to us through his eternal Word. Rev. 15 makes very clear that this spectacular end of the age and God's display of his holy wrath will not indicate that God is unjust or unmerciful, but that mankind is without hope since they have chosen to worship the antichrist, the ultimate defiance of God's purpose for humanity. In vs. 1 John hears a booming voice from God's throne which directs the seven angels mentioned at Rev. 15:1. These seven angels represent a "great and marvelous" sign in heaven designating them for dispensing the earth's last plagues. These plagues are "filled up [with] the wrath of God." The booming voice from God instructs the angels to pour out the bowls of God's wrath upon the earth. The first poured out his bowl upon those who worshipped the beast's (political antichrist) image and bore his mark. Those persons who worshipped the beast are infested with foul and loathsome sores. (This reminds one of what happened to Job when God withheld his protection.) The second angel pours out his bowl upon the sea which becomes like the blood of a dead person, causing every creature there to die. The third angel pours his bowl on every source on earth of fresh water, and all such water becomes as blood, i.e., unpotable. This angel, again, declares the righteousness of the eternal Creator even though he is being wrathful upon those who have shed God's people's blood. Now these persecutors have only blood to drink. Even so, this judgment is true and just. The fourth angel pours out his bowl upon the sun so that mankind are all scorched with intense heat. Amazingly, the persons so burned continue to blaspheme God's holy name and refuse to give him glory. The fifth angel releases his bowl upon the throne of the beast, and he and his party are covered with darkness, causing extreme pain. They bite their tongues seeking to relieve the torturous discomfort. They still do not repent of their rebellion against God's will. Then the sixth angel pours his bowl directly upon the River Euphrates which causes the stream to dry up for a clear path for the nations to the east to have a clear way toward the west. Thus an interlude reveals that as evil spirits like frogs come from the mouths of the dragon (Satan), the beast (the political antichrist), and the false prophet (the religious antichrist), the nations to the east gather together into the Armageddon (Mount Megiddo) area for "the battle of that great day of God Almighty," vss. 13-14,16. For these unbelievers Jesus has promised to come as a thief in the night, Matt. 24:42; vs. 15. The culmination of this interlude takes place at Rev. 19:19-21. The seventh angel empties his bowl into the air as the voice from God's throne says that his wrath is hereby finished. There follow loud noises, thunders, lightnings, and an earthquake greater than any other in all history. Jerusalem is divided into three parts, all cities of the earth fall, islands disappear, all mountains are leveled, and a hail storm of fifty-six pound stones falls over the earth. The Tribulation concludes, but the unbelievers refuse to repent and even blaspheme God because of the plague of hail.

Nov. 7, 1999

"The Apostate Church Destroyed"
Rev. 17

Couples Class
Wendell Alford,
Teacher

I. Chap. 17 gives attention to the details of the end of the religious antichrist which John saw in Rev. 13:11-18. To understand what God wants us to know in our time about the final destiny of the "Church" at the end time, we should review what we have learned in the earlier portions of the Revelation. In the brief account of the church history of the seven periods of the outline in Chapters 2 and 3, we noted that during the sixth church at Philadelphia, the Lord removes his ecclesia from the earth, Rev. 3:10; I Cor. 15:52; I Thes. 4:13-17. The "Church," however, continues on during the Laodicean period in name only even though the organization was "neither hot nor cold," and our Lord elected to "spew (vomit) them out of his mouth," Rev. 3:15-16. A distinction should be made between the Church as an organization and individuals within that organization. God's Holy Spirit calls persons into his kingdom on an individual basis, John 6:44-45, 63, 65. Some Bible students have claimed otherwise by citing a passage like Acts 16:31 out of context. There the jailer at Phillipi thought that he would be killed for letting his prisoners, Paul and Silas, escape, but, in fact, Paul and Silas did not leave their cells even though God had opened the doors with an earthquake. Why? I believe God wanted the jailer and his family to become believers in Jesus, the Messiah (Savior). The jailer's family did come to believe in Jesus, because they (Paul and Silas) spoke to not only the jailer but "to all that were in his house," Acts 16:32-34. I believe that taking this effort to establish that God does not save groups of people (families, nationalities, denominations, etc.), is important for us to see how the Church as an organization can err in its teachings and practices concerning an individual's relation to God through Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord. An individual must repent and accept Jesus as Savior and Lord before immersion can mean what it was originally intended to mean, an outward expression of what God has already done to ones spirit, rebirth by God, John 3:3-7; Acts 2:3, 38, 41. The sequence and purpose of immersion are important factors, but early in the history of the Church the mechanical "rite of baptism" was interpreted to mean that the act itself makes one spiritually alive (from above). This change is, I believe, one of the perversions of Scriptural evidence (God's message), and, combined with administering "baptism" to infants and other unbelievers became the means by which the Church organization could "grow the Church" without God having any part in the process. Also, there are a number of other teachings, based upon improper interpretations of God's Word, which give to the Church as an organization, temporary and self-serving results. It is possible, of course, and even probable that some individuals who have improperly received "baptism" to become aware of the correct relationship of immersion to a right relation with God through faith in Jesus Christ and follow through correctly.

II. The above information underlies how the "Church" becomes an organization whose leader becomes the religious antichrist in Rev. 13:11-18. Now we examine Chap. 17 to learn further details of the

"woman [who] was arrayed in purple." The end time apostate Church here is noted as a city which carries for God's people the hated name "Babylon." Babylon on the east bank of the Euphrates was at first the place where mankind first attempted to become God's equal by entering heaven through a tower. A common language made such effort possible. God confused the language to interrupt the efforts. The "woman" in scarlet and Babylon are synonymous to the same entity. As we learned in Chap. 13, the religious antichrist (here spiritual Babylon) was subject to the authority of the political beast which we will see in further detail in Chap. 18. In vs. 1 the apostate Church (Babylon) is called "the great whore" who includes the majority of the earth's population (waters). Vs. 2 explains that this harlot is now in alliance with the nations (kings) of the earth, i.e., the apostate Church combined with world politics. Babylon again has one religious language, now worldwide. Such an arrangement is committing spiritual fornication, because members of this worldwide "Church" are drunk with her teachings and power. The false prophet (supposed messenger of God) has promised a false hope of safe spiritual welfare through a misinterpretation of God's Word, vs. 2. One of the seven angels who dumped the seven bowls of God's wrath upon the earth comes to John and "carried him away into the wilderness" where he saw the woman (whore) supported by the political antichrist, vss. 3-4. Here we see the apostate Church united with the political antichrist or beast. The latter has become the Emperor of what has become the restored Roman Empire. When John saw this, "Babylon the Great, the mother of harlots and abominations of the earth," he was amazed at her power. I believe that the religious antichrist represents not only Roman Catholicism, but Protestantism, all other Christian denominations, as well as all other religions, cults and sects of the earth. There will again be one person, the religious antichrist, speaking one religious language with the one political leader, the political antichrist, enforcing adherence to the one religious leader. We are told rather clearly where the seat of the religious antichrist will be. In vs. 9 the woman sits on seven mountains which, I believe, means that Rome is the headquarters of the world religious empire. As the angel further explains to John and us "the mystery of the woman (apostate Church, the human religion) and the beast (the Antichrist), he mixes the characteristics of both. First, he states that the beast's domain (the reconstructed Roman Empire) will have seven heads (political divisions) and ten horns (political leaders). I do not believe that we need to know the details of this political amalgamation, and the angel tells John in vs. 8 that those who are sealed will understand the details as they unfold. Those not written in God's book of life will not know. I am glad that today we do not need to understand the details in vss. 10-13 as the saints of God will who are then alive on earth during the Revelation. In vs. 14 it is clear that God's people will be sustained by knowing that Jesus will shortly overcome all his opposition on earth, because he is Lord of lords and King of kings. Those who are trusting our Lord can rest assured that they are called and chosen (sealed) by God. In vs. 16 we learn that the political Antichrist and the kings under him hate the whore (religious component), "and shall eat her flesh, and burn her with fire." In other words, they, the political leaders within the restored Roman Empire and the Antichrist will eliminate all religious influence other than the worshiping of the Antichrist himself, "For God has put in their hearts to fulfill his will," vs. 17. The Antichrist will have become the leader of the world in all matters. He will then claim to be God, II Thes. 2:3-4.

Nov. 21, 1999

"Babylon II Is Destroyed"
Rev. 1 8

Couples Class
Wendell Alford,
Teacher

I. The evidence of Chaps. 17 and 18 appears to me to reveal two Babylons, one the center of world religion (including a uniting of all religions of the world), and the other Babylon, the headquarters of the political Antichrist who will profess to be God, II Thes. 2:4. There is considerable disagreement among Bible students about the distinction of the two Babylons. Some believe them to be one and the same at different times or spiritual and physical entities, but I believe that there will be built at the end time period a new Babylon (Baghdad?) in the vicinity of the original Babylon of ancient times in the Tigris-Euphrates area. In Rev. 12:9-12 we learned that during the Revelation period (seven years) Satan is to be "cast out" of heaven onto the earth. Jesus foresaw this act of God at Lk 10:18 and immediately following the glorification experience at John 12:31. Now recall our study of Isaiah at Isa. 13:19-22 and at Isa. 14:12-22. There Isaiah prophesied of Babylon's destruction as related to Satan's being thrown from heaven and restricted to dwelling on earth. For such an advent to happen, I believe that eventually the center of the entire world's commerce and trade will be controlled at this new Babylon. However, I think that the Antichrist, who will reside at the new Babylon, will maintain his religious control from Jerusalem where the religious Antichrist had installed the Antichrist's lifelike image. We could believe that such extensive control of the world's trade and commerce should be centered in such places as New York, Tokyo, Berlin, etc., but the source of such a large portion of the available energy for manufacturing and human body comforts is located in petroleum deposits in the Middle East. Also, the cities of the earth will be leveled during this short period, Rev. 16:19-26.

II. As we examine the beginning of Chap. 18, we remember that religious Babylon (Rome) has fallen, and we have seen the events of the seven seals, the seven trumpets, the seven personages, and the seven bowls of wrath. Chap. 18 is devoted to the new Babylon, the world's political and religious leader's capital and headquarters. Here the Antichrist (Satan personified) reigns supreme as he professes to be God himself. Under his dictatorial, despotic rule the world is "finally at peace" in every area, I Thes. 5:2-4; II Thes. 2:34, and see Isa. 13:4-11,19; Rev. 16:16. John sees another angel (messenger of God) come down from heaven with great authority lighting the earth with his glory. With a very loud voice this angel announces that it is time for this wicked Babylon to fall, because in that loathsome city devils live and promote foul spirits, a dwelling place for uncleanness and hatred. All nations of the earth worshiped the Antichrist and were favored by his doling out his luxurious and lavish goods. A voice from heaven admonishes her inhabitants to cease reveling in the sinful practices of the city in order to escape her sins. God has become aware of the awfulness of her sins, her self-exaltation. She claims complete self-sufficiency, in fact, she proclaims, "I sit a queen, and am no widow [I am able to care for myself without any other, including

God], and shall see no sorrow," vs. 7. In other words, "I am untouchable and beyond being faulted, because I am the God of the universe." Because the Antichrist is so defiant of God's authority, "her [political Babylon] plagues come in one day, death, mourning, and famine; and she shall be utterly burned with fire: for strong is the Lord God who judges her," vs. 8.

III. There will be two reactions to the destruction of the merged two Antichrists, the religious and the political Antichrists. The political leaders (kings) of all the earth who have allied with the political and religious goals of the Antichrist shall weep for her and lament her passing when they see "the smoke of her burning," vs. 9. The time it will take for this final destruction of mankind's sinful defiance of their Creator's love and offer of spiritual salvation through faith in his Son, Jesus Christ, is just "one hour," vss. 10,17,19. This repetition of such a brief period of the Beast's destruction is no doubt for emphasis so that those who are sealed with God's Holy Spirit will be encouraged in this hour of bitter trial. Note in vs. 10 that the former adherents abandon the Antichrist's home town for fear of the torment of "that great city Babylon, that mighty city!" The business men of the planet shall weep, because their goods and services are no longer bought and sold. The list of goods given in vss. 12-14 covers about everything imaginable from necessities to luxuries. Most amazing is that the world's supply of these goods is controlled by one hub on earth, Babylon, along with all political authority and all religions. Even with our present-day technology (computers, etc.), we can hardly believe that the entire world's business, politics, and religion can be managed from one location. Apparently the Antichrist's love of power and the ability to control the lives of the earth's population is the culmination of Satan's long desire. Remember when Satan confronted our Lord Jesus at the beginning of his ministry with three temptations? Satan told Jesus to break his fast by performing a miracle by turning stones into bread. A second time Satan tempted Jesus to display his bravery by calling upon God to save him as he cast himself from the top of the Temple in Jerusalem. The third temptation involved a false promise of Satan to give Jesus lordship over all nations of the world if Jesus would bow down and worship Satan, Matt. 4:1-11. This last temptation is exactly what is allowed Satan in Rev. 18. Of course Satan did not have the power he claimed, but now, for reasons I do not understand, God is allowing Satan through the Antichrist to control temporarily the earth's total business, political and religious powers, except for those whom God has sealed, Matt. 24:21-22; II Thes. 2:7. The end result of this temporary arrangement will bring about Satan's final and permanent defeat, Rev. 20:10.

IV. The second reaction to the defeat of the Antichrist is by those of us in heaven along with the Old Covenant saints. We will rejoice, because God is avenging his people on Satan and his Antichrist by destroying the old Deceiver who has tried to keep all people from worshiping their only Jehovah God, Father of our Lord, Jesus Christ, Rom. 12:19. As a millstone disappears when dropped in the ocean, so will Satan and his Antichrist be at the hand of our Lord Jesus.

Nov. 28, 1999

"The Lamb Takes A Bride"
Rev. 19

Couples Classss
Wendell Alford,
Teacher

I. In Rev. 4-5 Jesus takes the ecclesia from earth to heaven to prepare his bride for the marriage feast. From then until Rev. 19 the Lord is readying the ecclesia for the formal wedding ceremony. During that preparatory period the ecclesia (the elders, Rev. 4:10; 5:8,14; 11:16; 19:4) will appear before Jesus' throne for judgment of each believer's service in God's kingdom. We should emphasize emphatically that this examination of service is for rewards and is not for spiritual salvation and eternal life, Rom. 14:10-13; I Cor. 3:11-15. Our faith in the righteousness of God in Jesus Christ has already made us spiritually complete (perfect), John 3:18; Rom. 9:30-33; 10:9-10; Eph. 5:25-30; Col. 1:19-22. Then the wedding takes place while we are still in heaven, but the feast will occur on earth after the Lord Jesus brings us back to earth as he returns after the Tribulation. But I am rushing ahead of the beginning of Chap. 19.

II. Vs. 1 makes clear that the events of John's vision in Chap.19 follow the tribulation purge. "After these things" began in Chap. 4:1 and continue through Chap. 18, i.e., while the ecclesia is away from the earth and in heaven, we are to be told what is to happen immediately following the terrible destruction of the apostate "Church" and the political world order controlled by the Antichrist at the end time. In other words, while the marriage of the Lamb and his bride, the ecclesia, is consummated (married) for the introduction of the Lamb's bride to the earth, the entire earth is being prepared for Jesus and his family to begin the kingdom of God on earth. This reign will be the millenium period for Jesus as King on his earth. The ecclesia, Jesus' bride, will include all who have accepted him as Lord and Savior from the beginning of the establishing of his chosen ones on the day of Pentecost in Jerusalem to the day of his taking them from the earth, John 12:30-32; 14:3; Acts 2:41; I Cor. 15:51-52; I Thes. 4:13-18. John the apostle heard the voice of a great multitude in heaven saying, "Alleluia (Praise you the Lord); salvation and glory, and honor, and power unto the Lord our God," vs. 1. The host of voices sang out of the justice which God has exercised on the great whore (the apostate "Church") who was responsible for corrupting the people of the earth by her spiritual fornication, misinterpreting God's Word (Message) to mankind, the four living creatures, vs. 4. In destroying the whore God has avenged the "blood of his servants at her hand," vs. 2; Rom. 12:19-21. "The Lord God omnipotent reigneth," and John hears the people of God in heaven and on earth (the ones sealed during the Tribulation) sing Alleluia to his power which has alone cleansed earth of its evil, sin, and corruption. Vss. 1-6 are a praise introduction to the marriage supper of the Lamb.

III. We come now to the witness of Jesus' love for us who have placed our trust in his righteousness for eternal life. "Let us [God's elect] be glad and rejoice, and give glory to him [the Lord God] for the marriage of the Lamb [Jesus our Lord] is come, and his wife [the ecclesia] hath made herself ready," vs. 7. Vs. 8

tells us that the bride's dress will be fashioned from the "righteous acts" of God's people. By now the ecclesia's services are judged by Christ and her bridal gown will be made of those services, as cited above from Rom. 14:12. The angel instructs John to write, "Blessed (happy) are they who are called into the marriage supper of the Lamb." Further, the angel said, "These are the true sayings of God," vs. 9. This scene of the spiritual nuptials of Jesus and his ecclesia simply overwhelms the Apostle John who bowed to worship the angel. (See also Acts 10:25-26.) The angel said, "See thou do it not: I am thy fellow servant, and of thy brethern that have the testimony of Jesus: worship God: for the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy," vs. 10. Note another such encounter at Rev. 22:8 where the angel states that God's people are those who believe the prophecy of this, God's Revelation. Remember that in our study of Daniel's prophecy, God told Daniel at Dan. 12:4,9 that the end time information would not be revealed until "the time of the end." Here in Revelation John is given the information to reveal to us believers the message which was withheld from Daniel.

IV. Every action of mankind today, individually and collectively, is helping bring about what is revealed to John in vss. 11-21. John sees the door of heaven open through which a white horse appears. The horse has a rider whose designation is Faithful and True. The rider's purpose is, "- - in righteousness he doth judge and make war," vs. 11. When God's Son first came to earth, he came as a human baby subject to the wiles of greedy and vile humanity. His chief opposition was from his own people, the Jews, John 1:9-11. But they were not alone in opposing God's Son, for the rest of mankind (nonJews) had long before turned from God and his will, Rom. 1:21-25; 11:32. In fact, Jesus' life was taken by a joint effort of both Jewish and Gentile authorities, Matt. 27:1-2; Lk 23:13, 20-24; Acts 2:23,36; 4:10; 5:30. In Rev. 19 Jesus is not a baby but King of kings and Lord of lords over all.

V. An eternal change now is taking place, because Jesus is beginning his rule of the whole earth with a "rod of iron", vs. 15. He is implementing "the fierceness and wrath of Almighty God." In vs. 17 John saw an angel calling for the fowls of the earth to gather for the feast of all times. Satan (the beast) calls forth the armed forces of the earth's nations to gather together to make war on the man from heaven on the white horse. His name is, "The Word of God," vs. 13; John 1:1-2,14, and his troops from heaven "follow him upon white horses, clothed in fine linen, white and clean," vs. 14. The war like none ever before takes place as noted in vss. 19-21. This is the last battle in what is well known as the War of Armageddon. Among those defeated are the Antichrist and his religious sidekick, the false prophet, head of the apostate "Church." They both are defeated and "cast alive into a lake of fire burning with brimstone," vs. 20. With the defeat of all political and religious forces of earth, the stage is set for Jesus Christ to become, in truth and practice, the Ruler of the entire earth. Next week, Lord willing, we will see the union of God's people and the fulfillment of the promise of God that the throne of David will be reestablished, Isa. 9:6-7; Dan. 2:44, forever.

I. We now look at Rev. 20 where the earth has just been purged by God by means of the catastrophic end time Tribulation of seven years which we first learned about at Dan. 9:27. This seven-year period and what follows in Rev. 20-22 is referred to throughout the Old and New Covenants as, "in that day," "the day of the Lord," or simply, "that day," Isa. 2:12,17,20; 3:7,18; 4:1-2; 34:8; Jer. 46:10; Ezek. 13:5; Joel 3:14; Amos 5:18; Obad. 15; Zeph. 1:8,18; 2:2-3; Mal. 4:5; Matt. 24:36-39; Lk 21:34-36; I Cor. 5:5; II Cor. 1:14; I Thes. 5:2; II Pet. 3:10. Another important constancy in the Old Covenant is God's promise to restore Israel as a people eventually, Isa. 65:8-9,17-25; 66:10-24; Ezek. 39:27-29; 48:9-13 (cf Rev. 21:9-14); Dan. 12; Hos. 14:1-9; Joel 3:1-21; Amos 9:5-15; Obad. 15-21; Mic. 7:15-20; Zeph. 3:14-20; Hag. 2:20-22; Zech. 8:1-23; 14:9-21; Mal. 4:4-6. Further explanations of God's continuing to care for the Jews as a people is noted at Matt. 17:9-13; Rom. 10:18-11:36; Rev. 7:1-8.

II. At the very outset of Chap. 20 we immediately confront the concept of the thousand-year period at the end time. I alluded to this concept when we first began our study of The Revelation, Chap. 1,I. For those of you who do not keep these lesson outlines, I believe it appropriate to repeat that information to review. The problem of accomplishing world peace involves whether the Church will bring that about, or, whether it will require God's special intercession into the affairs of mankind. Chiliasm (Greek for one thousand, or Millennium in Latin) was understood as truth in the first two hundred years of the ecclesia period (Acts 15:13-19; Rom. 11:25-29), but Origen (185-254 AD) spoke against Chiliasm. Later, Augustine (354-430 AD) in his published Christian philosophy (The City Of God), after the Roman Empire had high-handedly taken over the Christian Religion as its own under Constantine I in c. 323 AD, essentially made the Christian Church, as an organization, synonymous with the Kingdom of God. In other words, the Roman Church disallowed God's ever maintaining the Jews as a nation or congregate people again. The Roman Church, not the Jews, is to fill the role of representing God in world affairs until Jesus comes again. The Roman Church still forbids its members to believe in the millennial period in which God's early Covenant with the Jews will be fulfilled, Catechism of the [Roman] Catholic Church, 1994, p. 177, Paragraph 676. This position signifies that the Roman Church presumes themselves to be equivalent to the Kingdom of God which will, through their own efforts, eventually bring peace to the earth before Jesus comes to earth again, but see Rev. 7:1-8. I believe that, as was stated in our study of Rev. 17,II, the Roman Church, as an organization, will be a component of "the great whore" during the Tribulation, along with all other world religions.

III. In vs. 1 an angel from heaven comes to earth with a key to the abyss and with a huge chain in his hand. Thus equipped he grabbed Satan and bound him for one thousand years. During that long period Satan is to remain bound in the abyss where he will be unable

to deceive people on earth. God's Word states plainly in vs. 2 that Satan will be released after the Millennium for a "little while." Vs. 1 states that during the last half of the Tribulation, many will be killed because of their trusting that Jesus will save them. They will be resurrected to reign with Christ during the Millennium. The first resurrection began when Jesus was resurrected (Matt. 27:51-53). In that resurrection the Old Covenant saints, those with faith in God's promised Messiah, arose. They will join those who were killed during the Tribulation to reign. Jesus' bride is considered a separate group who will reside with Jesus in the New Jerusalem (Rev. 21:9-10) and will be resurrected when Jesus returns to earth, I Thes. 4:13-18. I believe that many of those who are saved during the Tribulation, except those who are killed and resurrected in the first resurrection, will continue on in their natural bodies. With Satan and sin no longer on earth, disease will no longer be a problem. The Jews will reign on earth with Jesus the Messiah directing their activities. We, now Jesus' spouse, will be able to interact with them between New Jerusalem and earth's Jerusalem as Jesus did after his resurrection, (Our bodies will be like his, Phili. 3:20-21.) Lk 24:39-43. Vs. 7 picks up the narrative after the Millennium. There we are told that Satan is brought up from the abyss and unchained. He again pervades the entire earth to test mankind. Masses of people gather together to do harm to God's people in and around Jerusalem. God directly from heaven brings down fire and devours this Gog-Magog horde of God's people's enemies. The people referred to in this passage are of the same genre as the Gog-Magog noted in Ezek. 38:2, but I believe Ezek. 37-39 describes the former Battle of Armageddon and that God will reestablish Israel as a nation before the Tribulation comes. As a nation they will suffer persecution, but they will enjoy a resurrection, Dan. 12:12; Rom. 11:25-29.

IV. Satan is released for a little while after the Millennium, and he will again be taken by God and "cast into a lake of fire and brimstone where the beast, Antichrist, and the false prophet, head of the apostate Church (the whore), are. There they will be tormented forever. John then sees a great white throne whereon sits the One who will decide the final disposition of those who had no place prepared for them, John 14:1-4. This One will be our own Lord Jesus Christ, John 5:22-30. Coming before him for judgment will be every person who ever lived and who elected to trust his or her own goodness to prepare for citizenship in God's heaven. All people both small and great stand before God, and the books are opened, one with the roster of those spiritually dead and the other the book of life. Every spiritually dead person was judged according to their deeds or works, and not one was found worthy by their own works or deeds. Only those to whom God's righteousness had been applied through their faith in Jesus Christ were found in the book of life, John 3:17-18; Rom. 9:30-33. Hades has two areas: paradise and a place of torment, and those who were not in paradise (on the book of life role) were cast into the lake of fire along with death (that which separates one from God, disbelief) and the place-of-torment component of hades. Our witness is extremely important for people to know and have an opportunity to believe and have faith in God's love through Jesus Christ!

SUPPLEMENT TO REV. 20 - DEC. 5, 1999: THE RESURRECTIONS

- I. The First Resurrection
 - A. Jesus resurrected, Acts 1:9-11; I Cor. 15:20-28
 - B. Rapture (resurrection) of Jesus' Bride, the Ecclesia, I Cor. 15:51-52; I Thes. 4:13-18; Rev. 4.
 - C. Resurrection of Tribulation and Old Testament saints, Dan. 12:1-2.

- II. Millennium during which the Israelites will be priests of God. Time and circumstance promised to Abraham, Gen. 12:1-4; 15:6-18; Rev. 20:6.

- III. The Second Resurrection
 - A. All who ever lived but refused to exercise faith in God's promise through his Son, Jesus Christ, are raised for final judgment by God.
 - B. All are condemned by God based upon their own efforts, Rev. 20:12-13.
 - C. Following this judgment exercised directly from God's Great White Throne, Death (that which separates one from God) will be destroyed, I Cor. 15:26; Rev. 20:14.

- IV. A new heaven and earth will replace the old world order, Rev. 21:1.

Couples Class
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Dec. 12, 1999

"The Threshold Of Eternity"
Rev. 21

Couples Class
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I. We have stated earlier (Chap. 15 I, Oct. 17, 1999) that The Revelation given to John is a detailed description of what Jesus taught in Matt. 24-25. At Matt. 24:35 Jesus said, "Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my words shall not pass away." There Jesus is telling us that the earth and heaven are temporary as compared to the truth in Jesus Christ, and that truth will outlast the creation as it (the heaven and earth) then existed. Vs. 1 reveals that, in fact, "for the first heaven and the first earth were passed away," as the fulfillment of Jesus' prophecy takes place. Other factors as a part of that arrangement which God in Christ will create after he has purged the earth by means of the terrible tribulation: there will be no more seas, and people will not be bothered by remembering what the old age was like, vs. 1, and Isa. 65:17, "For, behold, I create new heavens and a new earth: and the former shall not be remembered, nor come upon the heart." I have emphasized throughout our examination of The Revelation that the Jews are again to be remembered in a special way by God. That was asserted dramatically in Rev. 7 where John saw a special angel of God seal 144,000 Jews as his own. Further, God tells us at Isa. 66:22, "For as the new heavens and the new earth, which I will make, shall remain before me, saith the Lord, so shall your seed (Abraham's) and your name remain." This position of God's Word defies those who presume that the Church will replace God's people, the Jews, through the end time. Also, remember the passage which I have emphasized to this class at Heb. 11:39-40, "And these all, having obtained a good testimony through faith, received not the promise: God having provided some better thing for us (the ecclesia) that they, apart from us, should not be made perfect (complete)." The kingdom which God will create during the millennium will fulfill his promise to the Jews which we learned in our study of Daniel at Dan. 2:44, the key verse in Daniel's prophecy.

II. Beginning at vs. 2 a new concept is seen by John which is especially interesting to us of the ecclesia, those sealed by God's Holy Spirit (his own Son's bride), during the New Covenant period of human history. Note particularly that John saw a holy (separated) city, a new Jerusalem (italics mine). This city is especially prepared for the bride of Jesus Christ, an eternal place which Jesus promised at John 14:3, "And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there you may be also." This wonderful new creation for us brings to mind I Cor. 2:9, "But as it is written, 'Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God has prepared for them that love him.'" At this point in time, the marriage and associated feast is over, the millennium kingdom has come and gone, and now the threshold of eternity has come. Our eternal relationship with our Lord is noted at Eph. 5:28-32, "So ought men to love their wives as their own bodies. He that loves his wife loves himself. For no man ever yet hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, even as the Lord the ecclesia. For we are members of his body, of his flesh, and

of his bones. - - - This is a great mystery, but I speak concerning Christ and the ecclesia." Is it not glorious that Jesus and his Father do not practice divorce?!

III. John the apostle sees and explains the conditions which will prevail in the New Jerusalem. This new city from heaven will be distinct from the new earth mentioned in vs. 1. God himself will live with his redeemed in the New Jerusalem. Since God and his people will live there, there will be no more death (separation from God), no more sorrow, tears (weeping), for God will dispose of all the recollections of the sorrows we experienced before on the old earth. In fact, everything will be new according to the very words of the One who sits upon the throne, words of the Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end, Jesus Christ, Rev. 1:8. That which is needed for eternal sustenance will be available free as an inheritance from God, for God the Creator will be our God and Father. We will not need to fear, because those things which have caused misery and sorrow in the past will be removed from our memories forever. Those things include the practice of cowardice, unbelief in God, hate, murdering, sexual immorality, appealing to evil spirits, idol worship, and lying, all of which will be abolished forever. Those who did not depend upon their faith in God's Savior, Jesus, have been relegated to the eternal lake of fire by their own choices. Their lot is with Satan who has been cast into the place of eternal punishment away from the Lord and his people, Matt. 25:41; Rev. 20:10,15.

IV. Vss. 9-21 are given to John's view of the New Jerusalem. He is shown the new city, our new, eternal home with our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. The apostle is taken by one of the seven angels who poured upon the earth the seven bowls of plagues, to a huge, high mountain. "Come here and I will show you [the abode of] the bride, the Lamb's wife." The angel carried John in the spirit in which he saw the holy city, the New Jerusalem, descending out of heaven from God. The city had a barrier around its four sides with three gates on each side. These gates each had a name of one of the twelve tribes of Israel, and each gate was controlled by an angel. It is interesting to us that the support of the great city was twelve foundations which were each named for one of the twelve apostles of the Lamb. One can wonder about Peter's insistence at Acts 1:15-16, 20-26, that the vacancy caused by Judas Iscariot's omission was to be filled immediately. Another wonder is how does Paul as an apostle fit into the picture here as God names the twelve foundations of the New Jerusalem. These two wonders need not trouble us, for our faith is in our Lord who knows all things from the beginning to the end. He has promised to care for us whether we can understand these mysteries or not. These concerns are eliminated as problems through our faith in Jesus Christ. There is no special dwelling place for God himself in the new city, for the entire city is God's dwelling place. Nothing that defiles or corrupts can ever enter the New Jerusalem. Only those who are at home there are those purified by faith and recorded in "the Lamb's book of life," Isa. 4:3; Lk 10:20; Phili. 4:3.

Dec. 19, 1999

"No Sun Needed"
Rev. 22

Couples Class
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Teacher

I. God's Word begins by announcing simply that God is the Creator of the heaven and the earth, Gen. 1:1, but within his creation God chose to create a being (mankind) like himself with free moral choice, even to defy the Creator himself. The first man and woman chose with their freedom to disobey their Creator which disobedience is symbolized by the eating from a particular tree in the Garden of Eden. God had expressly forbidden them to eat that food. Their disobedience brought upon themselves spiritual separation from God as well as the deterioration and final mortal death of Adam and each of his descendant's physical existence upon the earth, Rom. 5:12-21; I Cor. 15:20-28. But through Jesus Christ God brought Good News (the Gospel) to mankind. Through faith in this only begotten Son of God, Jesus, God's Messiah (Savior), anyone can now become spiritually alive and be assured of eternal (life) union with God. Rev. 22, the end of God's Word and revelation of his truth to mankind, continues the description of the New Jerusalem where the bride of Jesus will finally and eternally reside. A pure river of clear as crystal life-giving water proceeds out of the very throne of God and of the Lamb, John 4:14. The New Jerusalem will have a boulevard with a median on which will grow the tree of life and on which will be twelve different types of fruits, a perpetual supply, Gen. 2:9,15-17; 3:24. The leaves of the tree will continually ensure peace from the New Jerusalem among the nations.

II. Vs. 3 makes clear that in our new dwelling place God and the Lamb will also live. There his servants will continually serve him. Note especially that there shall be no more curse. Here on earth we have lived under a curse where sin, death, and Satan has ruled for a season, John 12:31; II Cor. 4:4. As we noted above, in Adam all people die (physically), I Cor. 15:22, but God at Rev. 20:14 cast death (that which separates) into the lake of fire. In the New Jerusalem there will be no sin, no need for testing, and never a temptation for the inhabitants to do contrary to God's perfect and holy will or cease from serving him. That arrangement will be what makes heaven heaven, perfect (complete). All of creation will now revolve around our new home, because that is the home also of God, the Creator and his Son and Savior, Jesus Christ. The physical laws which have limited us before our resurrection will no longer be in effect. We will have the abilities then which Jesus had after his resurrection, I John 3:1-2. He was able to leave the earth for other celestial locations. I believe that we will be able to leave the New Jerusalem for other places in God's creation. (Jesus walked through closed doors, John 20:26.) Vs. 5 tells us that in the New Jerusalem there will be no need for the sun, for "the Lord God giveth them light, and they shall reign for ever and ever." We believe that it was God who created our sun, and, therefore, that source of energy for the old earth also was provided by our Lord. We will not eat meat in heaven even as was true of Adam and Eve in the Garden. There will be no animals, for even fish cannot live where there is no water (sea) Rev. 21:1. Truly God has promised to create a new heaven and a new earth.

I believe that we will be able to go back and forth to either without fear or hindrance as the spouse of our Lord.

III. In vs. 6 the Lord indicates that the events of The Revelation will take place quickly, i.e., the period of The Revelation when it begins will happen in a short period of time. Most of it (after Chap. 3) happens within a relatively brief seven-year period. Jesus states the brevity of the period in vss. 7,12,20. John again, as he did at Rev. 19:10, is overcome with the message which God's messenger is delivering to him. The message is so glorious that John again fell down at the feet of the angel, and, again, the angel told him not to worship him but rather God is to be worshiped. "Seal not the words of the prophecy of The Revelation, for the time is at hand [has been at this time decided]." The white throne judgment has passed, and the eternity of everyone's fate is sealed, Rev. 20:11-15. Therefore, they will continue in their evil ways. Also, those who are sealed by God as his own by including them in the Lamb's book of life will continue to be righteous and holy, vs. 11. Jesus personally assures those of us who trust him and have served him will receive the rewards promised. He was not only there at the beginning, but he will be there at the end, vss. 12-13. Those who have served him and placed their faith in Jesus Christ will have free access to the New Jerusalem and its tree of life. Jesus' invitation is still open during the ecclesia period Rev. 1-3 and on into the brief revelation period, vs. 17; John 4:14. A warning is given to those who add to or subtract from any part of The Revelation. Such a one is not one who is a part of the book of life or who will enjoy the New Jerusalem. Jesus again states that he will make a short work of his purging of the earth as outlined in The Revelation. God's grace through our Lord Jesus Christ will be with us who believe, vs. 21.

IV. The earth that was created by God in Genesis passes away in Revelation. Satan who led Adam and Eve to rebel against God is completely neutralized in Revelation. The sun which was assigned the task of ruling the day, Gen. 1:16, at the beginning is abolished in the new world, Rev. 22:5. Darkness was a part of the original Genesis creation, but the new heaven and new earth will have no night at all. The water necessary to maintain mortal (flesh and blood) life (I Cor. 15:50) was necessary in Genesis, but there will be no water (H₂O) in the New Jerusalem, Rev. 21:1. The sin, introduced into the Garden of Eden through Satan's deceit and lies, is buried with Satan and all who have yielded to his unbelief in the lake of fire, Rev. 20:10,14-15; 21:27. Mankind began in perfection, but through their own choices (all have sinned, Rom. 3:23; 5:12) they needed a Savior who could be supplied only by God. That Savior announced himself in Rev. 1, and gave a brief, concise, panoramic history of the ecclesia and "Church" in Rev. 2 and 3. During the ecclesia period in the Philadelphian era (Rev. 3:7-13), the ecclesia is taken to heaven (Rev. 4-5) where they remain with Jesus during the purging of the earth (Rev. 6-18). In Rev. 19 Jesus returns to earth with his bride. In Rev. 20 Jesus sets up his kingdom promised to the Jews in the Old Covenant. In Rev. 21-22 is described the transition from the old age to the new eternity.