

Jan. 2, 2000

"The Creator, Humanity and Sex"
Romans 1

Couples Class
Wendell Alford,
Teacher

- I. The nature of humankind as sexual beings
- A. Gen. 1:26-27 People made "in Our (God's) image," i.e., with God's eternal potential, in day six of creation.
 - B. Gen. 2:18-25 A male was made eternal (God breathed into him an eternal spirit) in day seven, but he felt incomplete without a companion with an eternal nature also. The God of creation met that companionship need by involving the male in creating a female companion of another gender (sex). They were by God's designation a family, man and wife,.
 - C. Gen. 6:3-7 Mankind from the beginning of their history disappointed God who made them, and the Lord promised that his Spirit would not always strive with mankind. (Gal. 5:16-18; II Thes. 2:7)
 - D. Gen. 19:4-11 The depth of mankind's sin against God was expressed by deviating (through homosexuality), i.e., from God's original plan of sexual intimacy (heterosexuality), i.e., between a male and female as man and wife. (Review Gen. 2:23-25) [I cite this original male-female condition as man and wife, because Jesus recalled this same concept in discussing male-female relations in Mk 10:2-12. - WA]
- II. Biblical testimony against pseudosexual (carnal, not natural) activities between people of the same sex:
- A. Old Test. Gen. 19:5,24-25; Lev. 18:22; 20:13; Deut. 23:17; I Kings 14:24
 - B. New Test. Rom. 1:18-32 (esp. vss. 24,26-27); I Cor. 6:9; I Tim. 1:9-10;
 - C. Necessity of spiritual perspective, Matt. 16:23; I Cor. 2:14
- III. Sexual activities of a married (publicly committed) couple of one male and one female are pleasing to God.
- A. Old Test. Gen. 1:28; 9:7; Prov. 5:18-23;
 - B. New Test. Mk 10:2-9; I Cor. 7:1-9; 11:11-12; Eph. 5:31-33; I Tim. 3:2,12; 4:1-5.
- IV. Sexual awareness and stimulus development in humans
- A. Born with sex (gender) already determining physical features and characteristics, but innocent (neutral) in sexual stimulus
 - B. Physical desires regarding sexual urges develop during chronological period referred to as puberty, i.e., that time in person's life when he or she is capable of reproducing another human. This time in life can vary over a considerable period, but usually the time occurs at 12 years in girls and 14 in boys.
 - C. Well before and especially during a youngster's reaching the puberty stage, normal behavior patterns should be nurtured by proper instruction and introduction by caring and loving parents. (Prov. 22:6; Eph. 6:1-4; II Tim. 3:13-16)
 - D. In the early years of a child when the transitional period between childhood (sexual innocence) and adulthood (sexual awareness) is occurring, an individual usually confronts a mixed feeling

between his or her maleness and femaleness. This mixed feeling is most often due to the gradual introduction of those glandular products of secreted hormones produced in the ovaries of the female and in the testicles of the male. This period of adolescence is related for David in I Sam. 18:1-4 just after he had slain the giant, Goliath of Gath. David and Jonathan became especially enamored of each other. David's later relationship with females leaves no doubt concerning his later sexual maturation. (I Sam. 18:27; II Sam. 11:2-5)

V. Sexual relations are well defined and ordered in the Bible. The special relationship of a male and female married couple who share mutual sexual intimacies should involve a unique, distinctive, and one-of-a-kind sharing. That oneness is so distinctive that the Bible refers to it as "one flesh," or like to Christ's relationship to his bride, the church. (Eph. 5:31-32) Marriage of a woman and man is therefore sacred, i.e., it is an intimate merger of one each of the two genders which God created for such a relationship in the beginning. When persons practice activities involving sexual excitation and consequent activities outside such a marriage (sacred, sanctioned by God), the end result can be nothing short of distress, anxiety, shame, disorder, guilt or misery in the short and/or long term of life. God's word is very specific regarding the nature and intent of why he created the two genders within humanity. There are, in my opinion, two primary reasons for why God made the two genders. First, the obvious one is the procreation of the human race. But, there is another reason which is more difficult to express and less definable. The emotional sense of well-being and self-esteem resulting from sexual expression in a God-approved married state is so distinctive that only a loving God Almighty could have created such. It is possible to reach a sexual, sensual, emotional experience through other activities than a Biblically approved marriage, but as clearly defined in Rom. 1, such displeases our God. Also in that same chapter (vss. 20-22) declares that he has built into the conscience of all men a sure feeling of guilt for those who practice such a perversion of God's original purpose of mankind's two distinct genders. The Judeo-Christian Bible makes very clear that mankind can and do practice sexual activities other than those pleasing to our God such as prostitution, adultery, homosexuality, bestiality, against another's will (rape), and fornication, but that same Bible makes such human conduct contrary to the will and purpose of humanity's Creator. It is common for those who practice sexual irregularities also to practice other hurtful activities in defiance of God's will. Paul is explicit in Rom. 1:24-32 to enumerate a group of such companion evils along with the practice of homosexuality.

VI. Conclusion: At Matt. 19:10-12 Jesus gives three reasons why some persons cannot enjoy marriage. Those born impotent, have been neutered, or choose to devote full and exclusive time to God's work. This passage should not be interpreted to mean that homosexual lifestyles are inbred, innate, inherent, inborn, intrinsic, or natural such as physical deformity, race, or skin-eye-hair color. Homosexuals are those who become sexually attracted to persons of the same gender through sexual immaturity and an ungodly choice. Examples of other such ungodly (sinful) choices are: polygamy, pedophilia, masochism, and sadism.

Jan. 9, 2000

"The Law and the Spirit"
Romans 2

Couples Class
Wendell Alford,
Teacher

I. Introduction to Romans: On Paul's third missionary journey, he spent over three years in Ephesus and went thereafter to Corinth in Greece in the winter and spring of 58 AD. (See Acts 20:3) He had every intention of going to the capital of the Empire, and if God permitted, to Spain also. (See Acts 19:21; 23:11; Rom. 15:24). Recall that his Rome visit was delayed for over two years while he was imprisoned in Caesarea. Phoebe, a deaconess in the neighboring Cenchrea church, (Rom. 16:1-2) was about to leave for Rome and very probably carried the letter to the Roman believers. The church at Rome was most likely started by the Jews and Jewish proselytes from Rome who attended the first Pentecost celebration in Jerusalem after the resurrection of Jesus, see Acts 2:10. Also, the Roman believers could have been started or reinforced by those who were forced out of Jerusalem following the murder of Stephen, see Acts 8:4; 11:19. There is no Biblical evidence that any one of the apostles started the body of believers in Rome. They did know through the letter we are discussing about Paul as early as 58 AD when it was delivered to them by Phoebe. The Scriptural evidence of this fact is found in Acts 28:15 where believers from Rome rushed down to meet Paul all the way south of Rome at Appii Forum and The Three Taverns. When Paul's letter to them arrived, the beliefs understood and practiced by the believers in Rome were probably very rudimentary, especially regarding the problems relating the Jews who accepted Jesus as the Messiah with the Gentile believers who worshiped with them. However, Paul had been declaring that God also accepted nonJews throughout the Mediterranean Basin, and it is likely that some such believers had moved to Rome from there. To reconcile doctrinal differences, which no doubt were held among the congregation at Rome, was Paul's deliberate purpose in writing this letter to them. This purpose he stated in 1:16-17 and introduces what may be called Paul's understanding of the religious meaning of the world's history. The Roman letter does, without doubt, contain the fullest and most systematic exposition of not only Paul's teaching but also his own character.

II. Summary of Rom. 1: Paul outlined the universal ungodly practices of all humanity. He included his own persuasion that all people are worthy of spiritual separation from the loving God who created them. He, as a result of that persuasion, concluded that the only power able to salvage human spirits was the Good News (Gospel) brought to the world by and through Jesus, God's Messiah. Paul was, in this context (everyone is short of God's glory), happily willing to profess a lack of shame for relying upon the Gospel of Christ and its power to save. In fact, his everyday living was entirely justified by that reliance in the righteousness of Jesus Christ. And further, that "power of God unto salvation" is available to all Jews and all nonJews alike, anyone who will believe, Rom. 1:16-17; Philip. 2:9-13.

III. Rom. 2 Because everyone is guilty before God, no person is able to judge another person's spiritual condition in God's sight.

That judgment is exclusively God's prerogative, and every person's deeds is evaluated by God who has no respect for one person over another, whether Jew or nonJew. Paul (God's Word) then is telling us that if we set ourselves up as spiritual judges, we are not only attempting to usurp God's exclusive prerogative, but also condemning ourselves, Jam. 2:10. The only way a human can judge another is by citing a breaking of God's law, and God has assigned that responsibility exclusively to the only perfect (without sin) human who ever lived on earth, the God-man, Jesus Christ, 2:16. Paul stresses that God has demonstrated extreme, ultimate patience with mankind's weaknesses and rebellion. The purpose for this delay of judgment by God on all humanity is to show his love through forgiving grace and thereby bring about repentance and eternal life, Rom. 2:3-7. Paul then relates Jews and Gentiles in their willingness to follow God's will, i.e., believe that Jesus is God's Son, the Messiah. God's judgment will fall on those of both groups who disobey him. The Jews have had a special advantage in that God gave them the law (tenets of God's will). The Gentiles, on the other hand, did not have the written law to guide them, but God did put his eternal spirit in them so that they actually have an inner conscience to guide them. The final evaluation is not based on what one knows to be God's will, but the deeds produced by the knowledge which everyone has. One cannot boast about what he or she knows about God's nature and will, but about what his or her life demonstrates or fails to show of Godliness in daily living, Jam. 2:18. The fruits of the right spirit determines if the person's spirit is from above (God's throne). In this regard note all of the evil human acts given in Rom. 1:21-31. A person can know that God's law (will) makes it clear that one should not steal, but steals; should not commit adultery, but commits adultery; should not give credence to idols, but commits sacrilege (covets - Col. 3:5). God's name is held in contempt by those who do not know him, because unbelievers observe those who profess to know God and who, at the same time, do those things which the unbelievers know (from their eternal nature) God hates. Take, for instance, circumcision (baptism) is supposed to indicate that one is living within God's will. However, if one who has been circumcised (baptized), conducts his or her life in disregard of God's influence, the professed willingness to follow God's will is shown to be null and void, a farce. A true believer (Jew or Christian) is one whose inner spirit is controlled by God's Spirit, not one who knows God's law. The genuineness is known by the following of God's Spirit, not just knowing his law (letter). God makes the final decision.

IV. Review: Can a person be right with God (spiritually salvaged, born again) and always act as God's children, i.e., act as God wants him or her to in every detail? (See I John 1:8-10; but see also John 3:14-16; "- - whosoever believeth in him should not perish. but have everlasting life." John 10:28-29 "- - neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand. - - no man is able to pluck them out of my Father's hand." Eph. 1:13-14; "- - after you believed, you were sealed with that Holy Spirit of [God's] promise which is the deposit of the purchased [with Jesus' death, burial and resurrection] possession - -."

Jan. 16, 2000

"The Jews, Law, and Grace"
Romans 3

Couples Class
Wendell Alford,
Teacher

I. If Gentiles can be made right with God through faith in Jesus Christ, was there an advantage in being a Jew? Was there an advantage in keeping the Abrahamic covenant? Yes, Paul states, those mechanical rites ever kept before the Jewish nation and its citizenship the fact that Abraham believed God (demonstrated faith in God's promise), and God equated that faith with righteousness (pleasing to God), Heb. 11:8-10; Gal. 3:6. Further, the law (which here also includes the prophets and poetic books as well as the Pentateuch, Law) was communicated to mankind through God's people who were chosen to disseminate that explicit knowledge of God's will to all humanity. But they (God's people later known as Israelites and Jews) did not do God's bidding to be evangelists of God's will (Law) through the world. They became too concerned with temporary matters rather than everlasting, spiritual truths, Matt. 23:13-15.

II. Paul is quick to proclaim that while it is true that the nation of Israel as a whole did not follow God's leading, some of them did. The fact that God was not believed by all did not destroy or make untrue the "faith of God." This reference to "God's faith" is most interesting. We continually think of people having faith in God, and here Paul refers to God's faith! To understand what Paul intended to communicate in using this term, we probably should examine how "faith" is meant in Scriptures. There is first a reference to a faith which means the totality of ones faith in Jesus as God's Savior, one could say the true Christian faith, see Jude 3-4. Second, there is faith referring to that which is really unworthy of trust in a person or cause. For example, a person can be depending upon (have faith in or trust) rules, laws, ordinances, things, power over others, prestige, popular opinion, or ones family background, etc., Mk 3:24; John 8:33, 37. Third, assurance or reliability can be expressed by the term faith. This is used in Heb. 11:1 where faith is defined as "the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen." Fourth, faith can be simple belief (as a little child, Mk 10:15) which James uses in his letter at 2:14-26 where some people say, "I believe" with no commitment. That use of the word "faith" as just knowing the Law as God's will, but not incorporating it into ones life. James contrasts belief (which the devils themselves have about God) with true faith which is demonstrative belief. Fifth, as Paul brings out in vs. 3, means loyalty, faithfulness, or reliability. The "faith of God" means that God is reliable and can be depended upon. Paul is saying that, although men do not all accept God's offer of eternal life, God has not changed his mind or offer. Even if everyone refused to accept God's love in Jesus Christ (John 3:16), God will still remain the same. If God changed his position, i.e., that mankind should live by faith in God, God would thereby reveal inconsistency and unrighteousness. (I, [God], promised you eternal life [for believing in Jesus], but if you sin, it is only temporary !!, I Cor. 1:9; Eph. 1:13-14; 4:30; I John 2:1; 3:20). Paul was quick to state that he was uttering such a thought as a mortal.

Mankind's decision not to live by faith in God reflects on people's wrong, not in any way reflects negatively upon God. God's correctness is proved consistent by sending his Son and placing on him the sins of all who will trust (have faith in, rely upon) him. Jesus is accepted by God as a sacrifice for any person who will believe that he is, in fact, God's Son, a personal Savior for that person who trusts him. Is it necessary for a person to sin to prove that Jesus will be able to save him or her? (Paul's position was so interpreted by some, i.e., if faith saves, then one could say he or she has faith and not worry about living contrary to God's will.) Paul says that not one person can claim justly that he or she is without need for forgiveness by God. Jesus said as much in John 5:46-47 when he said that he himself was truly the personification of the righteousness of God's promise in the Old Testament. The recurring theme in this chapter is the universal unrighteousness (displeasing God) of all people, vss. 9,10,11,12,13-18,19,20,23. The law, in essence, makes people know that they must have more than an attempt to keep that law in order to please a holy and just heavenly Father who loves them, Gal. 3:24.

III. Now Paul refers to the "righteousness of God," another term as interesting as "faith of God" used above. After stating that those who know the law (the Jews) and who say they are keeping it to so please God, have, in fact, failed. According to Paul's position (vs. 19), the law condemns every person in God's sight, and therefore God had to furnish his own righteousness to cover mankind's sins. This position is not strange, because the law and prophets witness to this fact, Psa. 14. The Law's value is in indicating to people that they need something (actually someone) more, to be happy and satisfied in God's presence. That "righteousness of God" is childlike faith in God's Son, Jesus Christ. This faith is number three above, "the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen." It is faith like Abraham had, one which causes one to become a child of God and act like it! (See fourth faith above and Matt. 18:3) Justification before God is a free gift by his grace through God's redemption (redeeming, purchasing for repossession) that he prepared through sacrificing Jesus Christ. God forever can be declared just by everyone, because he justifies anyone who accepts his displacement of unrighteousness through believing in his Son who lived perfectly and died specifically for salvaging people's spirits (their everlasting nature). It is not possible for one to claim correctly such a spiritual quickening by ones own merits and boast of such as self-accomplishment. Paul then, as a result of the above, uses another strange term, "the law of faith." Again, this faith is that attitude and will that makes one act like a child of God that he or she has become through that faith. In other words, people who have become God's children through faith in Jesus Christ want to keep God's law, i.e., do his will. On the other hand, keeping God's law, according to ones own judgment, will not make one a spiritual child of God (reborn from above), John 14:6. Paul says that by exercising our faith in Jesus Christ as God has ordained, we thereby create the desire to do God's will because of what he has done for us as sinners (those spiritually separated from God). Oddly enough then, our faith in Christ, rather than eliminating the need for the law, establishes the desire to keep it.

Jan. 23, 2000

"Exercising Faith"
Romans 4

Couples Class
Wendell Alford,
Teacher

I. Introduction: Paul has made his position clear in Chap. 3 that a person is not spiritually salvaged by his or her own good deeds, but rather desires to do what God wants done because God has through his own (God's) righteousness in Jesus Christ, shown grace to every believer by making him or her eternally alive spiritually. In other words, the desire to do good works that are pleasing to God follow spiritual salvation, but do not produce that salvation. By the deeds of the law shall no flesh be justified in the sight of God, Rom. 3:20, but evidence of ones right relationship with the Heavenly Father will be seen in his or her attitude and actions, Jas. 2:24. Now, in this next chapter (4) Paul calls to mind examples, Abraham and David (especially Abraham), two who pleased God through having faith in God's promise and then exercised their faith through their lives.

II. The faith of the Jews was grounded solidly (so they thought) in the fact that they were descendants of Abraham (John 8:36-44), and there is Biblical evidence that many early Christian believers had reservations about the part that lineage played in being right with God, Gal. 2:11-21; 3:2-3,6-7. Paul asked the rhetorical question about Abraham's spiritual accomplishments on his own. Did the welfare of Abraham's spirit rest upon a choice of doing what God requested? No, his eternal well-being was assured by simply believing what God promised him, Gen. 15:6. Had his spiritual destiny rested upon his own efforts, he could have boasted about how great he was to have accomplished so great a courageous feat. Paul reveals God's righteous requirement is simply believing God's promise. Abraham believed God was honorable and would therefore honor his promise. His belief, in a figure, wiped his sinful spirit clean. His belief was accounted to his spiritual account as righteousness in God's sight. If Abraham had earned his favor with God, God would have owed him his spiritual reclamation. Such an arrangement would have meant that God would not have had to exercise grace in reclaiming a human spirit. Every human spirit that is made right with God is justified by God himself through that human spirit's simple belief in God's promise in his word. Jesus claimed himself as the link between every person and God's perfect requirement in John 3:14-16; 14:6. Note the simplicity of the process. When the genealogical children of Abraham (the Jews, Israelites) were in the wilderness after God's freeing them from Egypt, the people sinned (disbelieved God's promise), and the Lord sent fiery serpents among the people, Num. 21:4-9. Those who were bitten by the venomous snakes died physically. The sinful people asked Moses to pray and seek God's mercy and help. Moses was instructed by God to make a likeness of one of the serpents and raise it on a high pole so that it could be seen by anyone who would look in its direction. If a person were bitten by a snake, all he or she had to do to continue living was to do what God had promised, i.e., look at the likeness of the serpent. Simply viewing the likeness meant life instead of certain death. In God's Second Covenant based upon the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus

Christ, all one has to do to be assured of spiritual life eternal with God himself is to look to Jesus and trust God's promise through him. With a child-like faith one is spiritually salvaged through this simple promise of God, Matt. 19:14. What a mystery! What a promise! Please note that God did not tell Moses to have a concerted snake-kill or even to set up a counseling program for those family members whose family had been stricken by the calamity. They were not to kill the ring leaders who were exciting the people to complain against God's promise to lead the Israelites onward to God's promised land. Neither were the people encouraged to reverence or worship the likeness of the serpent, but, in fact, some did later, II Kings 18:4. The simplicity of becoming a spiritual child of God, an eternal citizen of God's kingdom, is so uncluttered and without adulteration that "the proclaiming of the cross is to them that perish [sheer] foolishness," I Cor. 1:18.

III. Chap. 4:6-25: The Christian believer is to seek with all his or her heart to please God as led by God's Holy Spirit, but not to justify oneself before God. Only faith in what God did through his Son, Jesus Christ, satisfies God according to God's account. Then Paul underscores his position (God's) regarding God's grace by citing Psa. 32:1-2. There David relates how God had forgiven him, not maintaining his condition as sinful (separated from God), after confessing his sinfulness., see also Psa. 51. God had made him happy by assuring him that his sin would no longer be charged against (imputed to) his account. Again, referring to Abraham, Paul states that the patriarch had, in fact, received God's promise before the sign or symbol of the relationship represented by circumcision. Abraham was promised by God, God's blessing (heir of the nations of the world) even before the Law was given. The Law outlines a perfection which God requires that indicates mankind's inability to please God while in the flesh, Rom. 3:20; 7:22-25; Gal. 2:16-21. Therefore, only faith can make any person justified in God's sight. In other words, God makes what is impossible for a person to accomplish by himself or herself, possible, through faith in his Son, Jesus Christ. Consider this, Paul states, God promised Abraham an offspring when he was about one hundred years old and Sarah, his wife, was much older than a human female who can naturally conceive and bear a child. And yet, Abraham did not doubt God's promise but rather was "fully persuaded" that what God had promised, God would deliver. That persuasion (faith) was imputed (credited with, ascribed as, accounted as) as being right (righteous). Now, in the Second (current) Covenant, all people everywhere are being asked by God not only to believe (trust, be persuaded) that God resurrected his only begotten Son, Jesus, the Messiah (Savior), back to life again after he had died physically, but also, that believing that will also assure ones own resurrection to eternal life (forever together with God spiritually). Jesus was committed to hell (separated from God temporarily, Acts 2:31; I Pet. 3:18-22.), even though he had never deviated from God's will, even once. His resurrection was performed precisely so that those who have personal faith in God's Son, Messiah-Savior, will be justified before their Creator God and Heavenly Father. What a mystery! What a promise! Praise God from whom all blessing flow!

Jan. 30, 2000

"Jesus and Adam"
Romans 5

Couples Class
Wendell Alford,
Teacher

I. Introduction: The first four chapters of Paul's letter to the believers in Rome in about 58 AD had to do with God's justifying sinful persons who exercise faith in Jesus Christ. The following four chapters (5-8) relate how believers are to respond to God's loving generosity, his grace through Jesus Christ, his Son. Now that one is through the door of God's grace and is spiritually salvaged, how does one live the remainder of one's physical life (in the flesh)? One's faith has granted citizenship into God's kingdom and that begins the salvation process as heir of all of God's precious promises made also to Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Moses, David, etc., I Cor. 15:20-28; Heb. 11:39-40. What should one expect in a life nurtured by God in the person of his Holy Spirit? Everlasting life is as sure as God's promise which can not be voided by anything or anyone in all of God's creation. With God's promise of eternal life comes also God's promise of eternal forgiveness, for the two are inseparable, Rom. 8:38-39; I Cor. 4:3-5; I John 1:8-10; 2:1; 3:20.

II. Chap. 5:1-6 Based upon what Paul has made clear in the first four chapters and especially his conclusion in the last sentence in chapter four, he now announces his glorious conclusion at the beginning of this chapter, Chapter Five. We (those who are trusting God's righteousness through faith in Jesus Christ) are now unquestionably justified before God's throne. Since this relationship has been made indelible by God himself through Jesus Christ, we believers have peace with our Creator, Almighty God. Further, we have continual access by that same faith that initiated our relationship with God, to his bountiful, unlimited, loving grace. Therein we have taken our stand and rejoice in that hope which reflects the very glory of God himself. We do not consider sorrows or tribulations in our temporary, fleshly lives to cause that hope to be severed or even to waver at all. In fact, we glory in the very midst of those sorrows and tribulations knowing that God's promise makes us sure through them all. The tribulations for us believers temper us to have patience through the adverse experiences which, at the same time, strengthens our hope in God's promise through Jesus Christ. This childlike hope makes us (what for unbelievers would be shame) bold to demonstrate God's love as his Holy Spirit reveals his will for us. We are humbled by the fact that we know even before his Spirit convicted us of our need to trust in God's righteousness in Jesus Christ, we were ungodly and without the power to love God and seek to please him. But God interceded in our lives on our behalf, and in due time sent Christ to die and thereby redeem us.

III. Chap. 5:7-11 One can believe perhaps that a person could be convinced to sacrifice his or her own life to save the life of one other person, especially if the one to be saved were an exemplary personage. But observe what God has done for every believer, even sacrificed his only begotten Son so that we (every believer) can enjoy life forever with the Heavenly Father. Not only are we justi-

fied by Jesus' blood (life), Lev. 17:11, 14, but note especially the way "blood" and "life" are related in Rom. 5:9-10. Christ's death (sacrifice) reconciles a believer to God, but Christ's resurrection to life is the assurance for every believer of eternal life beyond the grave (physical death). Yes, it is God's Christ (Messiah, Savior) who is the one who alone established the reconciliation bridge between the Creator and his wayward likeness (mankind) in the world. It is God through his Son that fills our spirits with unlimited joy! His Holy Spirit is the One who reveals this glorious truth to us!

IV. Chap. 5:12-21 At this point in God's revelation to us through Paul, he draws a parallel between the one man, Adam, and the other man, Jesus Christ. [Both were direct sons of God; see Lk 1:34-35 and Lk 3:38.] The one mystery left not completely solved is the fact that Adam's sin made physical death necessary and mandatory through personal choice of sin by every human that followed Adam's posterity, except Jesus. We are told that Adam's sin passes death (physical) to every person who lives, because everyone, without exception, does choose to sin (disobey God's perfect will). One can believe that Adam and Eve's children (all of us) were, after their sin, relegated to a sinful state of being that makes sinning an innate part of one's very nature, I Cor. 15:45-50. Human rationality could wonder about a general system that leaves no real choice of whether to sin. The answer to that query is that Jesus was human and did not perform one sinful act or think one sinful thought. Vss. 13-17 are parenthetical and relate to the law's part in mankind's history. In that passage we learn that Adam's sin was singularly grievous to God. From Adam to Moses God had not outlined his specific will for people to follow, i. e., the Law. Even so, those who lived in that period were sinful and died physically as a result. God then gave the Law to cite explicitly how mankind was deviating from God's perfect will. That law was given through Moses to teach people the need for a Savior who could offset the effect of the sin of Adam, Gal. 3:24-26. What we find in this revelation is that God has progressively revealed himself and his will to mankind as mankind has become able to receive and assimilate God's will and purpose, Heb. 1:1-2. For a reason we do not fully comprehend, through one person, Adam, every person who followed him were sinners (except Jesus) and were made to suffer death (including Jesus) because of his (Adam's) sin (separating themselves from God). Likewise, our understanding is not complete (I Cor. 13:12) concerning why it was necessary for one man, Jesus Christ, to die so that some of mankind (believers) could be made right with God (reconciled). Our hope as believers in this reconciliation through faith in God's Messiah, Jesus Christ, is sealed through God's current messenger, his Holy Spirit, John 14:26; Eph. 1:13-14. As Paul puts it in vs. 21, as death reigned because of Adam, eternal life for believers will reign forever through Jesus Christ, our Lord.

PREVIEW: What about sin in the life of the believer? Romans 6

Feb. 6, 2000

"Free From Sin"
Romans 6

Couples Class
Wendell Alford,
Teacher

I. The Jews were from the beginning of the Gospel period suspicious of it because of the lack of a requirement to keep their sophisticated interpretation of Moses Law. The Jewish priests were steeped in myriads of minute details which were not understood by the ordinary Jewish faithful, Matt. 5:20-48. Jesus reprimanded those leaders for misinterpreting God's will in the law. Paul stated in I Cor. 1:18-31 that the Gospel's simplicity was to the Jews a stumblingblock and to the Greeks, foolishness. To those who believe, however, the Gospel is the power and wisdom of God. Also to many, God's grace seemed to set aside the law as telling believers in Jesus Christ what God wanted those believers to do to please him. In Romans 6 Paul reminds believers that God's love has admitted them to his glorious kingdom by means of their faith in Jesus' reconciling sacrifice. The fitting response to God's love in Christ should be the living of a holy life, including God's desire for the living standards outlined in his law. Jesus said that those who love him should keep his commandments, John 14:15-16. Paul states in Eph. 4:30 that believers should "not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, whereby ye are SEALED unto the day of redemption."

II. If believers are in God's favor through faith in God's sacrificing Jesus Christ, can such grace be multiplied by continuing to sin? In other words, is God's grace as determined by God's love effective only to the extent that a believer sins (displeases God)? Paul's answer to this question is that when a person publicly (Matt. 10:32) accepts (as is indicated by baptism, vss. 4-7) Jesus Christ as his or her Savior, that person is guaranteed eternal life by God and is therefore not subject to a sin which will separate him or her from God as Father, Rom. 4:24-25; 5:1-2, 21; 8:38-39. If a believer is indeed "dead to sin" (and "freed from sin" as the same term used in vss. 7, 18, 22), why should he or she live as though such an eternal relationship had not been certified by God? We have identified our lives with Christ and should therefore walk a lifestyle that becomes the new relationship we have with our Father, God. Paul states that the experience of baptism itself illustrates such a fact as one is buried beneath the water as one is buried in the earth after physical death and is raised from the water as Christ was raised to life eternal in the resurrection. Baptism in its symbolism identifies a believer with Christ in his eternal life. A believer is freed from the wages of spiritual death. Our old selves have been killed with Christ, and even though our mortal bodies will follow the sin-route for physical destruction, we are new spiritual creatures in responding to the leadership of God's Holy Spirit and will therefore never die spiritually, John 11:25-26. We are no longer separated from (spiritually dead) God's family and should not serve that which indicates otherwise.

III. Our hope of eternal life is a corollary of having our sinful spirits reborn by God. Our relation with God is dependent on our faith in what happened to Jesus Christ. He died but was raised from death to life and will never die again. His death was caused

by sin (the sin of all other humankind), but he now lives (is with God the Father). We too are to follow the same pattern of events in that we died (were separated from the sin that keeps every unbeliever separated from his or her Creator) but are now alive spiritually due to our faith in Jesus Christ. Our character is to be shaped by our relationship with God. We are not to let that which separated people from God in the first place reign in our temporary, fleshly bodies and which can encourage a believer to lust after actions and situations which displease God as our spiritual Father. (Such actions also cause unbelievers to question our true spiritual identity.) God's relation with people is based upon his love for us, John 3:16. Should not our love for God, because of what he has done for us through Jesus Christ, make us delighted to please him in the way that we live our lives?

IV. Sin (that which separates) is not to rule in the life of the believer, not because of a legal mandate (law), but because we are experiencing God's grace. Here, strangely, Paul again asks the question whether a believer should sin, because we are not under a legal constraint but are under God's grace. These two questions are not the same (vs. 1 and vs. 15). In vs. 1 the question has to do with remaining in a state of sin (state of being), and in vs. 15 the question relates to sinning in a state of grace (liberty). In vs. 1 the question could be well translated, "Shall we (believers) go on sinning to obtain (more of God's) grace?" In vs. 15 the translation would be, "Shall we sin because we are in grace?" Jesus said in John 3:6 that "that which is born of the flesh is flesh" indicating that mankind has a fleshly nature by birth. He said immediately after that statement that a person's spirit could, by his or her personal choice, be born from above, through God's work, John 3:7. In fact, in order to have eternal life one must be born from above through exercising faith in Jesus Christ. If, then, our eternal nature comes through God's love (grace), should we not listen to and obey our Heavenly Father rather than our fleshly desires that would grieve God's Holy Spirit? We know that sin causes death (separation), and we should therefore not be servants of death-causers. We have been made free from sin and are obligated to rightness as God sees rightness, i.e., as led by God's Holy Spirit. Even though we have a fleshly nature while we wait to join our Lord, we do not have to follow those fleshly desires which displease God. If sin has as its end death, we should abhor such and pattern our lives by those actions which are pleasing to God. We should not work for wages which separate us from the one we love (God) since God has given us eternal life through Jesus Christ, our Lord. [I believe that Lk 15:20-21 expresses the attitude which demonstrates God's love for his children even though they do not always follow his holy will. Note, however, how glad the wayward son was that his father (God) still loved and accepted him as his child. How sorrowful we should be to disappoint our Heavenly Father by our attitudes, speech, or actions!!!]

V. God's Word states, "Sin not," but, "If you sin, we [believers] have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous." I John 1:8 - 2:2.

Feb. 20, 2000

"The Believer's Challenge"
Romans 7

Couples Class
Wendell Alford,
Teacher

I. Introduction: In order to understand Rom. 6, we thought of two aspects of the Law of Moses, the ritual or ecclesiastical and the moral or lifestyle which pleases God. To understand Rom. 7 we must consider a third facet of the law (including not only the Pentateuch but also the poetic and historical portions), the promises and requirements of God which we refer to as the Old Covenant. The context of Paul's revelation in the letter to the Roman believers must be understood not within that Old Covenant but within God's New (Second) Covenant with mankind. In Chap. 7 as in all Scripture the reader must be led by the same Holy Spirit that directed Paul to reveal it originally. The New Covenant established by God through sacrificing his only Son, Jesus Christ, eliminates keeping the law as the means of becoming a citizen of God's kingdom (a member of his spiritual family). Faith in God's righteousness (trusting Jesus as God's Savior, Messiah) is now substituted for ones attempting to be made right with God through performing all the requirements of the Law, Rom. 10:4. When Jesus said on the cross, "It is finished," the New Covenant of God became effective, and God resurrected his Son to prove it, Heb. 1:2; 8:7-13; Rom. 8:25. But we believers yet have a struggle with our old Adamic (and Eveish) natures to contend with until, through God's mercy, we receive our new bodies, I Cor. 15:42-50. In Rom. 7 Paul relates his, and our, challenge.

II. Chap. 7:1-5: In introducing the tension between a believer's temporary, fleshly life and his or her reborn spirit, Paul uses the most intimate of human relations, a married man and woman, spouses. It is understood that the married man and woman in Paul's example are joined by God, i.e., they are bound together as God wills in his law. The believers at Rome were, in part, Jews who had accepted Jesus as God's promised Messiah and who had first heard the Gospel at the Pentecost experience at Jerusalem following the resurrection of Jesus, Acts 2:10. They knew the law and its requirements of a Godly marriage. Each spouse is required by the law to be true to the other until one of them dies physically. When one dies the other spouse is no longer responsible to the marital commitment. As long as a husband lives, the man's wife is by the law not permitted to marry another man, and vice versa. The law states that if the wife marries another man while her current husband lives, she is guilty of adultery. Paul then states that believers are, in effect, by their faith in Jesus married to him, and the law is dead to them spiritually. If the law is dead to a believer, then he or she is as free as one of a married couple is free from his or her former mate when physical death occurs. When we are born from above spiritually, we become members of God's ecclesia (called out body), the body of Christ, Eph. 1:22-23; Col. 1:24, and therefore free to serve God ("bring forth fruit unto God"). Before we were reborn (still served self rather than God) spiritually, we were not only breaking the laws which determine physical death, but were also destined for spiritual death, hell.

III. Chap. 7:6-8: Now Paul (God's Word) states that we believers

are isolated from the letter of the law (the Old Covenant) and our lives are to demonstrate our new spirit which God has created in us through the New Covenant. What part does the law play in the new life of a believer? Is the law useless even though we believers are not separated eternally from God by it any longer? No, the law still tells us about the Savior God promised and the actions which displease (grieve) our Heavenly Father, Eph. 4:30. For example, the law tells everyone, including believers, that God does not want his creatures, humankind, to serve fleshly, lustful, temporary goals and to covet (worship idols, Gal. 5:18-26; Col. 3:5). In fact, if the law had not laid down explicitly what God's will was before God sent his Holy Spirit to enlighten all believers, Acts 2:14-18, mankind would not have an exact record of God's will. The written law gives concrete evidence of sin. Sin is brought to life by the law, vs. 8b. Grace brought fear and then relief.

IV. Chap. 7:9-13: Vs. 9 is a singularly important insight into every person's spiritual condition from birth through life. Paul continues a first person account of his own spiritual history. Note carefully that Paul said that as an infant and child he was spiritually alive without knowledge of God's will (the law), but when he reached spiritual awareness (what we refer to as the age of accountability) the law informed (Gal. 3:24-26) him that he was serving himself without regard to what his Creator wanted him to do. The result was that he died spiritually because of what the law conveyed to him. Thus, the holy law (carrier of God's message) was an expression of God's mercy to enlighten him concerning what makes him one (in agreement) with the God who created him. The law, then, is not bad in and of itself, but the breaking of it (doing contrary to God's known will) is sin (that which separates one from God). Doing an act which is against oneself and/or ones fellow human beings is bad enough, but then to know additionally that such displeases God Almighty (contrary to his law) makes such "exceedingly sinful," vs. 13b.

V. Chap. 7:14-25: Here Paul contrasts the two elements of the believers dichotomy: (1) The law has a spiritual goal, to make us alive spiritually, but (2) we have flesh-and-blood bodies that cannot escape the wages of sin (physical death). Between those two contrary elements there is a continual battle, Matt. 26:41. The fleshly (temporary) part of our (believers) beings want what our animal natures desire, and our born-from-above spirits (permanent) want only what pleases our newly acquired Heavenly Father. Every day we are confronted with two motivations: What our reborn spirits want and what the body we still live in desires. There are times when the animal-self (which ignores our spiritual well-being, vs. 18) simply takes over our decisions even though the law makes such actions clearly wrong in God's sight, vs. 22-23. Everything considered, I am, in a way, a miserable being before physical death releases me, but thank God through my faith in Jesus' righteousness, I know that while my physical being is destined for destruction, my reborn spirit is never to die or leave God's presence. How Wonderful Is God's Love! How Precious And Unfathomable Are God's Mercy And Grace! See Rom. 11:33 - 12:2; I John 1:8 - 2:2.!

Feb. 27, 2000

"God's Children Forever"
Romans 8

Couples Class
Wendell Alford,
Teacher

I. Introduction: In Chap. 8 Paul ends the second major division of his discourse to the believers in Rome. In Chaps. 1-4 he makes the situation very clear that every human spirit is faulty, unclean (separated from his or her Creator) by sin (the separator), Rom. 3:9-11. The need for spiritual salvaging is satisfied or justified by only one God-ordained way, faith in God's Savior, Jesus Christ, his only Son, Rom. 4:9-25. Beginning in Chap. 5, the second major division begins, and Paul amplifies the factors following the believer's entrance into the new life of the Spirit. After being justified through trusting Jesus Christ for eternal life, a believer still must continue living for a while in this body of flesh. The experience involves the following sequence: conviction of sin (separation from God); seeking a solution after realizing the separateness (John 6:44,65); accepting Jesus through faith as the bridge to God by receiving (calling upon) him according to God's word, Rom. 10:13; at this point one is justified by God, Rom. 4:25-5:1; and the believer now, as a newly spiritually reborn creature (in one Spirit with Christ), begins eternal life justified and in a forgiven relationship with God (God's child through recreation, John 3:5-6). Chaps. 6-7 divulges the believer's relating to God, though still in temporary bodies of flesh. Paul gives considerable weight to the law (especially its moral or lifestyle aspects) and its part in the new creature's life within the New Covenant. However, he is very careful to make the law a catalyst to show us our need for Jesus Christ and for growing in God's grace, Gal. 3:24-25; II Pet. 3:18, rather than the agent for attaining that grace for salvaging human spirits. In Chap. 8 the Holy Spirit and his part in the believer's life is emphasized as the believer follows that Spirit rather than his or her own will during the temporary status, i.e., while in the present body, Matt. 6:32-34.

II. Chap. 8:1-8: Paul has referred to the Spirit only twice (5:5;7:6) in the letter before this chapter, but in this chapter he refers to the Comforter and Guide twenty times. This fact certainly proclaims the importance of Jesus' promise (John 14:15-21; 16:7-15) concerning the part the Holy Spirit's role would play in the life of every believer. Chap. 8 begins by a further assurance that the God of all creation no longer condemns those who are his by faith in Jesus Christ, because they live with spiritual (eternal) goals rather than fleshly, temporary goals. The phrase, "who walk not after the flesh," obviously does not mean that the human body is basically evil in and of itself. In fact, the word "flesh" here does not designate the sinew, blood, and bones of which the human body is composed physically, but the style of life which causes the body and mind to express a contrary intent to the purposes and will of God who created it. "God is Spirit and those who worship [recognize his superior worthiness] him must worship him in spirit and in truth," John 4:24. Living "after the flesh" does not mean such actions as eating, drinking, expressing anger, or performing the requirements necessary to maintain the temporary fleshly body, for our Lord did those things without sinning (displeasing the

Father). The emphasis here is walking after the flesh, i.e., styling ones life to satisfy sensuality, greed, self, etc. Believers are not subject to the law of sin which produces spiritual death, because God's forgiveness and gift of eternal life are sealed forever. The law could only designate right and wrong, but faith in Jesus' sinless life (blood) in human flesh alone removes a person's condemnation by God. God's Holy Spirit who directs the life of the believer assures that God's children are walking after the Spirit, not after the flesh (transit concerns). Even our (believer's) outlook (constant desire) is heavenly (spiritual, eternal, Philip. 3:20-21; Col. 3:16), and our future involves a glorious body to match that heavenly spirit which is already ours. We see about us every day those who are carnally minded with unquickened spirits who demonstrate attitudes against God and his divine purpose. The lifestyle they live ignores God's law (will), because they cannot please God with only fleshly, temporary goals, Eph. 4:17-32, ff.

III. Chap. 8:9-17: Paul then contrasts unbelievers (they) who are in the flesh (not following God's Spirit) with believers (ye) who are "in the Spirit," i.e., following God's Spirit. The definition of a true believer designates those whose attitudes and pleasures in life are in Christ, vs. 14. [spiritually concerned with converts, character, and conduct - WA] The Spirit is life (together with God) and produces in his children righteousness (acts, attitudes, and speech which please God). Our responsibility (indebtedness, vs. 12) is to live a life showing our eternal nature (spiritually motivated). Believers have the spiritual power to overcome our base, animal natures. God's Spirit himself assures believers that they really are God's children. Therefore, we need not experience fear concerning our inheritance, because our future is allied with Christ's. We will be glorified with him, vss. 28-31. (He was a fellow human.)

IV. Chap. 8:18-39: It is realistic to allow that believers will not live without continual challenge (struggle) as related in Chap. 7, but a glorious future is as sure as the promise of God. The children of God (trusters in Jesus' righteousness) are still (before physical death) a part of all earthly creation which is separated from God because of mankind's sin. However, believers are to wait patiently with faith in God's promise even as his Spirit continues with us to commune with God on our behalf and direct our lives according to God's purpose. Remember that God is not limited by time and knew even before he created the earth that we would become members of his heavenly family. [An unfathomable mystery to human limitations - WA] Unquestionably, since such a Being is arranging our lives for us, we need fear no aspect of our future. Take a for instance, who would judge our being short of God's expectation for us? The ultimate judging has been assigned to God's Son, Jesus Christ, and he is the one who loved us so much that he not only died for us but sits at God's right hand soliciting God's mercy on our behalf. With that as an absolute (God's promise), who has the audacity to presume to interrupt the relationship of God with his children and who trust his Son to maintain that relationship, no one or no thing! Vss. 31-39 are explicit and definite!

Mar. 12, 2000

"Israel Has Rejected God"
Romans 10

Couples Class
Wendell Alford,
Teacher

I. Introduction: That Israel rejected Jesus, the Person of God incarnate in human flesh, was not a new expression of national intent and activity of the Jewish nation. For four hundred years the Hebrews were held captive by the Egyptians, and when God delivered them from the captivity (slavery), they complained concerning their food and circumstance and actually wanted to return to Egypt, Exod. 14:12. While Moses was receiving specific instructions (the Law) from God on Mt. Sinai (Horeb), the people of Israel turned openly away from Jehovah God to an idol (a golden calf) and gave the idol credit for their delivery from slavery, Exod. 32:4. This betrayal provoked God, and Moses referred to the people as stiffnecked (stubborn), Exod. 33:9, as God himself had declared earlier, Exod. 32:9. Later, the Israelites rejected God's direct leadership through prophets and demanded a king like the surrounding nations had, I Sam. 8:6-8. God continued to raise up prophets among the people of Israel who proclaimed God's will, but they were not listened to by the Israelites, Mat. 5:12b. Of the Jewish leaders (Pharisees) Jesus himself declared that they were children of the devil, John 8:44. Regardless of current "politically correct" information, the Jews were, in fact, the reason for Jesus' having been crucified, Acts 3:13-15. In the sermon which Stephen proclaimed to the Jewish council and high priest, the newly elected servant of the Jerusalem believers stated plainly that the Jewish leaders were "uncircumcised in heart" and had resisted God's leadership (the Holy Spirit) by betraying and murdering God's Messiah, Acts 7:51-53. Paul was acutely and sadly aware of all of the above facts as he dictated (Rom. 16:22) this letter to the believers in Rome at Corinth in 58 AD.

II. Chap. 10:1-5 In vs. 1 Paul reiterates his profound concern for his fellow-Israelites; how he wished and prayed that they would accept God's Good News about Christ Jesus. He was very willing to witness about the Jews' strong zeal to please God. Ritually they were precise in remembering through ceremonies the events in their history when God had blessed and saved the nation of Israel in their earthly affairs. But their love for such religious zeal had caused them to miss the true message of God, faith in God's righteousness. They were ignorant of God's plan, "taken the bull by the horns," strayed from God's righteousness, and created for themselves a false righteousness based upon living according to their own interpretation of the Law God had given them. God's position is that mankind cannot attain a state of perfection apart from God himself, i.e., mankind is incomplete apart from God's Son, Jesus Christ. Why is faith in Jesus as the Christ (Savior) necessary to please God? Because God's New Covenant with all humanity is that Christ's death and resurrection terminated the Old Covenant based upon the Law. Now every individual who pleases God does so through the provision of God's New Covenant, placing ones total dependence upon the righteousness God himself has provided, faith in his only begotten Son, Jesus Christ, Rom. 9:30-33; Heb. 8:7 - 13. What God did in his Son eclipsed and superseded anyones legal attempt to satisfy him. "Christ is the end of the law for

righteousness to everyone who believes (in Christ)." Moses outlined the necessity of keeping every aspect of the Law in Lev. 18:5; 20:24,26. (See also Gal. 5:1-6.)

III. Chap. 10:6-11: Paul here interprets Deut. 30:12-14 as referring to Christ's mission to come. No longer is it necessary to assume that one must go to the very throne of God in heaven or even to the abode of the physically dead to learn of God's desire for mankind, for the Word (God's message) has come to earth in the person of his Son. He has been brought near (Christ has been among us.), and that message is being proclaimed. God's message of faith is simple: openly confess verbally that Jesus is Lord of your life (as opposed to anyone or anything else) and believe (without reservation) that God approved of Jesus' life, death, and resurrection (refusing even to let Jesus' body decay, Acts 2:31). One becomes righteous (pleasing to God, the Creator) by believing (trusting Christ) inwardly (with the heart, being absolutely honest with oneself). The result of such faith will cause one to relate to others (confess) what God in Christ has done for him or her, Matt. 10:32-33, Lk 12:8-9. To reinforce Paul's position here he quotes Isa. 28:16 concerning the stone (Jesus Christ) whom God will make to be a sure foundation. On him you can build your spiritual foundation without fear of shame, Philip. 2:12.

IV. Chap. 10:12-21: This simple faith can be exercised by any person on earth, and "any person" means absolutely that with God there is no difference between Jews and nonJews, Acts 10:34. All who trust in God's Savior, Jesus Christ, by calling upon him will not be denied eternal life. Christ's atonement (ability to save) is without limit (rich), and therefore every person is covered who will exercise the simple faith related in III above. Paul at this point approaches the practical matter of the mechanics of learning about what God has done for mankind through Jesus Christ and how one can respond to the Gospel. Hearing of Christ involves evangelists or proclaimers. One who witnesses to God's love (expressed by sacrificing his only begotten Son) is a beautiful person in God's Sight, Isa. 52:7. A person who witnesses to the love of God through Jesus Christ. True faith is established by hearing and believing God's word. Paul then asks the question that had so disturbed him in vs. 1. Have the Jews not heard? Yes, but they would not believe as prophesied in Isa 53:1; Rom. 10:16. Israel did know, Psa. 19:4, but, and Paul gives an incite which is as mysterious as parts of Rom. 9 regarding God's selective choices, God has provided the New Covenant to provoke the Jews to jealousy. In fact, God has chosen to anger the Jews by means of including people in his kingdom who have previously been foolish by disregarding God. In Isa. 65:1 it is stated that people will come to God who had not been interested before at all. But Israel (as a nation) will continue to be disobedient and contrary as always toward God's outstretched hands as they have throughout their history, Isa. 65:2.

Next session (Romans 11) will answer the question: Will the Jews (as a people) be doomed by disbelieving in Jesus as the Messiah forever, and what about the Gentiles in this regard?

Mar. 26, 2000

"The Jewish Nation Will Return"
Romans 11

Couples Class
Wendell Alford,
Teacher

I. This chapter of Romans reveals a mystery of human history that only God Almighty himself could reveal. The information here gives specificity to the ongoing activities of humanity that makes rational and right what otherwise would leave historical events a hodgepodge of stupidity. God has a purpose for his creation, and although that purpose may appear entirely arbitrary to human reasoning, the final results will please God and all those who trust him. There is no doubt about God's final relationship with the Jewish nation, for his intention was repeated in many of the Old Testament prophets. I refer to those passages which declare God's plan to restore the Jewish nation to his favor as "restoration passages." They include at least the following: Isa. 66:5-24; Jer. 31:15-19; Lam. 5:21; Hos. 14:1-7; Joel 3:1-21; Amos 9:11-15; Obad. 19-21; Micah 7:15-20; Hab. 3:5-13; Zeph. 3:14-20; Hag. 2:15-19; Zech. 8:18-23; and Mal. 4:5-6. (Matt. 11:7-15) Many leaders of Christendom as a whole stand very near the position held by the Jewish leaders when Jesus was here with human limitations. Baptizing infants and assuming such a rite will enter the infants into God's kingdom without regard to the will of the one baptized is essentially the same position of circumcising an eight-day-old and declaring that the rite makes ones spirit right with God, Acts 7:51. Declaring certain individuals priests between God and other people into a hierarchical system in which one is the "high priest" with God's absolute authority over people's spiritual welfare, is very much like the Jewish priesthood given by the law (Old Covenant) to the Levites. This priesthood arrangement is duplicating the Old Covenant and overlooks Jesus' sacrifice as a once-and-for-all sufficiency to cover all sins of anyone who trusts him, Matt. 20:25; Heb. 8:7-13; 10:9-25; I John 1:8-2:2. Paul (God's Word) warns against Christians' following the Jewish leadership pattern in turning God's righteousness (faith in his plan) into their own "righteousness" through unbelief, Rom. 9:30-33.

II. Chap. 11:1-6: Has the New Covenant (new arrangement) caused God to discontinue his concern for the Israelites as a people? Of course not, as is witnessed by the fact that individual Jews such as Paul are accepting Jesus as Jehovah's Messiah (Savior). Paul cites Elias (Elijah) who prayed against Israel (I Kings 19:10,14) not realizing that there were others faithful to God among the Israelites, I Kings 19:18. The same condition exists now during the Christian era since some individual Jews have not refused to accept God's Son, Jesus as the Anointed One, promised by the prophets. This remnant is the result of a demonstration of God's elective grace. Again, Paul insists that believing in his divine plan of spiritual salvation is not due to a person's doing good works, but rather due solely to God's grace. Spiritual salvation must be free (God's Son paid the only price acceptable to God for making a human spirit pure.) on the part of a believer for such salvation is dependent entirely on God's merciful grace.

III. Chap. 11:7-24: Israel as a nation, then, has not received

the salvation which it sought. The reason is that God elected some and made others among them stubborn. Paul quotes Isa. 29:10-13 in which the prophet states that the Israelites were put into a state of deep sleep as though they were given a book to read of God's plan but were unable (unlearned) to read the book. They spoke of God with their lips, but their spirits (hearts) were far removed from God's will. Again, Paul quotes Psa. 69:22-33 where David stated that the Jew's table (rites) would become a snare (trap), and their eyes (eyesight) would become dim so that fear would be their lot. (Note the other verses in this Psa. and how they relate directly to Jesus Christ.) Paul reveals that this refusal of God's plan on the part of Israel is a stumbling, but not a fall. This time of stumbling (trespassing) is God's occasion for the nonJews (Gentiles) to be able to become citizens of God's kingdom. This new arrangement will provoke the Jews to jealousy. If the temporary casting away of the Jews means the outstretching of God's hands to all people, how much glory it would be for God for Israel again to embrace God's plan of spiritual salvation, accept Jesus as the Messiah! In fact, we Gentiles are, as it were, wild branches which have been grafted into an olive tree (God's family, Israel) and the Israelites (Abraham's offspring according to the fleshly lineage) if they should accept God's holy plan in Jesus Christ, God will graft them back into the olive tree. Likewise, if the nonJews who claim to be God's children through their alliance with Jesus Christ, but, in fact, have turned away from true faith (confess Christ with their lips but not with their spirits, hearts, see the latter portion of I above) will be cut off from God's family.

IV. Chap. 11:25-36: Paul now states plainly that he is revealing a mystery concerning God's plan for history's purpose. Christian believers are not to consider themselves so intelligent and special in God's plan that they cannot fall. The blindness of the Jews is to be for a specific time period. That period is referred to here as the "fulness of the Gentiles." This "time of the Gentiles" noted in vs. 25 was also noted by Jesus in Lk 21:24 and by Daniel in Dan. 9:27; 12:1,7.7. In this period as God divides history (See Dan. 7:25 and II Tim. 2:15), the Jews are enemies of God's plan for the sake of us Gentiles, but the overriding plan of God is not to forsake his long-time beloved, the Jewish nation. He will, through his autonomous election process, bring them back in his fold again even as he promised through his prophet Isaiah at 59:20-21. As in the past when we Gentiles did not honor God (Rom. 1) and have now been permitted to know, believe, and accept God's grace so shall the Israelites again know, believe, and accept God's Son, Jesus as the Messiah. God has, in effect, reached the same conclusion concerning all people, both Jews and Gentiles, to have been unbelievers so "that he might have mercy upon all." Israel as a people will be restored to God's favor! How profound, deep, and rich (generous) is God's wisdom and knowledge! Truly his ideas are not our ideas! We are prone to think like Elijah in II Kings 1:10,12 and James and John in Lk 9:54, wanting God to destroy those who do not agree with the way we think. God is entirely autonomous and needs to repay no one. His current plan is that anyone who accepts Jesus as Lord and Savior is assured of eternal life!

I. Introduction: At this juncture in Paul's letter to the believers in Rome in 58 AD, he turns from outlining the panorama of human history to the practical expressions of one's love for what God has done for believers in and through his Son, Jesus the Messiah. Paul has comprehensively related how all mankind, both Jews and non-Jews have defied God through lack of faith in God's promise (unbelief). God has at last, in these final years of man's occupying the earth which God created, made himself more vulnerable to mankind's wickedness by becoming a human himself and living among people. Those people, his own (John 1:9-11), hated Jesus for his teaching and whom he claimed to be, God's Son. Paul felt so grateful for God's forgiveness in Christ that he wanted to live a Godly life and to encourage all those who accepted Christ through his witnessing to live wholesome lives also. So, in his letter to the Roman believers, he turns from what could be identified as doctrine to exhorting those in Rome to live lives worthy of their calling (God's election) in Christ Jesus, Eph. 4:1; Col. 1:10; I Thes. 2:12. Romans 12 is an encouragement by Paul (God's Word) for believers to act as the offspring of God (those who have been born from above, John 3:3-7).

II. Chap. 12:1-2: Based upon the entire letter through the preceding chapter, Paul begs the believers to live in the flesh a manner of life that reflected God's mercy in which believers abide. A believer should sacrifice (kill or control) bodily lust and all moral impurities that bring displeasure to his or her heavenly Father, Gal. 5:16-18; Eph. 4:30. Paul bases his plea on what he has related in Romans 1-11 and states that his request of them [and us] is rational (appropriate). The believer's life should reflect holiness (separateness, dedication) which is acceptable to God, Eph. 5:17. One who is trusting the righteousness of Jesus Christ for eternal (spiritual) life should at once be adjusting his or her attitudes and style of life for citizenship in a kingdom over which Jesus is Lord, Philip. 3:18-21; Col. 3:1-17. Loyalty should be to him and no other. What is most valuable is what is eternal and not that which is associated with the temporary life in the flesh. A believer's goal is to satisfy the Lord who has salvaged his or her spirit rather than satisfy the goals related to material (temporary) things where there is a conflict, Matt. 6:33.

III. Chap. 12:3-5: Every believer in his or her self-awareness should not consider self to be superior to (free to "lord it" over others, Matt. 7:1-5; 20:25-26) other believers. The rationale for this principle is that not every believer's faith is at the same point of development as compared to another, II Pet. 3:18. A given member's position of faith can be in one unique area of expertise in addition to various levels of maturity. Really, God is the only one capable of judging his children as to how well (perfectly or completely) they are developing. The evidence based upon Paul's observation is that God is giving to different individuals among his elected believers different assignments. Each local congregation

involves people for various functions. Paul here likens the congregation to a human body with Christ as its head, Eph. 4:14-16. [When a believer condemns another believer, that believer is condemning him or her self, Matt. 7:1-2. Both are depending on Jesus' righteousness to satisfy the judgment of God. Service in the kingdom is another matter as indicated by Paul concerning Peter in Gal. 2:11-21.]

IV. Chap. 12:6-13: Since Paul has confirmed that every believer has a different responsibility, he enumerates several such responsibilities and encourages those with these charges to be diligent in their performance. His checklist begins by identifying each believer's potential as a gift of God's grace. The call for expressing the proper attitudes and behaviors relate to associations among believers primarily. Each believer should consider every other member of the group important and a necessary component of the whole body. The net result is that the group develops into a community (koinonia) in which the group welfare is a concern of each member. Those who prophesy (witness) should do so according to their experience of faith in Christ. Those who serve the group in such areas as food service, fiscal management, etc., should do so equitably for all. Teachers should give full attention to teaching. Moral consultants (exhorters, counselors of ethics) should exercise sound judgment and wisdom in their suggestions. Those who give financially should do so unobtrusively, and ones chosen to supervise or moderate should be diligent (fair) in conducting the affairs of the group. Expressing love for others should be sincere and familial in nature. Evil should be abhorrent to all and goodness upheld consistently. Members should be fervent in their secular vocations considering such work to be serving the Lord. Rejoice in eternal hope, be patient during temporary setbacks, pray without hesitation, and distribute resources to believers everywhere as needs are known.

V. Chap. 12:14-21: In relating to people outside the congregation, do not curse those who persecute you but bless them instead. Be happy with those who rejoice, and be sympathetic with those in sorrow. Consider yourself equals with other believers, but refrain from assuming a haughty, high minded attitude as you associate with others, even if by secular standards they hold a lower status. Never presume yourself to be wiser or more intelligent than others. When someone does something maliciously that makes you appear inferior, do not reciprocate. Be a positive person (Phili. 4:8) and look for the best in others, encouraging them to be their best at all times. Even in situations when you are provoked to think or perform negatively, rise above the temptation to become a combatant and be a person of peace. Do not "get even" with those who abuse you, as a believer, for God is your Father and has promised to take care of his children. The result of such divine care puts the believer in a position even to feed his or her enemies. (If God is for us who can be against us, Rom. 8:31.). Simply do not permit evil to control your thoughts and actions, but let serving the Lord control all of your behavior. [This method of proper Christian attitude and actions is helped by reading the Word, giving time to prayer, and spending time with mature believers.]

April 9, 2000 "The Government, Neighbors, and Crises" Couples Class
Romans 13
Wendell Alford,
Teacher

I. Introduction: How unthinkable it would have been for Paul in giving wise instructions to the new believers in Rome, the seat of political power of the empire, not to have made God's position clear as to how they should relate to that political power! Paul was very aware of the part the Roman government was playing in the spread of the Gospel, the Good News of what God was doing for people through faith in his Son, Jesus Christ. Remember in our study of Acts that when Paul was at Corinth (where he wrote this letter to the Roman believers), he was taken before the local Roman authority, Gallio, by the opposing local Jews. Gallio refused to convict Paul as a law-breaker based upon his having advocated and promoted a religion (followers of Jesus as Messiah) not on the official Roman roster of legally approved religions under Roman law, Acts 18:12-17. Further, the Romans had done much (though not for that purpose) to make the spread of the Gospel possible. The good road system and sea lanes; Pax Roma (widespread peace through law and military force); near universal language (mostly Greek but some Latin); and communication by courier (primarily for tax collection) kept information passing throughout the empire, all made Gospel spreading easier. Chapter 13 of Romans touches on three topics: believers' responsibilities to established political power, to neighbors, and to Jesus Christ during periods of jeopardy (physical) for believers.

II. Chap. 13:1-7: All power throughout the earth is subject to God's will, either commissively or omissively. All believers should be submissive to political authority over them for that very reason, for God is ordaining all ruling power. For a believer to resist political authority, then, is to resist God's judgment. To be against that authority brings God's wrath, because rulers (those in seats of political authority) are serving God when they promote and uphold good works and restrict or condemn evil works. A believer has a twofold reason to adhere to the "law-of-the-land," not to be punished for breaking the law and to maintain a good conscience before his Lord. Such yielding to political authority extends also to the payment of taxes levied upon believing citizens, Mk 12:17. The believer is to pay for all tax support including local, regional, and national. Deliver to all political authorities their dues, whether fear, custom, or honor. [We must at this point in Paul's (God's) admonition look at the larger Biblical context to examine further what is meant by "their dues." At Acts 3:19 and 4:29 when Peter had publicly witnessed to the validity of Jesus' being God's Anointed One (Messiah and Savior) and how the Jewish leaders had been the ones who had killed him (Acts 5:30), Peter asked the Sanhedrin members whether the believers should "obey God rather than men." It was, of course, a rhetorical question, because the obvious answer was that God is to be obeyed above everyone else. One could say that this opposition to spreading the Gospel was from religious leaders (the Jews) and not political. However, the Jewish leaders were under Roman authority at this time, and Peter's observation that "Jesus whom ye slew and hanged on a tree," (Acts 3:13; 5:30) makes it clear that Roman authority (Pilate) permitted

the Jewish (religious) leadership to cause Jesus' death. If all authority is from God as Paul confirms in Rom. 13:1, then God himself sacrificed his Son, Jesus Christ, Psa. 22:1; Matt. 27:46; Rom. 8:32. What sacrifice and mercy God has exercised in our behalf! What can one deduce from this thought about Hitler's gross abuse of the Jewish people, God's beloved, Rom. 11:28? It is true that Jews even today interpret the victim of Isa. 53 to be the Jewish nation rather than (as we believe) Jesus, but see John 12:37-43. The overall factor in all these considerations is that Jehovah God is the Ruler of all his creation, and nothing occurs in human affairs that God could not change if he so willed, Rom. 9:16-24. Should believers in our time in a democratic government spend time and effort attempting to cause their political leaders to do those things by law which we believe to be against God's will (abortion, making homosexuality acceptable, using tax money for orienting children in public schools in religious beliefs contrary to ones own belief, etc.)? Is it possible that God wants us to vote our Holy-Spirit-led consciences on election day and then be satisfied that our heavenly Father will take whatever the results are (Democrat, Republican, or whatever) and use them for his, his Son's, and our glory? I believe so. If the results are in accord with God's will, so be it, but, if not, his Word speaks to that possibility also at Lev. 19:18; Deut. 32:35-37; Rom. 12:19.

III. Chap. 13:8-10: After making it clear that believers are to honor (obey) their government, Paul states that the believer's whole duty is to be unencumbered (Lk 12:31) with worry about political acts and laws since our motivation is first to love God and others. When one does what is done through love, the law is overshadowed. All of the do nots: committing adultery, murdering, stealing, bearing false witness, coveting, and all other commandments can be understood to be wrong when a believer is guided by love. The rule of gold is to care sincerely and profoundly for the welfare of others as one does about oneself. That practice is right because genuine love creates for one a desire to do nothing but good for his or her fellow humans. Thus, it is a fact that exercising love on every occasion causes one to meet all of the law's requirements.

IV. Chap. 13:11-14: Paul here gives the context of the period by stating that times were [and are] volatile and the world order is approaching the time for God to reorder history. The salvation process is nearing its conclusion, even nearer culmination than had been thought before. The darkened cover of sin is ever prevalent. [When Paul wrote this letter, a young Roman emperor by the name of Nero had been in power for four years. Before he died in 68 AD of suicide, he had, on occasion, lit the night in the civic center in Rome with the live, creosoted bodies of believers in Jesus Christ.] Then, as now, believers must be very aware that their lives (physical) must be lived in proper perspective with God's Holy Spirit (the Spirit that was in our Lord, Jesus Christ) guiding our choices. Subduing those desires which emphasize ones temporary life (physical) in deference to those desires which promote eternal values should be the earnest goal of those whose trust is in Jesus Christ. Next week: What is right when two believers are at odds?

Apr. 16, 2000

"Loving With Differences"
Romans 14

Couples Class
Wendell Alford,
Teacher

I. The honest, sincere differences in personal consciences is considered here in Romans 14. The assumption by Paul obviously was that all believers would not have a monolithic spiritual position on all issues, especially those issues having to do with the relationship of necessary earthly functions of believers with consciences at various levels of maturity. These differences were particularly notable where considerable variations in cultural backgrounds existed. The first church at Rome was no doubt made up of both Jews and Gentiles very likely resulting from attendees at the Pentecost assembly at Jerusalem when God sent his Holy Spirit as promised by Jesus before his crucifixion, John 14:16; Acts 2:1-4,15,31-34. Another dispersing which happened later after Stephen's murder could have also added to the believers' going to Rome. He had witnessed that Jesus was indeed the Messiah God had promised the Old Testament prophets, Isa.53. Paul heard that message and intensified his efforts to annihilate the "wayward" Jews who "falsely" confessed Jesus to be the Messiah, Acts 8:3-4. I believe that it was Stephen's message on that occasion which resulted in Paul's conversion as it burned within his soul later on the road to Damascus. Paul's concern for the differences among the believers in the new group at Rome (Many of them Paul knew personally as we shall see in Chapter 16.) made, he felt, necessary the admonitions in this Chapter 14.

II. Chap. 14:1-2: There is a variation in the strength of the faith of different believers. Today we say that certain believers are "nominal" in their relation to other believers in church activities and goals, to support of missions, and to their emphasis regarding secular or nonchurch concerns. For example, some persons whose membership is in a given congregation can be "married" to their professions, businesses, or trades. Witnessing, Bible study, and even ones family are not high-priority concerns. The more avid church-goer and worker should not exclude the nominal for his or her lack of enthusiasm but love and encourage the weaker (less mature) believer. Among the early (first century) believers, Paul here notes that some were of the opinion that believers should not eat meats, because some of the meats sold in the marketplace had been consecrated (sacrificed) for certain idols, I Cor. 8:7. Paul's position, which is more definitive in I Cor. 8, is that whether meat is devoted to a false god (idol) or not makes no difference since we believers know for sure that there is only one true God who is the Father of our Lord, Jesus Christ, I Cor. 8:4-6. What others believe about another god or gods does not change that truth. Therefore, a believer is free to eat any meat with a clear conscience after giving thanks to Jehovah God, Gen. 9:3; Acts: 10:15. Paul by inference is stating that when a believer is convinced that eating meat already sacrificed to an idol displeases the Lord Jesus, one is weak in his or her faith. A believer who understands the truth about the matter is strong in the faith.

III. Chap. 14:3-23 What should be done about the differences of opinion held by weak believers and strong believers as defined in

II above? Here Paul (God's Word) makes the principle of individual accountability to God absolute. [Priesthood of every believer] He asked the question whether a certain slave is to follow the wishes of a master (owner) to whom he does not belong, or, his own master? If, therefore, a believer is a subject of the kingdom of God, he or she should be responsible to the king who reigns over that kingdom, Jesus the Messiah, rather than another member of the kingdom. That relationship of loyalty is true while the believer is still in the flesh and will be true even beyond physical death, vs.9. The same principle applies to timing believers' activities. Some early believers (especially those who had practiced Judaism) wanted to continue practicing the rites associated with Jewish feasts and holidays. The Sabbath as compared to Sunday as the right time to have formal worship bothered some, Col. 2:10-23, note vs. 16 especially. But no one is able to disregard the feelings of others while participating in the activities of the local church family, vs. 7. The answer to the differences lies in tolerance based upon the fact that only God can judge such differences. Every believer is scheduled to give an account of his or her service to God personally, vs. 12. One should be guided by whether expressing ones own freedom thwarts the service of a fellow-believer, vs. 13. A strong (in the faith) believer should not flaunt his or her spiritual maturity before a weak (in the faith) believer, because the latter's effectiveness as a witness could be lowered. Service in God's kingdom is not measured by such trivialities (mundane) as eating and drinking (including wine, vs. 21), but by doing what is right, promoting peace, and following the leadership of God's Holy Spirit, vs. 15. The guiding principles are: do everything motivated by love, do nothing which causes a fellow-believer to (stumble) be made weaker in faith, and do nothing which causes ones own Spirit-led conscience to come under a burden of guilt (displeasing to the Lord). In this chapter we are considering service in the kingdom of God, not initial salvation (becoming a child of God).

IV. Some other situations which do concern or have been concerns among believers: 1)Abortion, 2)Adultery, 3)Anger, 4)Associating with nonbelievers, 5)Autoeroticism, 6)Bathing mixed, 7)Birth control, 8)Blood tranfusion, 9)Card playing, 10)Child molesting/abuse, 11)Children, bastards, 12)Children's obedience to parents, 13)Church attendance, 14)Conceit, 15)Caffeine or nicotine, 16)Cohabitation of unweds, 17)Cosmetics/jewelry, 18)Covetousness, 19)Dishonesty, 20)Dishonoring parents, 21)Divorce, 22)Drug/alcohol use, 23)Effeminity, 24)Envy, 25)Euthanasia, 26)Fornication, 27)Gambling, 28)Gluttony, 29)Gossiper, 30)Hatred, 31)Homosexuality, 32)Hyprocrisy, 33)Impatience, 34)Incest, 35)Jealousy, 36)Laziness, 37)Liar, 38) Lust, 39)Marital fidelity, 40)Military service, 41)Movies or theater attendance, 42)Murder, 43)Pornography, 44)Pride, 45)Prostitution, 46)Prejudice, pro or con, 47)Rape, 48)Revenge, 49)Self-righteousness, 50)Sharp tongue, 51)Pool/billiards, 52)Social dancing, 53)Spiteful, 54)Sunday activities, 55)Stealing, 56)Swearing/cursing, 57)Tithing, 58)Court settling of church affairs, 59)Use of medicine and/or medical doctors, 60)Women deacons/ministers, 61)Women teachers of men, 62)Wearing clothing of opposite sex, and 63) etc.

I. Introduction: Paul is nearing the end of his epistle to the believers in Rome. The first section of this chapter continues encouragement for harmonious conduct within the Roman fellowship, and, in fact, is a continuation of the admonitions relating to believers' ethics given in the preceding chapter. Then Paul gives the basic reasons why he has written this long letter to the group there and his authority (responsibility) for having done so. He bases his authority upon God's grace and special assignment to the Gentiles, Acts 9:15; Gal. 2:8. He announces his intent to visit the believers in Rome as a part of a longer trip to Spain.

II. Chap. 15:1-13: Believers who have strong reliance upon God's promise in Jesus Christ and understand their faith should not require that their own wishes take precedence where there are differences in mundane matters. A strong believer should receive the highest satisfaction in yielding in matters where there is not an obvious desecration of God's will. [Take this case for instance: John has been a believer for many years and witnesses regularly to those with whom he associates. He is a tradesman and works in a manufacturing plant operating a metal lathe fashioning automobile parts. Operating the lathe next to his is a new fellow, Jack, who has just moved from another area of the country. On coffee breaks and at lunch John makes a special effort to be friendly and welcome Jack to his new situation. Jack immediately begins telling off-color jokes using vulgar language, frequently using God's name vainly. Over time it became apparent to Jack that John was different, and, to make a long story (months) short, John led Jack to accept Christ as his personal Savior. Jack's language had become so established in his oral communication that he struggled with it continually, and, on occasion, John had to fight embarrassment as a result. John exercised the kind of patience and understanding Paul (God) gives in Rom. 15:1-5 to help Jack grow in God's grace and become an effective witness himself later.] Paul states that such patience demonstrates that a believer is following the example set by his Lord Jesus Christ. What Christ did for every believer was not pleasing to Jesus (as a human) at the time, Matt. 26:36-43. Paul here quotes Psa. 69:9 indicating that the Scriptures (Old Testament) were written for later believers to gain patience and comfort through the hope which they inspire. He states that the Psa. passage, "The reproaches (blame, discredit, or disgrace) of those who reproach you (Christ) have become mine (Sins of believers are transferred by the Father onto the Son.)," sets an example for trusters in Christ. In other words, people who blame the misery and discomfort which mankind has brought upon himself or herself through disobedience of God's will has been (by God) placed upon Christ for those who trust him, Isa. 53:6. Therefore, believers in identifying with Jesus Christ should be willing to accept also a "suffering servant" attitude in life. If Christ has received us while we were in an imperfect state, Rom. 5:8, we should likewise witness to unbelievers and embrace believers who are weak in their faith. We who are strong in our faith should uphold (undergird,

strengthen) those who are yet weak, and become servants for their welfare as Christ has for us. To further emphasize this point, Paul quotes II Sam. 22:50; Psa. 18:49; Deut. 32:43; Psa. 117:1; and Isa. 11:1, 10. In these passages the theme is that God is following a plan in which the Jews have laid a foundation on which Gentiles can and will trust, i.e., Jesus Christ whose human nature came from Abraham (Jesse in vs. 12 by quoting Isa. 11:1, 10). For this privilege of knowing the Creator God, Gentiles should be especially grateful and praise God for making such forgiveness available, vss. 9-11! In leaving this wonderful concept, Paul gives a short benediction in vs. 13: "Now (in view of the foregoing wonderful news) may the God of hope (promise of expectation) permeate you with undefinable joy and peace as you are trusting Christ, and be assured through the (absolute) power of God through his Holy Spirit," II Cor. 1:22; Eph. 4:30.

III. Chap. 15:14-21: Here in the letter Paul reveals his reason for writing to them. My example of giving you suggestions in matters of Christian ethics can be followed by you also as you grow in God's wonderful grace. As you increase in goodness and knowledge, you will be able to admonish and nurture one another, Heb. 3:13; 10:25. My boldness in writing to you as I have is because of God's special assignment in witnessing to the Gentiles. I am truly staying within my limits which God has assigned me, and which I have practiced all the way from Jerusalem through the entire northern perimeter of the Mediterranean Sea (Illyricum). My purpose has been to proclaim the entire message of God's recent acts as he has produced them through his Son, Jesus Christ. And I have done so in areas and locations where no one else had been before my arrival, Rom. 15:14-16,20. My intent has been to fulfill Isaiah's promise, "To whom he was not spoken of, they shall see and they that have not heard shall understand," Isa. 52:15.

IV. Chap. 15:22-33: Paul states that he would have been to Rome sooner as he had so hoped to do, but he was hindered from doing so. Immediately after writing and sending this letter to Rome from Corinth, he finished the collecting of relief money for the believers at Jerusalem. Remember in our study of Acts how Paul was arrested at Jerusalem, taken prisoner by the Roman military at the insistence of the Jewish leaders there, and held two years as a prisoner at Caesarea on the coast. There, as a last resort, Paul on the basis of his Roman citizenship, appealed to Caesar in Rome. Paul tells the believers at Rome that he is especially pleased that the money which is to be collected in Macedonia and Achaia (Greece) for the believers in Jerusalem (mostly converted Jews) is being given by Gentile believers. He notes that his visit to Rome is to be a part of a longer journey to Spain. In fact, Paul was asking in the letter for support while in Rome and for further travel to Spain. He also solicited their prayers for safety in Jerusalem on the relief mission and his further travels. Another short benediction is given here that the God of peace will be with them in Rome. [If one visits Spain today, one is told with assurance that Paul did, in fact, come there. The Bible does not reveal that he was ever there, and I prefer not to speculate - WA.]

May 7, 2000

"Romans Summary and Farewell"
Romans 16

Couples Class
Wendell Alford,
Teacher

I. Introduction: Interesting and rewarding is a panoramic view of God's relating to mankind through the Gospels and Luke's account (Acts) of God's continuing his work through his Holy Spirit whom Jesus promised at John 15:25-27. God commissioned the recording of the Holy Word during the apostolic period which ended in about 100 AD. A special calling of Paul to become one of the apostles gave rise to the recording of a major number (thirteen of twenty-six, and I believe Hebrews also) of the New Covenant books, Acts 26; I Cor. 15:1-11. Examining this last chapter of Paul's letter to the Roman believers concludes our study of the most systematic revelations of God's plan for all humanity, both Jews and Gentiles. This letter was written, I believe, to give emphasis to God's plan of making known that ALL persons are qualified to accept spiritual, eternal life through faith in his Son, Jesus Christ. The purpose and theme of the Roman letter is given in Chap. 1:16-17: "I am not ashamed to admit that my hope lies in my faith in Jesus as God's Messiah (Savior), for accepting that truth is the power of God which provides spiritual salvation to every individual who believes in Jesus Christ as God's Savior, BOTH TO JEWS AND GENTILES (any human). Through Christ God has revealed and makes available his righteousness which leads those who believe to greater and greater faith [to grow in God's grace]. The person who is to live in God's will must continually depend on his or her faith in God's mercy." Paul further amplifies this purpose as he describes God's righteousness at Chap. 3:21-31. The letter of Paul (God) to the Roman believers (and us) is the spiritual history of the world. Jesus' sinless life, death for the sins of all people, and rising to life from death is the center of all history. Before his coming all history looked forward to that event (victory over death), and since his coming, all history looks back to know God's plan of spiritual salvation (victory over death). The tragedy is that not all people believe and are therefore destined by personal choice to be eternally separated from the loving Creator.

II. Some highlights of Romans: In Chapters 1-3:20, Paul establishes and confirms mankind's absolute need for a Savior which mankind cannot himself or herself supply. The Gentiles and Jews had both fallen short of God's requirements, the former without the law of God and the latter with the law which God had given through Moses. The conclusion, therefore, is that ALL PEOPLE, to the last person, are without knowledge and do not seek God. How mankind is to be justified is given in 3:21-4:25, i.e., through an individual's faith in God's Savior, Jesus Christ. As one becomes a believer (truster) in the Savior, he or she wants to do God's will and thereby embraces the law which outlines that will, 3:31. The believer is a new person living a new type of life, being reconciled to God through Christ. Chapters 5-8 describes the new life as one led by God's Holy Spirit who gives absolute assurance of eternal oneness (spiritual life) with God, 8:31-39. In chapters 9-11 Paul explains God's plan for the Jews who will finally return to God's will (receive Jesus as Messiah) after a period when Gentiles are given the

special opportunity of faith. This mystery is not explained by human rationality but by God's absolute sovereignty, 9:6-29. Israel's problem was in trying to create their own righteousness apart from faith in God, 9:30-33. Jesus and his message were a stumbling factor, because he and his message, too, were based upon faith in God's mercy. At 11:21 Gentiles are warned not to forget that they also will be monitored, as were the Jews, regarding faith as the basis of pleasing God. Chapters 11-15 are devoted to following God's Holy Spirit in the believer's daily living. Pleasing God and harmony among believers are stressed in these admonitions. Jesus' attitude and behavior are to be examples for believers

III. Chap. 16:1-2: Paul here introduces the Roman believers to Phebe whom he commends as a sister in Christ and a deaconess (servant) in the assembly of believers. He introduces her first, in my opinion, because she was to be the carrier of the letter from Corinth to Rome. She lived in a suburb of Corinth, Cenchrea, where Paul was when he wrote Romans. She was obviously a very well-to-do, mature, responsible person, or Paul would never have entrusted to her such an important mission. The Greek term for deaconess (diakonon) used in vs. 1 is the same Greek term found in Philip. 1:1; I Tim. 3:8,12.

IV. Chap. 16:3-16: Priscilla and Aquila then lived in Rome and as ones who had risked their lives helping Paul among the Gentiles, Acts 18:18,26, Paul asked that they be greeted. They were then using their home as a meeting place for believers. Paul then mentions Epaphroditus who was the first one to believe in Achaia (Asia) and a certain Mary who had worked with Paul. Relatives of Paul, Andronicus and Junia, who had been with him in prison are mentioned as ones who had believed before Paul. Listed are Amplias, Urbane, Strychys, Apelles, and the family of Aristobulus. Another relative of Paul, Herodion, is greeted along with the family of Narcissus. Others listed are: Tryphena, Tryphosa, Persis, Rufus (whose mother had been like a mother to Paul), Asyncritus, Phlegon, Hermas, Patrobas, Hermes, Philologus, Julia, Nereus and his sister, and Olympas. All of these are to be greeted affectionately (with a holy kiss) on behalf of the churches Paul knew. In all, 26 believers are listed, most of whom were Gentiles.

V. Chap. 16:17-27: Here Paul again emphasizes the urgency of harmonious relations among the believers at Rome. To maintain harmony he cautions against letting agitators cause divisions by introducing spurious teachings motivated by personal gain. Paul stated that such people were especially effective in upsetting weak believers. He commended them for reports of their faithfulness to true faith in Christ. He assured them that Satan is to be controlled by God in due time. Paul sends greetings from Timotheus and his relatives, Lucius, Jason, and Sosipater. Tertius who is the secretary to whom Paul dictated the letter gives a personal greeting in vs. 22. Gaius in whose house Paul resided in Corinth; the Treasurer of Corinth, Erastus; and Quartus all sent their greetings to the Roman believers. Paul had a hard time in saying farewell as is indicated by the "Amens" appearing at vss. 20, 24, and finally in vs. 27.

May ²¹ 14, 2000

"Saved And Sealed"
Eph. 1

Couples Class
Wendell Alford,
Teacher

I. Of the four letters which appear in God's Word and which were written by Paul during his first imprisonment at Rome, we now consider the last in our series, Ephesians. This letter organizes and presents the implications of the Gospel of Jesus Christ in such a comprehensive way that many believe its contents were intended to be shared with several of the congregations in and around Ephesus in the Roman province of Asia. I also believe that it actually is a Gospel treatise designed for more general use, primarily because it involves no controversy and deals with no specific problems in any particular congregation. Since Ephesus was the foremost of the Asian churches, this letter, in any case, eventually became associated exclusively with that location. After the book of Romans, the book of Ephesians is the most carefully written presentation of Christian theology in the New Covenant. The apostle wrote this letter to make believers more aware of the great and unique riches they have in Jesus Christ and also to encourage them to lean upon and practice this spiritual resource in their daily living. Ephesians was written at about the same time as Colossians, 60-63 AD, during the time noted in Acts 28:16-31. These two letters do have a common content arrangement in that the first chapters are doctrinal (spiritual teachings), and the last portions are practical applications of those teachings for daily practicing a believer's faith in Jesus Christ.

II. As mentioned above the Ephesian congregation was foremost among the groups in the area. A main reason for its being so well established was the fact that Paul himself had been instrumental in teaching and serving there in its first years of existence. At the end of his second missionary journey, Paul visited Ephesus where he left Priscilla and Aquila, Acts 18:18-21. It was at Ephesus that Paul wrote the first letter to the Corinthian congregation. The apostle's effective service in Ephesus began seriously to hurt magic and idol image sales which led to an uproar in the huge Ephesian Theater (held 25,000 to 35,000 persons), Acts 19:23-41. The uproar was led by one Demetrius who evidently was a chief silversmith. His business was making icons relating to the goddess Diana (Greek Artemis), and Paul's spread of the Gospel had adversely affected the sales of the talismans and temple likenesses sold to locals and tourists by the silversmiths. This fertility cult was promoted by the belief that a meteoric stone which had fallen there was actually Diana's image. At the head of the harbor was a temple of Artemis which was known to be very magnificent throughout the former Greek world and the then present Roman Empire.

III. Jesus in speaking to John in Rev. 2:1-7 made the congregation at Ephesus the first of the seven groups addressed. The Lord's admonition to Ephesus involved those in or related to the congregation who were falsely claiming to be apostles. Jesus said that they were not apostles and commended the Ephesians for disbelieving their claims, Rev. 2:2. In Rev. 2:3 note that Jesus said that they had ignored the false "apostles" and served with patience "for

my name's sake" instead. They were to confirm their "first love" and "do the first works," i.e., return to the doctrines and works of service with which they had begun, Rev. 2:3-5, before the influence of the false "apostles."

IV. The Ephesian letter was addressed to a group of believers who were spiritually rich beyond measure in Jesus Christ but were living as beggars, because they were unaware of their spiritual wealth. Jesus told of believers who had trusted and served the Lord during their earthly sojourn and who were so involved in their service that they did not even realize that they were earning rewards in heaven at the time of their service. Now Jesus was back to receive his own and finally to establish his Kingdom of God. They will ask the Lord, "Then the righteous (believers) shall ask him 'Lord, when saw we thee hungry, thirsty, a stranger, naked, sick, or in prison and met your needs?' Then the King (Jesus) shall answer, 'truly, as you have served with my family, you have served me.'" We believers are to love our Lord and serve him by doing his bidding (be led of the Holy Spirit), and not be concerned about our pay, Matt. 6:6; 25:31-40. What believers have in their heavenly bank accounts (Matt. 19:21) only God knows for sure, I Cor. 2:9; 13:12. Paul addressed the Ephesians as saints (believers who are trusting Jesus Christ) who are being blessed by God the Father and our Lord Jesus Christ. We believers were chosen by God (John 15:16; Rom. 9:16-24) even before the world was created by him through Jesus Christ, and through whom we are holy and blameless. God the Father did this through pure love. This selection by God was simply because of "the good pleasure of his will to the praise of the glory of his grace, wherein he has made us acceptable in the beloved (Jesus, God's Son)." Jesus' blood redeems (salvages) us, forgives our sins, again, by means of the riches of his grace. As a result of God's call of us believers, he leads us into all wisdom and understanding (in the person of his Holy Spirit, John 14:26). God's plan is ultimately to gather together all things in Christ, i.e., those in Jesus whom he has brought to heaven before (at physical death) and those believers who are still alive (physically) when he returns for his own, I Thess. 4:13-18. This arrangement is true because God has elected us as inheritors of everything good. The initiation of this spiritual inheritance began when we first trusted Jesus as Savior and Lord. After we commit ourselves to be trusting Jesus, we are sealed with God's Holy Spirit of promise until our spiritual salvation is completed, I Cor. 15:50-58, and forever. God's sealing us with his Holy Spirit is our guarantee of the ultimate redemption of our spirits which are God's purchased possessions (through his Son's blood), vs. 13-14. Paul then (beginning in vs. 15) assures the Ephesian believers that his prayer for them is that they can understand the wonderful blessings they (and we believers) have in store for them (and us) through the Almighty God's power to carry out what he has promised to all believers in Christ. He worked out the believers' glorious condition by raising Christ from physical death and seating him at his own right hand in heaven. In that position he is above all possible hindrances to us believers as he serves as head of God's ecclesia, those whom he is calling to be believers in Jesus his Savior.

May ²⁸ 21, 2000

"God's Gift of Grace"
Eph. 2

Couples Class
Wendell Alford,
Teacher

I. The first word in Chap. 2 of Ephesians, "And," signifies that Paul is coordinating what he has just stated in Chap. 1 with what he is about to state in Chap. 2. Chap. 1 has outlined briefly God's undisputed power which he demonstrated by raising his Son, Jesus Christ, from death. Furthermore, the Almighty Father brought that same Jesus back to heaven and seated him at his (God's) right hand where he has been made to be head of those whom God is calling out from among the peoples of the world, a body of which Jesus Christ is the head. In Chap. 2 Paul addresses those believers at Ephesus as those whom God has made alive spiritually (quickened) who, before God's quickening, had been dead spiritually, i.e., separated from their loving Creator because of their trespasses and sins. The clear implication is that God, in making spiritually dead people alive, demonstrates the same power of God that raised our Lord from the grave alive. If faith in God's Word (John 1:1-4,14;3:16; Heb. 11:6) is what makes a person righteous in God's sight, it follows that a lack of faith in God's Word leaves one separated from God, dead in trespasses and sins, Gal. 3:6-9. In vss. 2-3 God reveals that before the Ephesians were quickened by God, their lives were lived as people who gave no thought to what God wanted them to be or to do. Their way of living reflected a spirit of disobedience toward God. Their lord (prince) was Satan who has captured the hearts and minds of those who desire to ignore God's will for them. Before accepting Jesus as Lord, the Ephesians had given themselves over to temporary matters as that which is important for humans to dedicate their lives to. An unbeliever's conversation involved primarily bodily lust, desires of the body, and the unregenerate mind. Their very nature served those actions which have goals leading to ultimate wrath and destruction.

II. One of Paul's favorite literary methods of emphasis was using two antipodean (two opposites) factors. In vss. 1-3 the previous conditions of believers were listed, and then in vss. 4-10 the apostle gives the tremendous changes which take place after one becomes a follower of Jesus Christ. Note that vs. 4 begins with another coordinating conjunction, "But." You believers were headed down a one-way, dead-in street where nothing lives but destruction, misery and death (eternal separation from a loving God). But what a change takes place when one embraces God's plan of spiritual reclamation through faith in his only begotten (through God's Holy Spirit) Son, Jesus Christ! The entire process rests upon the initial call of God (John 15:15-16), and it is his "mercy which signifies his great love wherewith he has loved us." God exercised that singular love even when we were "dead in sins" making us alive together with Christ (And don't ever forget that we have been saved solely by means of God's free grace, vs. 8-10.) We believers have been raised up together and have been made to sit together in heaven in Christ Jesus. God has taken such a miraculous action so that in the forever he can illustrate his love for us by pointing to this exceeding richness of his grace (favor without commensurate merit to pay for the favor) and of his kindness in Christ Jesus.

The word "kindness" is highly significant in this revelation, because it means that God recognizes a oneness with us in Jesus who was truly human as well as truly God (Divine) than he had before he sent his Son to earth to be born of a woman, live with people, and die a cruel physical death at the hands of fellow human beings, Heb. 2:5-18. This change brought about a new, distinct Covenant with all of humanity by God in Christ. Nothing can be more worthwhile for anyone than what God has done for us in and through Jesus Christ. God wants us to know, to realize, and to appreciate the fact that we have been given this new nature and status through God's grace alone because of our simple, childlike faith (trust) in Jesus Christ. It is not merited by our own goodness or by the doing of good deeds. The only, exclusive, singular, sole reason for our being right with God is that God gave us this new relation with him, because we are trusting Jesus as our Lord and Savior. We trust Jesus because that trust pleases God. We can not trust anything or anyone else to please God lest anyone should boast that they have attained eternal life (spiritual rebirth) apart from or without God's loving grace. We, simply put, are God's workmanship (recreation), created in Christ Jesus for doing what pleases God. God prepared and implemented a New (second) Covenant with mankind so that believers in Jesus Christ will feel motivated to do what pleases the Father, because we have God's unconditional promise to be with us and forgive our sins, Matt. 28:18-20; I John 1:8-10-2:2; 2:12.

III. Having established the fact that God had begun a new provision in the earth in and through Jesus Christ, Paul explains that that new arrangement makes no distinction among what had been a definite cleavage during the period before the coming of Christ Jesus. Those who had been allied with God the Creator in a special way, the circumcision (Jews), had kept God's Covenant (the Old) by means of using their hands to circumcise all male infants, Gen. 17:7,10-14. During that Covenant period nonJews were not included in the nation (commonwealth) of Israel. In fact, all Gentiles (nonJews) were not included in God's family and were alienated from God's covenanted promise. Gentiles were without spiritual hope and "without God in the world." What makes nonJews acceptable now (and Jews as well) to God and his promises is the shed blood of Christ Jesus. Our spiritual peace has been brought into existence through our Lord. Now there is no difference in God's sight between a Jew and a Gentile, a man or a woman, or any other biological distinction. What God did for humankind in and through Jesus Christ brought down ALL spiritual walls of separation. Any person is free to appropriate God's plan of spiritual salvation through trusting the person of Jesus Christ. Because Jesus is God's Savior by being both human and divine, he has in himself, who was two (God and man), eliminated the animosity between God the Father, and any rebellious and unworthy person who will trust (have faith in) Jesus Christ. God has established a method of reconciliation between himself and every believer. This Good News (Gospel) has been made known and accessible to anyone through God's Holy Spirit. Jesus Christ is the chief cornerstone, and believers are the building blocks which make up the dwelling place (Temple) of God on earth today, I Cor. 3:9-17.

June 4
May 28, 2000

"God's Eternal Purpose"
Eph. 3

Couples Class
Wendell Alford,
Teacher

I. Chap. 3 begins with a prepositional phrase, "For this cause" which directly links with what he has stated at the end of Chap. 2. The relative pronoun, "this," in that phrase indicates even a dearer relationship with what has been related. The antecedent of "this" is the concept that in Christ Jesus all believers (including us) are a called-out group who are led by God's Holy Spirit and who have direct, complete access to our heavenly Father by means of God, the Son. Jesus is the chief corner stone of a building (the ekklesia or called out ones) which was promised to the Jews during the period of God's speaking to them through the prophets, e.g., Isa. 9:6; 49:6; 60:3-5. After Jesus came and was sacrificed for our forgiveness, the Lord ordained (through his Holy Spirit) that the apostles (2:20 and 3:5) would speak for God in his relating to humankind, Acts 10:9-20,28,34-48; Gal. 2:2-8,21. The apostle Peter had a special assignment in the Gospel for the Jews, but Paul was especially commissioned to deliver the Gospel to the Gentiles, Acts 14:26-28; 18:1-6; Rom. 1:16. Now, in Eph. 3 the apostle Paul refers to the miraculous efforts of God in "leveling the playing field" for both Jews and everyone else (Gentiles or all nonJews) through Christ Jesus. This glorious condition which God himself has brought to pass in the earth, Paul characterized as a former mystery (hidden truth). In former times this truth (the Gospel) "was not made known unto the sons of men, as it now is revealed unto his holy (especially set aside and sent) apostles [just as it was formerly] to the prophets by the Holy Spirit." What a tremendous circumstance God has caused to happen, i.e., that the Gentiles (nonJews) should be fellow heirs, and of the same body, and partakers of his [God's] promise in Christ by the Gospel!" Paul then expresses his amazement and awe that God would honor him with such an assignment of spreading the Gospel. Paul who earlier tried so conscientiously to annihilate this new "Jewish sect" consisting of a rapidly growing group of followers of this one Jesus (the Way) who had "falsely" claimed to be the Jews' long awaited Messiah.

II. We all know the story: Paul, with authority from the Jewish leaders in Jerusalem, was headed for Damascus up north to do his part "for God" by going from house to house calling these "falsely led" Jews to account for their "heresy." And, while en route to Damascus from Jerusalem, the Lord, Jesus Christ, himself appeared to Paul (Acts 22:7-8,18) and told him to get away from the influence of Jerusalem. Paul left and went to Arabia (a desert or wilderness area) and remained there about three years, Gal. 1:15-24. The Scriptures are absolutely silent about what happened during those three years. We do know that the instructions he received there caused him to see no need to confer or consult with anyone else, including the other apostles, about what God wanted him to do. God's Word which we have in his letters to the various local congregations let us (who are led by God's Holy Spirit) know that his three-year "schooling" could only have come from the Lord, and we do have Scriptural evidence that the Lord Jesus Christ himself

came to Paul, noted above at Acts 22:8, and see also at I Cor. 15:8. At I Cor. 15:9-10 Paul states that he considered himself "the least of the apostles" [but an apostle nevertheless], and here at Eph. 3:8 he further expresses humility again by referring to himself as "who am less than the least of all the saints (all believers)." But all that he is, is because of "Unto me - - - is this [God's] grace given - - by the effective working of his (God's) power." Paul who was a Hebrew of the Hebrews (Phil. 3:5), and through Jesus, the Messiah, revealing to anyone who would listen that God's mystery of spiritual salvation is available to every person who will believe, John 3:16. Through Jesus Christ (God himself) the world was created.

III. God now wants everyone, even the powers that be outside and away from the earth (heavenly places), to know the part God's Son, the God-man, has in God's relating to humankind. This plan of God was not an afterthought because man sinned and was displeasing to God from the outset of mankind's existence, Gen. 3:15. No, this plan was "according to the eternal purpose which he (God) purposed in his beloved Son, Jesus, our Lord," vs. 11. Included in this plan was that believers in the plan (accepting Jesus as Savior and Lord of life) are to relate boldly to God (through his atonement) with full confidence that faith in Jesus Christ makes such believers pleasing to God, our Creator. Because of this boldness Paul (God's Word) encourages us believers not to lose heart (faint not) even in periods of trials and tribulations. Even in times when unbelievers may be troubled and anxious, we believers are to "look up for our redemption draweth nigh (Jesus is never far from us.)," Lk 21:28. Paul notes that his belief in and service to the Gospel is what has caused him to undergo tribulations (including imprisonment at Rome), but his service in God's Kingdom has brought glory to many, i.e., those who have believed because of his testimony. Here he repeats the same sentiment given in vs. 1 where he states, "I Paul, the prisoner of Jesus Christ (Note, not of the Romans.) for you Gentiles. Was Paul complaining about his temporary troubles? No, he felt humble to be a part of God's eternal purpose in calling out a select group of believers who are to be recognized both on the earth and forever in heaven as the family of the Living God (trusting in and living for God's Son, the Lord Jesus Christ.). Paul, bowing (yielding) to God, vs. 14, was in reverence and awe as he prayed that God would "grant, according to the riches of his grace [to believers], to be strengthened with power by his Holy Spirit in the inner self," vs. 16b, and see also at Rom. 7:22 and II Cor. 4:16. Paul further prays that we believers may realize that Christ dwells in our hearts by faith, that as we are grounded in love, we will be able to understand along with all believers how all inclusive is the love of Christ, which is infinite (beyond believers abilities to go away from). In fact, God's intent is to do so exceedingly abundantly that we are limited (as mortals) in our abilities to think about or ask for those things he has for us, vs. 20, and see also I Cor. 2:16. We called-out-ones (ekklesia) will enjoy God's glory, his eternal purpose for us, forever, to which Paul says, "Amen!," vs. 21.

"Frail children of dust, and feeble as frail, in thee do we trust,
nor find thee to fail:
Thy mercies how tender, how firm to the end. Our Maker, Defender,
Redeemer, and Friend." With Paul we say, Amen and Amen!

June ¹⁸~~4~~, 2000

"New Family, New Attitude"
Eph. 4

Couples Class
Wendell Alford,
Teacher

I. Chapter 4 begins by Paul repeating that he is a prisoner of (in) the Lord and makes his circumstance a valid reason to plead with the Ephesian believers to live their lives worthy of God's having called them to live for him (God). In fact, this entire chapter is devoted to factors involved in the service of believers as new members of God's family who have become such members through their childlike faith in God's Son, Jesus Christ. These family members are relying upon God's Holy Spirit for instructions and strength, because now Jesus is their Savior for eternal life with God, and Lord also of the mortal life yet to be lived in the flesh. The first suggestion made by Paul (God's Word) is found in vss. 2-3. The new believers are to be humble as Jesus said that his followers should be, Matt. 5:5, "Blessed are the meek for they shall inherit the earth." The meekness comes from a sense of gentleness, long-suffering patience and "putting up with" some fellow believers who may not always be gentlemanlike or gentleladylike as Paul is suggesting here. The reason for such mutual respect is given in vs. 3, "Attempting to maintain coherence (sticking together) by the Spirit in the bond of peace," i.e., not letting internal disagreements and dissensions sap the strength of the local congregation so that influencing those outside the fellowship will be retarded. After all, Paul notes in vs. 4, since Jesus Christ is the only head of the ekklesia, it follows that there is only one body. [Paul develops this concept more fully at I Cor. 12:12-31. Note there that this loyalty within the fellowship culminates in the famous love Chap. 13 in which love motivates the "more excellent way," I Cor. 12:31b.] In vss. 7-11 Paul indicates the reason for the unity which he calls forth in vs. 3. God's grace is dispensed to every individual in a local congregation in different types and measures. He underscores this phenomenon by quoting Psa. 68:18 in vs. 8, "When he [Jesus Christ] ascended up on high, he led captivity captive [defeated Satan's power over all who will trust the Lord], and dispensed gifts [abilities to serve for spiritual purposes] to various individual believers." In verses in vss. 9-10 the Scripture states that, "he [Jesus Christ] went back up far above all heavens only after he had gone down into the lower parts of the earth," Psa. 16:10; Acts 2:31; I Pet. 3:18-22.

II. Among the gifts which Jesus left for members of his new family were apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers. I say "among the gifts," because other spiritual gifts are noted at Rom. 12:3-8 and I Cor. 12:4-11, 28-31. We should note carefully these spiritual gifts listed in vs. 11. The first gift is apostles, and we should be especially careful in determining who the apostles were. In the Ephesian letter Paul has already stated that members of the household of God are likened to stones with Jesus Christ being the chief cornerstone, Eph. 2:20-22. At that point in the letter Paul states that the foundation of this spiritual building is builded upon God's promise to the Old Covenant prophets and God's Word through apostles (apostolic period - New Covenant) ending at approximately 100 AD. We have also noted that there were

individuals in the Ephesian congregation who claimed to be apostles, but Jesus said that they were liars, Rev. 2:2. The only exception that the Scriptures make to the original twelve apostles (Acts 1:26) was Paul himself, Rom. 1:5; I Cor. 4:9; 9:1-2. So it is evident that the gift of apostleship was rather limited in scope, and I say that fully aware that there are some in "Christendom" who claim, through their tradition and misinterpreting of Matt. 16:13-20, that there have been a continuation of "apostles" (vicars of Christ on earth) since Peter. Peter himself did not claim to hold such a vicarious position, Acts 10:25-26; I Pet. 2:4-9. And Jesus corrected Peter dramatically when the latter was presumptuous in assuming too much authority (Mk 8:27-33) immediately following Peter's correctly identifying Jesus as God's promised Messiah, Savior. The other gifts: prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers are more obvious. The prophets were those who spoke forth God's Word, and evangelists were probably itinerant prophets. Philip was a deacon (Acts 6:5) and an evangelist (Acts 8:5) while his four daughters were prophets, Acts 21:8-9. Peter and Paul served God as both apostles and evangelists.

III. In vss. 12-16 Paul gives the reason for the Lord's giving gifts to believers following his ascension. Jesus wanted his body to be unified in their faith in him and mature, not "tossed to and fro" by "the trickery of men." To ensure this maturity believers should be loyal to the congregation by "speaking the truth in love" by each member supplying his or her own gift effectively so that the whole congregation will be edified (built up) in love. To accomplish the desired result the Ephesian believers, who had been unbelieving Gentiles, should now, as new creatures in Christ, leave their past style of living. For example, their hearts should no longer be hardened (be blind concerning) to God's will for them. Before being quickened by their faith in Jesus as Savior and Lord, they were spiritually ignorant and licentious (lacking legal or moral restraints, especially regarding sexual lusts) and greedy (putting self before everyone else) or materialistic, Matt. 6:24. "But all of you have not so learned the truth [of God's will] in Christ," vs. 20. Their old conversation and conduct had been corrupt and according to deceitful lust. Now in Christ an entirely new attitude should be assumed. The believers should don new dress which reflected renewed spirits of their minds. Believers should become people who are to follow God's Son completely and thereby be recreated in righteousness and genuine holiness (separated from their earlier lives of evil). Practically speaking, these believers should stop lying and start speaking truthfully with his or her neighbor, because they were now members of the same spiritual family. Being angry was no problem unless such anger caused one to perform acts contrary to God's will, e.g., consider actions of God and the Lord Jesus Christ at Num. 25:4; Mk 3:5; 11:15-18; John 2:13-17. A further admonition is given in relationship to being angry (vs. 26) which is not to permit the day to expire before a believer's wrathful attitude is quieted. A believer is not to fear the devil, because he (Satan) has been defeated by our Lord whom we trust and serve. One who serves the Lord Jesus Christ must work to meet his or her own needs rather than steal what is needed. Do not speak corruptly but positively, gracefully. The "bottom line" is that a believer should do nothing which will pain God's Holy Spirit who lives within and who has sealed us "unto the day of redemption," Eph. 1:13; 4:30. We are now permanent members of an eternal family. Let's make sure our attitudes and actions demonstrate as much!

June 18, 2000

"Offspring of God"
Eph. 5:1-24

Couples Class
Wendell Alford,
Teacher

I. As the beginning of Chap. 4 continued the ending thought in Chap. 3, so does Chap. 5 begin with the ending thought in Chap. 4. We believers are sealed by God's Holy Spirit to ensure that we will finish our mortal lives equipped for the culmination of our spiritual salvation, 4:30. Our willingness in expressing kindness to and forgiveness of one another is to be based upon the example of what God did for us in Christ. Chap. 5:1 admonishes us to be followers of God as his dear children as we, in fact, are. Our lives are to be lived in a sacrificial style (mode) which, figuratively speaking, brings a pleasant fragrance to God. Those activities which are contrary to what pleases God are begun in vs. 3. In contrast to what pleases God is fornication, sexual activity outside marriage. Uncleanness which we noted at Col. 3:5 as "lustful luxurious, profligate (completely given over to dissipation and licentiousness [lacking legal or moral restraints, especially sexual restraints]); (For further use of the Greek term here translated "unclean," see Rom. 1:24-27; II Cor. 12:21; I Thes. 4:7-8.)." Covetousness is a greedy desire to have more than one needs at whatever cost to self or others. Jesus spoke to covetousness at Matt. 6:19-24. It is possible for those who call themselves Christians to incorporate covetous manners (lifestyles) into what they consider acceptable to God, Mk 7:1-9, 13-23; Col. 3:5. Vs. 3b makes clear that neither fornication, uncleanness, nor covetousness should be practiced at all ("not once be named among you"), for such activities are not "becoming for saints (believers)." Other things which are not in keeping with the Holy Spirit's leadership and which grieve him are dirty stories, foul language (vulgarism), and raw jokes. Instead ones communication should be "spiritually efficient," i.e., use opportunities of conversation to speak of God's grace and goodness and to give thanks to God for what he has done for us through Jesus Christ. Such self-discipline will cause believers to become accustomed to relating to others in a Godly way when Christ returns to establish his Kingdom of God on the earth. In Rev. 21:2,9 John (God's Word) tells us that we believers will be presented as the bride of Christ. We should, therefore, act and think as a bride even in this life, for he loves us and cherishes us on a moment by moment basis. We should be faithful to him as our Lord, and not commit adultery with the prince (ruler) of this world, John 12:28-32; 14:30; 17:20-26. Again, we are reminded in vs. 5 that God's kingdom will have no place for whoremongers. We who are subject to God and his Son as Lord are not to communicate with others in the world in an unbelieving language. Partaking of the body of the opposite sex for money is not a proper way of demonstrating and communicating that God sacrificed his Son so that we believers can enjoy heavenly citizenship. Because God's Spirit indwells and leads us believers, we can judge such behavior and whether our own actions grieve God's Spirit, I Cor. 11:31-32. In other words, if "everyone else is doing it" in no way excuses a believer for participating in such unGodly activities, Rom. 1:20; 12:1-2. Rom. 1:20 refers specifically to unbelievers, but how much more are believers without excuse who grieve God's Holy Spirit! Vss. 6-12 describe

the differences between "followers of God as his dear children," vs. 1, and the "sons of disobedience," vs. 6. There are those who will try to deceive believers to compromise the righteous leading of God's Spirit, but we are not to be "partakers with them," vs. 7. Before accepting "the Way," Jesus Christ, as Savior and Lord, the Ephesians were walking in darkness and without God in the world, but now they are believers, "children of light." Vs. 9 states plainly that the attitudes and actions of believers are "the fruit of the Spirit [Remember that you are now the temple of God's Spirit.], in all goodness and righteousness and truth." The Holy Spirit of God will continually prove to you "what is acceptable unto the Lord," vs. 10 and John 16:13. Believers can associate with unbelievers for the sake of witnessing (John 17:11,14-19; I Cor. 5:9-11), but God's children (believers) are to act and think like who they are: the offspring (reborn of God's Spirit) of the Almighty God whose children can have no fellowship with "the unfruitful works of darkness," vs. 11. A Spirit-led believer should feel shame even to speak of things done and revered by unbelievers, vs. 12.

II. Beginning with vs. 13 Paul again uses his literary style of contrast for emphasis. He has pointed out those things which are unacceptable to God and God's Spirit's condemnation of such activities for his children. Now, he turns to those things which please (do not grieve) God. The illumination of God's Spirit in the believer makes (manifests) God's Lordship evident, vs. 13. It is highly significant that when Paul refers to the concepts in Isa. 16:19 and 60:1, he states that Jesus Christ will be the one who gives God's light (understanding). As those who bear the name of Christ, we should, therefore, "conduct our lives carefully (circumspectly), as wise ones, not as fools," vs. 15. The times are evil and we have such short lives during which we can bear the true testimony of what our loving heavenly Father has done and is doing for us in and through his Son, our Savior. Our spirits are to be constantly elated as God's Spirit saturates our desires to act like God's offspring. To help in this Godly living we should also lean upon one another for encouragement, vs. 21.

III. In the remainder of Chap. 5, Paul gives spirit-led admonitions regarding a believing family. As in all social settings in which Christ is Lord, there should be decency and orderliness, I Cor. 14:33-40. The sequence or order of Paul's suggestions is important. First, in vss. 18-21 the instruction is to be "filled with the Holy Spirit," or given completely to God's will. Second, in vss. 22-24 Paul speaks to believing wives in the households. In general, final decision-making is to rest with the husband. In our social setting today with the many changes which have occurred in the last 2,000 years, a believer must keep in mind what Jesus taught in Matt. 5-7 to the multitudes. In this teaching Jesus defied those who taught their incorrect interpretation of God's law. Proper living by the Spirit of God's Law was quite different from the Jewish religious leaders of that day. When Jesus lived in human flesh among men, women were not allowed education as were the men, nor were they generally active in business and public affairs. This arrangement was cultural and not necessarily what God preferred. But in that culture with its limitations on women's training and expected performance, the ekklesia would have been hampered had men not been given the leadership assignments. [MORE NEXT WEEK]

July 2
June 25, 2000

"In God's Uniform"
Eph. 5:25-6:24

Couples Class
Wendell Alford,
Teacher

I. We come now, sadly, to the end of our study of Paul's communication (God's) to the group of believers living in the city of Ephesus in about 62 AD (and to us as well in 2000). We could get bogged down in many details which are all important, but we should also note the general force of Paul's intent. At the time, Paul's imprisonment in Rome, believing Jesus as God's Savior of the world (the Way) was considered by the Roman government and many Jews as a new sect of Judaism. Paul was determined to keep all believers seen as one body, whether they were Jewish or Gentile. He spent over thirty years of his life proclaiming that believing on Jesus was not a new patch on an old garment, Matt. 9:16, but an entirely new faith in the world. Christ Jesus had made the difference. The Creator's Spirit (the same Spirit who was in Christ) is available for residence only in those who are willing to trust and to commit themselves to the Lordship of Jesus Christ. Understanding that the overview of the meaning of the message to the Ephesians involves the ekklesia, God's called out ones, is basic to understanding fully the letter to the Ephesians. The first chapter in vss. 3-6 notes that all believers are chosen by the Father; in vss. 7-12 believers are redeemed by the Son, Christ Jesus; in vss. 13-14 believers are sealed by the Holy Spirit; and in vss. 15-23 believers (saints, vs. 15) are asked to realize the significance of their circumstance, i.e., that absolutely nothing could possibly be better for persons on earth, Matt. 13:44-46. This estate of being offspring of God for eternity is further stated at Chap. 4:30-32 where also believers are admonished to live lives that will not grieve God's Holy Spirit who lives within every believer. Chap. 4 reveals that God's ekklesia had been a secret before Christ Jesus came from heaven to earth to make spiritual redemption available to any person who will believe in (trust) Christ Jesus. In Chap. 4 Paul begs all believers to be united (both Jewish and Gentile) around the Holy Spirit's leadership and exercise the gifts Jesus assigns. To do this believers must realize that they are new creatures, born from above (of the Spirit), John 3:3; II Cor. 5:17.

II. Beginning at Chap. 4:31 and to the end of the letter, Paul outlines practical applications to be practiced (working in love) by believers, "as dear children of God." We began examining these practical implications, really privileges, for believers last week in Chap. 5. Now we begin where we left off with 5:25 where Paul has begun admonitions for believing family members. It is absolutely essential when attempting to understand the spousal relationship of believing husbands with believing wives and vice versa, that one must keep in mind the fact that Paul is relating these two (husband and wife) with Christ and his ekklesia, 5:23-24. Also, remember that for the best chance for a believing married couple to be what the Lord wants them to be, they must be saturated (led by) with God's Holy Spirit, 5:18, which fact we discussed at some length last week. Given that the husband-wife relationship can be likened to Christ and the ekklesia, it follows that for believing

the differences between "followers of God as his dear children," vs. 1, and the "sons of disobedience," vs. 6. There are those who will try to deceive believers to compromise the righteous leading of God's Spirit, but we are not to be "partakers with them," vs. 7. Before accepting "the Way," Jesus Christ, as Savior and Lord, the Ephesians were walking in darkness and without God in the world, but now they are believers, "children of light." Vs. 9 states plainly that the attitudes and actions of believers are "the fruit of the Spirit [Remember that you are now the temple of God's Spirit.], in all goodness and righteousness and truth." The Holy Spirit of God will continually prove to you "what is acceptable unto the Lord," vs. 10 and John 16:13. Believers can associate with unbelievers for the sake of witnessing (John 17:11,14-19; I Cor. 5:9-11), but God's children (believers) are to act and think like who they are: the offspring (reborn of God's Spirit) of the Almighty God whose children can have no fellowship with "the unfruitful works of darkness," vs. 11. A Spirit-led believer should feel shame even to speak of things done and revered by unbelievers, vs. 12.

II. Beginning with vs. 13 Paul again uses his literary style of contrast for emphasis. He has pointed out those things which are unacceptable to God and God's Spirit's condemnation of such activities for his children. Now, he turns to those things which please (do not grieve) God. The illumination of God's Spirit in the believer makes (manifests) God's Lordship evident, vs. 13. It is highly significant that when Paul refers to the concepts in Isa. 16:19 and 60:1, he states that Jesus Christ will be the one who gives God's light (understanding). As those who bear the name of Christ, we should, therefore, "conduct our lives carefully (circumspectly), as wise ones, not as fools," vs. 15. The times are evil and we have such short lives during which we can bear the true testimony of what our loving heavenly Father has done and is doing for us in and through his Son, our Savior. Our spirits are to be constantly elated as God's Spirit saturates our desires to act like God's offspring. To help in this Godly living we should also lean upon one another for encouragement, vs. 21.

III. In the remainder of Chap. 5, Paul gives spirit-led admonitions regarding a believing family. As in all social settings in which Christ is Lord, there should be decency and orderliness, I Cor. 14:33-40. The sequence or order of Paul's suggestions is important. First, in vss. 18-21 the instruction is to be "filled with the Holy Spirit," or given completely to God's will. Second, in vss. 22-24 Paul speaks to believing wives in the households. In general, final decision-making is to rest with the husband. In our social setting today with the many changes which have occurred in the last 2,000 years, a believer must keep in mind what Jesus taught in Matt. 5-7 to the multitudes. In this teaching Jesus defied those who taught their incorrect interpretation of God's law. Proper living by the Spirit of God's Law was quite different from the Jewish religious leaders of that day. When Jesus lived in human flesh among men, women were not allowed education as were the men, nor were they generally active in business and public affairs. This arrangement was cultural and not necessarily what God preferred. But in that culture with its limitations on women's training and expected performance, the ekklesia would have been hampered had men not been given the leadership assignments. [MORE NEXT WEEK]

July 2, 2000

"Jesus Assigns Responsibilities
and Takes Leave"
Acts 1

Couples Class
Wendell Alford,
Teacher

I. The author of Acts, Luke, was not one of the twelve apostles. He was a companion of Paul and a converted Gentile. The companionship is evident through first person, plural pronouns which appear in Acts 16:10-17; 20:5-15; 21:1-28:16. Luke's name appears in the New Testament only at Col. 4:14; II Tim. 4:11; and Philem. 24, and each time is associated with Paul. Acts was probably written between 70 and 75 AD, and at the beginning of the book, Luke states to the same person, Theophilus, that he was continuing his discourse which he had begun to Theophilus outlining the life, activities, and teachings of the Lord Jesus. The addressee's name, Theophilus, means "lover of God" when translated from the Greek. This person probably became a believer in Jesus Christ by the testimony of either Luke himself in Antioch or perhaps Paul in Rome. If Luke, then he most likely was a person of high official rank living in Antioch, or if Paul, a similarly situated person living in Rome. The term "most excellent" which Luke used in Lk 1:3 would indicate that Theophilus was not only of high rank but also wealthy and prominent in the social order. We do not know for sure that these books were written upon specific request, but, evidently, Luke was convinced that he had interests in Jesus' life, his teachings, and early events following Jesus' death. Perhaps Luke believed that Theophilus would be convinced of the truth about Jesus by a prominent physician such as Luke, but we have no record of whether he was so convinced. We can surmise that, since Luke chose a follow-up writing (Acts) after his Gospel account, he (Luke) was convinced of the sincerity of Theophilus' interest. We are certainly blessed that the "most excellent" gentleman, for whatever reason (by God's Holy Spirit to be sure), motivated Luke to undertake the task. (God's Holy Spirit had many ways to insure that God's message was preserved for us.) There are some biblical interpreters who believe that subsequent Bible copiers took the original term "theophilus" and personalized it into a proper noun. If this is correct, Luke was simply addressing both books to any "lover of God."

II. After greeting Theophilus and summarizing his Gospel account to him as activities and teachings of Jesus, Luke said that that ended Jesus' personal ministry. But Jesus until he was taken up had given instructions through God's Spirit to those chosen to continue his work. Jesus also had shown himself to have been resurrected from death by many infallible proofs, e.g., in Lk 24:36-43 when he asked his disciples to feel his body, and even ate food as they watched. The Lord continued with the disciples for forty days instructing them in what they should now do. They were to remain in Jerusalem to wait for God's promise which Jesus himself had promised personally, see John 14:15-18; 16:7,2-14. The promise was soon to send God's Holy Spirit to immerse the disciples in that Spirit as John the Immerser had immersed his disciples in water when they had repented for not having kept the Law of Moses. The believers were to go, after being immersed in God's Spirit, to Jerusalem, Samaria, and throughout the earth witnessing about God's mercy through Jesus Christ. The disciples during the forty days asked Jesus

if the coming of the Spirit would be the time when Jesus would restore again the kingdom of (to) Israel. It is very noteworthy that Jesus did not say that the kingdom of Israel (Note that the kingdom of God or heaven is not the question here.) would not be restored, but rather that God, the Father, would determine himself the time when the kingdom of Israel would be restored. Jesus said that their immediate concern should not be the restoration of Israel as a nation but rather witnessing to spiritual rebirth of people through belief and trust in God's Savior, Jesus Christ, himself. This witnessing they are to do after God's Spirit has come to empower them.

III. After delivering this final admonition to be witnesses of God's salvation through him, Jesus was taken up through a cloud as the disciples watched. This ascension took place on the Mount of Olives, and there two of God's messengers explained that they need not continue their vigil. Jesus was now gone but would return to earth in the same manner as he had left. At this time the eleven apostles left Olivet and returned to an upstairs room in Jerusalem, likely the place where the Lord's Supper was instituted in what was perhaps the home of Mary, Mark's mother. They lived there seeking God's will as one, in earnest, humble prayer with the women, among whom was Jesus' mother, Mary.

IV. From the time Jesus left earth to return to the Father (forty days after Passover, see Acts 1:3), there were ten days left to take care of any business which needed the disciples' immediate attention. Peter took the lead in these matters among the approximately 120 persons waiting for Jesus' promise of the special coming of God's Spirit of power. Peter's chief concern was that, with the betrayal by and the death of Judas Iscariot, there were left only the eleven, whereas the Scriptures (Psa. 41:9; 109:8; John 13:18-19) indicated that the betrayer's position should be filled by another. After relating the events surrounding Judas Iscariot's suicide, Peter outlined the qualification: he must have accompanied Jesus throughout his three-year public-ministry from his immersion in the Jordan River by John the Immerser until Jesus was taken up into heaven. The group chose two qualified men to be the new twelfth apostle, Joseph (Barsabas) Justis and Matthias. The two were nominated for the vacant office, and after prayer, they voted and elected Matthais to succeed Judas Iscariot.

V. The apostles (ones especially sent) were distinct, unique and occupied temporary positions in the history of the ecclesia. Paul was the only apostle outside the original twelve and describes himself as one born (made an apostle) "out of due time" at I Cor. 15: 8-10. His experience of becoming an apostle by explicit direction and authority of the Lord Jesus himself is given at Acts 9:1-9. I have noted to this Class my thoughts concerning the implementing of the prophecy at Rev. 21:14 where God's Word states that the New Jerusalem will have a wall around the city with twelve foundations on which will be the names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb. I look forward to seeing whether Paul or Matthias will note one of the foundations. Only our Heavenly Father, his Son Jesus the Christ, and his Holy Spirit knows now!

July 9, 2000

"God Sends His Holy Spirit"
Acts 2

Couples Class
Wendell Alford,
Teacher

I. When the fiftieth day after the Passover (marking Israel's deliverance from Egypt and Jesus' deliverance from death), Pentecost (marking the deliverance of the Law to Moses at Sinai), the day promised by Jesus for the coming of God's Holy Spirit (Ghost or Accompanist), came to pass, John 14:15-18; 16:7-14. Pentecost was a feast of the harvest blessings from God. (Passover occurs in April and Pentecost in June. Wheat is ready for harvesting in June in Israel.). In other words, the receipt of God's Spirit in this special way and at this particular time was more important than Moses' receipt of the Law at Sinai and the exercise thereof, Heb. 9:1,15-18. [This occasion was unique, I believe, one which had never happened before and would not be duplicated again. It is true that some of the details were experienced again during the apostolic period to prove special messages which God wanted to emphasize, e.g., the first inclusion of Gentiles in God's kingdom at Acts 10:44-48, and asserting that believing John the Immerser's message of repentance does not make one right with God but that trusting the sacrifice of Jesus and his resurrection is necessary to be in God's kingdom at Acts 19:1-7. - WA] God made sure that the event was indelibly remembered by all those who witnessed it. A strong wind blew right through the building, and flame like tongues rested upon the praying disciples, one by one. In our day of Star Trek and television, such would probably be assigned to electronic manipulation, but this happening could only be a supernatural act of Almighty God himself. As God filled each praying believer with his Holy Spirit, he or she spoke the languages of the different people who had gathered because of the noise and commotion. Many people were in Jerusalem for Passover and Pentecost, people who spoke over a dozen different languages. It was obvious to these various people, as they heard these Galileans speaking not Galilean but their own languages, that the humanly impossible was happening. Also strange was the message they heard in their own languages: God had done and was doing something wonderful in and through Jesus Christ, God's Anointed One. Some of the hearers believed and were convinced by the message, while others decided the believers were drunk with some of the new wine of the recent harvest. The hearers were all either Jews or Jewish converts from all over the Middle East.

II. Peter, sensing the confusion of many of the hearers, stood with the other eleven apostles and delivered an explanation of what God was doing. His text was Joel 2:28-32, and in the message he made it clear that they (the Jews) had sacrificed the very person God had sent to bring salvation to Israel, Acts 2:23,36. Many believed his message and asked what they should do. Peter told them to repent and indicate their trust in [identify with] Jesus as God's Messiah (Savior) by being immersed in water. He assured them that when they did, they would also receive God's Holy Spirit.

III. Those who accepted Jesus according to Peter's message (about 3000 that day) were immersed and began to associate (fellowship)

with one another as believers in Jesus as the Christ (Savior). The twelve apostles (who had been first-hand hearers of Jesus' teachings) taught the new believers what Jesus had taught them. They met daily in the Temple and homes. Their actions and witnessing led many also to believe in Jesus Christ, and the Lord added the new believers to the group, his called out ones. Out of fear for their well-being, they shared their goods and lived from a common supply.

IV. The sharing of God's message with other than ones own tongue, i.e., in another human language or mysterious (angelic) speech, Mk 16:17; Acts 2:1-13; I Cor. 13:1.

A. The original, New Covenant use of nonnative languages was unique and for a special purpose, the establishing of Christ's church.

1. The languages were spoken by believers in Christ through a special anointing of God's Holy Spirit.

2. The languages spoken were languages of nations other than the native languages of the speakers themselves.

3. The Christians were miraculously given the ability by God's Holy Spirit to speak in the language of foreigners present, languages the speakers did not know through normal assimilation and learning.

4. The message given by the miracle was to communicate what God was doing for mankind through Jesus the Messiah.

5. The language miracle was a fulfillment of a promise of God during the Old Covenant period through Joel 2:28-29; Acts 2:16-18.

B. Early abuse of speaking in angelic tongues in the church, I Cor. 12-14

1. In discussing the variety of spiritual gifts, Paul mentions that apparently some members felt that their own gifts somehow made them superior spiritually, I Cor. 12:25.

2. The Scripture makes it clear that not everyone was speaking in angelic tongues, I Cor. 12:30.

3. Speaking angelic tongues is far inferior to love for fellow Christians, I Cor. 13:1.

4. Paul asserts that properly speaking in angelic tongues should be considered prayer, i.e., conversing with the Father, and that such activity is for self-help, not for helping the church, I Cor. 14:1-4. The better way to speak in a worship service is to speak in ones normal language, I Cor. 14:5-20.

5. Speaking in unknown foreign languages was for a sign of the New Covenant, Isa. 28:11-16; I Cor. 14:21-22.

6. Speaking in angelic languages was bringing confusion in the church worship services, and God, Paul (God's Word) said, is not the Creator of confusion, I Cor. 14:33, 40.

7. The women were evidently especially involved in the confusion caused by angelic speaking, I Cor. 14:34-35.

8. Paul, after the lengthy discussion of Christian worship with special emphasis on the better language to use in that worship, gave the Gospel in a nutshell, I Cor. 15:3-4.

"Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, and have not love, I am become as sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal. - - - without love, [for God is Love - I John 4:16] I am nothing, I Cor. 13:1 and 2b."

July 23, 2000

" Healing and Witnessing"
Acts 3

Couples Class
Wendell Alford,
Teacher

I. As the disciples remained in Jerusalem, they continued their daily activities. The regular hour of prayer was three o'clock in the afternoon. One day as John and Peter neared the Temple, they were about to enter the Beautiful Gate on the east side. There by the Gate, a beggar who regularly solicited a handout from those going in and out of the Temple saw Peter and John and accosted them for a donation. The two disciples stared at this handicapped (He had been unable to stand or walk since birth.) beggar and said to him, "Look here." The man (probably about forty years old) assumed that he was about to receive a gift, and gave Peter and John his absolute attention. Peter told him that he nor John had money but that they did have a gift more precious to him than silver or gold. Peter then grasped the lame man by his right hand, pulled him to his feet, and told him in the name of Jesus of Nazareth to walk. The physician Luke notes that the man's problem was defective feet and ankle bones. The defective parts were immediately and miraculously made whole through the power of the resurrected Jesus Christ. The well man walked and leaped as he went with Peter and John into the Temple, giving God the credit for the wonderful miracle that had happened to him. The crowd there recognized the former invalid who had for many years lain by the Temple gate begging for living expenses.

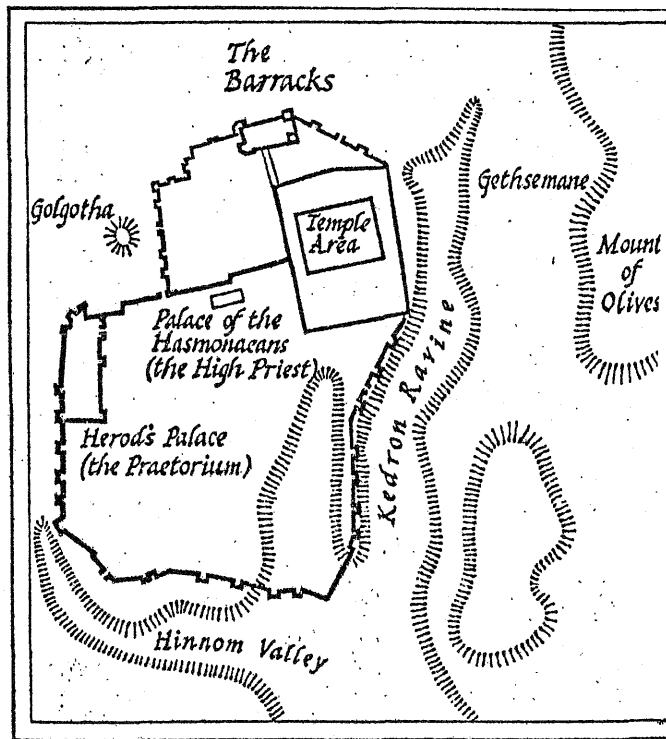
II. The crowd was amazed by the event as they rushed onto and stood on Solomon's Porch (Cloister). The formerly lame man embraced Peter and John, and Peter, seeing that they had the crowd's attention, seized the opportunity to bring his second message, this time to Temple visitors. His first thought expressed was that he and John were not the reason that the lame man had been made whole. It was not their power or righteousness that had healed the man, but the witnesses of this miracle should not be surprised by this happening. The power that healed the man had come from the God whom they knew as the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, the God of their fathers. This same God had by healing the lame man, as they themselves had witnessed, verified Jesus as his Messiah through his healing power. Peter again (Acts 2:36) laid the blame for Jesus' death at the feet of his hearers, the Jews, asserting that they had denied Jesus' innocence, although Pilate had been determined to release Jesus, having found him unworthy of death. In so doing, they had demanded the forgiveness of a murderer instead of God's Righteous and Holy One, vss. 13-15. Even though you, in effect, killed the author of life, God raised that same Jesus from death. We are personally eyewitnesses of his resurrection. It is, in fact, through faith in the power of the name of Jesus that this lifelong handicapped man has been made whole. The miraculous power of God you have seen with your own eyes. Peter then held open a chance for his hearers to be reconciled to God even though they, with their leaders, had done such an evil act, bring about Jesus' death. Peter said that their action had been carried out in ignorance (Remember Jesus' prayer on the cross when he asked the Father to forgive them "for they know not what they do," Lk 23:34. God had

even indicated through the prophets that his Messiah would suffer before he was glorified, Psa. 22; Isa. 50:5-7; 53; Dan. 9:26. Note also I Pet. 1:10-11.

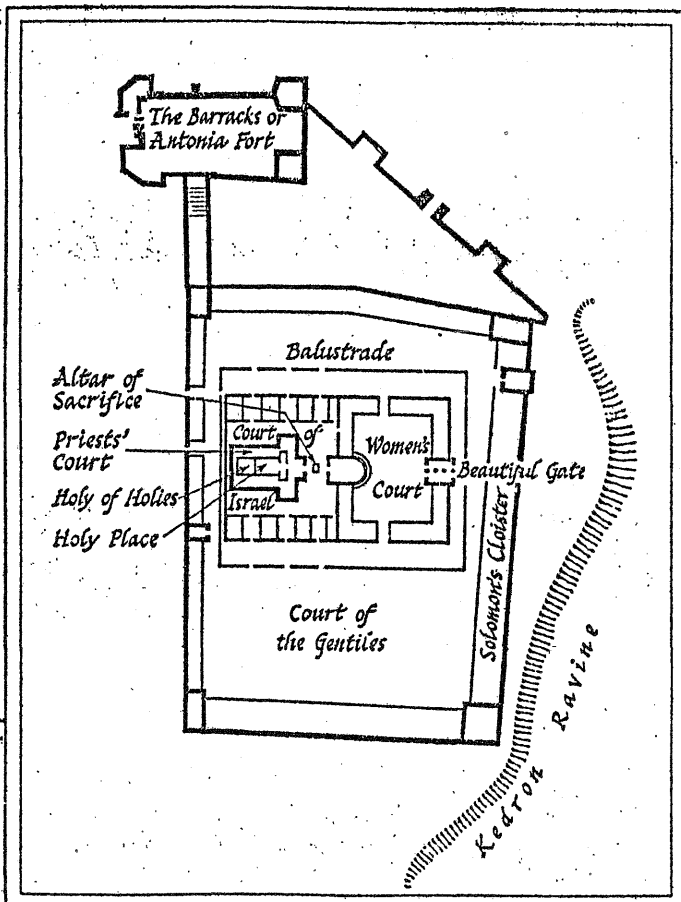
III. As Peter did in his first message in Acts 2, he told his hearers to consider their current, evil condition and ask for God's forgiveness so that what they had done, sinning against God's plan, would be forgotten by God (blotted out). Peter assured them that, although Jesus had gone back to the Father, he would return as the prophets had promised, vss. 21-24, which includes a quote from Deut. 18:15,18-19.

IV. Broad outline of Acts and maps of Jerusalem and Herod's Temple

- A. 1:1 - 5:42 The beginnings of the church (God's called out ones, ecclesia)
- B. 6:1 - 12:25 The church reaches out.
- C. 13:1 - 15:35 The church breaks barriers.
- D. 15:36 - 21:26 Paul leads the advance.
- E. 21:27 - 28:31 Paul's last journey: Jerusalem to Rome



Jerusalem



Herod's Temple and its precincts

July 30, 2000

"The Disciples Meet Opposition"
Acts 4

Couples Class
Wendell Alford,
Teacher

I. As the disciples continued to witness about Jesus in and around the Temple area, their message was especially offensive to the Saducees who not only did not believe that Jesus had returned from death to life but that such was impossible for anyone. [Jewish sects: Essenes - moral purity, works of law superior, "live the life" or "walk the walk;" Herodians - religious politicians assuming the only hope for Jews to have a nation was an alliance with Rome (Herod); Saducees - (Zadokites-good times) supremacy of Law, no spirit or angels, no future heaven or hell; Pharisees - ritual purity and oral law, were hypocritical; Scribes - their interpretation of law took precedence over law itself] After these Jewish sect members heard that the people were believing the disciples' message about Jesus (because the lame man had been healed - Chap. 3), the Saducees with the Jewish priests summoned the Chief of the Temple Police. The temple police were sent to arrest certain of the disciples whom the Jewish leaders considered to be spokesmen. Among those arrested were Peter and John whom the police took that evening and placed in jail for the night. The urgency which the Jewish leaders sensed was caused by the fact that believers now numbered about 5000.

II. After the arrest, a meeting of the Jews was planned for the next morning to decide what should be done to halt this new group (believers in Jesus as the Christ, Savior) from getting out of hand. Luke indicates that the situation was considered so important that all Jewish leaders were summoned to be involved. Mentioned specifically are: rulers (priests with some assigned offices), elders (older priests who had held offices earlier), scribes (interpreters of the law and written tradition), Annas (high or chief priest from about 6 to 27 AD), Caiaphas (Annas' son-in-law and successor to Annas as high priest), John (probably Annas' son who became high priest in 36 AD), Alexander (probably a relative of Annas), and a number of relatives of Annas and Caiaphas. The next morning this august group of Jewish leaders called the disciples before their council (Sanhedrin) and asked them for the basis of their authority, either through their own power or as representatives of someone else, to have healed the handicapped man of his standing and walking inabilities.

III. Peter, empowered by God's power (Spirit), spoke for the believers and addressed the Jewish leaders. He said that the good deed of healing the lame man should be understood by not only these leaders but by all Jews as God's further approval of the Nazarene, Jesus Christ. Peter again credited the Jewish leaders with Jesus' death as One "whom you crucified." (This is the third time that Peter has directly accused the Jews of physically killing the Lord Jesus, in Acts - 2:36; 3:15,17; 4:10.) Jesus was resurrected by God, and the lame man was made well through Jesus' authority. Peter then quotes Psa. 118:22-24 (See also Isa. 28:16-18) and says, in effect, Jesus is Israel's salvation designee, there is not another Messiah on earth or in heaven. God's proposition is this: accept

Jesus as God's Savior or you or anyone else cannot be made whole spiritually (as the lame man had been made whole physically).

IV. The Jewish council realized that Peter and John as leaders and spokesmen for the believers in Christ were completely committed to the position Peter had given to them. Further, these disciples (students or followers) of Jesus had not reached their conclusion through formal training, i.e., from Jewish scholars, but through personal experiences with and the teachings of Jesus himself. Another proof which could not be refuted was the fact that the man who was born incapacitated was standing before them completely healed, and the knowledge was known by many people who were spreading the good news even more. The Jewish council then sent the disciples out of the chamber and held a conference to determine their best judgment concerning their own best interests. Their chief concern was not to deny the validity of the healing in Jerusalem (They had already lost control over this "problem."), but they worried that the message of the disciples would go beyond Jerusalem and stir up trouble elsewhere. Their decision was to bluff the believers with a threat (Remember what happened to this person you are saying was resurrected.). They called in the disciples and ordered them to forget about talking of this "dead" Jesus person and get on with their lives!

V. But Peter and John countered their threat with a question: Should we heed your threat of retribution, or do you really think we should ignore God's command to us to witness to what Jesus has done for us and proved it to ourselves and even to you through miraculously healing this man, and then act as though nothing has happened? No!, we cannot ignore God's will and obey you! But the Jewish leaders were not convinced that they were wrong and further threatened the disciples. But, fearing the people who were giving God glory (credit) for healing the forty-year-old lame man, they let the believers go.

VI. The disciples who had been held and questioned by the Jewish council returned to the believing group and reported what had happened. An impromptu prayer meeting was the result of their exhilaration. In their prayers they praised God as Creator who had spoken through David (Psa. 2) how the rulers would oppose God's Savior, even as the Jews and the Romans, representing Gentiles, were now allied against God's plan of redemption. They further prayed that in the midst of all this opposition, God would give to them, his servants, believers in Jesus who is the Christ, further evidence of his presence with them. God answered their prayers by giving them a surge of the power of his Spirit to speak boldly God's message about Jesus Christ. God's grace was felt by the entire group and their goals were as one, to witness to everyone what God had made possible through raising Jesus from death to life again. In this spirit of exaltation, the group of believers again thought of their immediate physical needs and again decided to continue to pool their individual assets for the sustenance of the entire group. As a result, a certain man named Joses Barnabas (the son of consolation) sold his land, brought the proceeds to the leaders of the believing community, and made them available for the use of the fellowship.

Aug. 6, 2000

"The Growth of Opposition"
Acts 5

Couples Class
Wendell Alford,
Teacher

I. Evidently the generous and magnanimous spirit of Barnabas (Chap. 4) made him an outstanding role model for the early believers in Jesus Christ. (See also Acts 20:35) Barnabas sold his property and made all the proceeds available to the group. No doubt he was commended for his voluntary generosity. A couple in the group, Ananias and his wife Sapphira, likewise sold their land, and, apparently, wanted all of the group to believe that they, too, brought all the price received to the common treasury of the group. In some way, Peter knew that Ananias and Sapphira had been untruthful about their transaction. They had brought only a portion of the price of their land to the group while, at the same time, assuming that they had deceived the group and God's Holy Spirit. On a given day Peter confronted Ananias (whose wife was away) and asked him why he had let Satan influence him to attempt to deceive God (Holy Spirit) by being dishonest about the land proceeds. Peter told him that his chief problem was not with the believers, but with God. When Ananias realized the gravity of what he had done, he fell dead immediately. The young men who were charged with burying the dead went out and buried him at once. About three hours later Ananias' wife, Sapphira, returned to the group without knowledge of what had happened to her husband. Peter asked her directly whether they had given to the group treasury all that they had received for their land. Sapphira lied as her husband had done, fell dead, and was carried out and buried along with her husband. The effect on the church members was immediate and dramatic. The group realized that their activities meant more than just impressing other individuals, but God himself was directly involved. The church was God's doing, and the assembly of his people must conduct themselves accordingly.

II. Some observations about the Ananias and Sapphira incident:

1. Pharisee-like hypocrisy was inappropriate for those professing Jesus as Lord.
2. What individuals did reflected on the entire believing community. (See Josh. 7:1,11,22 and Matt. 23:13)
3. Individuals were responsible to follow the leadership of God's Holy Spirit as individuals and not depend simply on being in the group for guidance.
4. Pseudomembers of the church (associated with but not true believers) should be dealt with carefully since Jesus admonished that wheat and tares, if torn apart by human effort, can improperly disrupt the group, Matt. 13:28-30. Eventually God's angels (messengers) will take appropriate action.
5. Believers are not to judge wrongdoers in God's church as regarding their ultimate spiritual destination; that is God's prerogative alone, Matt. 7:1-2; I Cor. 5:1-5; Heb. 10:30.
6. The Word does not ascribe Ananias' or Sapphira's deaths to either Peter or God. Their sin had directly separated them from physical life in this instance.
7. Luke's including this incident in Scripture should indicate to readers the veracity of every detail given in Scripture.

Compare II Sam. 11 where David's awful sins of adultery and murder are detailed. (Can you imagine such information being in the minutes of a church's business meeting?) David repented of his sins, but lost his dear son of the adultery.

III. Probably because of the abuse of Peter and John in Chap. 4, many outsiders were reluctant (vs.13) to join the believers in the immediate Temple area for fear of the Jewish leaders. However, people generally profoundly respected the believers. The amazing miracles God worked through the leaders (apostles) of the believers persuaded multitudes to join the group, both men and women. The Sadducees envied the believers' growth and again threw the believers in prison. God sent a messenger who released them from jail and told them to witness openly in the Temple which they did early the next morning. The Sanhedrin gathered and sent for the believers to be brought before them in conference. The police returned without the believers, saying that the prison was secure, but that the believers were missing. Someone approached the council at that time and told them that the "rascals" were out there at this very time still teaching people about Jesus. The police chief quietly brought the believers before the chief priest and Sanhedrin again who repeated their threat against the believers for witnessing about the Savior, Jesus. This time they added the part about being accused of causing Jesus' death, vs. 28. Peter and the others repeated (for the fourth time in Acts) that they (the Jews) were the ones who did slay Jesus whom God raised from physical death, Acts 2:36; 3:15,17; 4:10; 5:30. Not only were they the ones responsible for Jesus' physical death, but the Lord's Anointed One was dastardly hung on a tree, Deut. 21:22-23; Gal. 3:13. The believers are witnesses to these truths as is God's Spirit in every believer.

IV. After this meeting with the believers, the Sanhedrin was determined to kill the leaders (apostles) of the believers. A Pharisee on the council, Gamaliel (a doctor of the law and teacher of one Saul of Tarsus), took a minority position by suggesting that the apostles be given more time before capital punishment was administered. He cited instances where certain men, e.g., Thaddeus with a following of about four hundred and Judas of Galilee also with a following, had flared up for a time and then were soon forgotten. Gamaliel's reasoning was that if God were not for these believers in Jesus as the Christ, they too would dwindle to nothing. If, on the other hand, God was really with the Jesus believers, the Jewish leaders could find themselves in the less than enviable position of fighting God himself! Gamaliel was well respected on the council so the group agreed with him. This time, however, the believers were not only threatened but beaten before being released. The believers left the council rejoicing that they were counted worthy of suffering "shame" in the name of Jesus. Not a day went by when the believers failed to witness and teach about Jesus' being the Messiah, Savior!

Jesus calls us o'er the tumult of our life's restless sea,
Day by day his sweet voice calleth, saying, "Christian,
follow me,"

Aug. 13, 2000

"Sharing Responsibilities"
Acts 6

Couples Class
Wendell Alford,
Teacher

I. As the company of believers grew to a large number, dissension occurred among the members of the group. The problem was aggravated apparently by the following:

1. The quantitative element. The last figure indicating the person-count of believers was 5000 in Chap. 4:4, up from 3000 in 2:41 at the end of the day of Pentecost. The numbers were growing enormously as mentioned in 5:14 (multitudes). Further, in 5:16 the Word states that even people from cities away from Jerusalem were coming to hear about Jesus. These believers formed a self-sustaining society, literally living on shared assets. Most of the members relied on the common fund for the necessities of life.

2. The welfare element. Many believers were unable to contribute anything to their own physical support. Widows are mentioned specifically in 6:1, but the mix undoubtedly included orphans and handicapped individuals who also could not contribute to the common treasury. (Paul later made specific requirements for widows at I Tim. 5:3-16. He also made clear that those who could were to work or not eat from the common pool at II Thes. 3:10-13.)

3. The ethnic element. The Grecian or Hellenist believers were those who had been born in Jewish families in the diaspora and had been Jews by faith before accepting Jesus as the Messiah, or those who had been converted (proselyted) to Judaism before becoming believers. These believers spoke Greek and were considered in the general population to be culturally advantaged. The Hebrews, on the other hand, were those who had been reared in the Jewish culture and among the Jews in Jerusalem to be religiously advantaged. Another barrier problem existed between the Grecians and Hebrews since the former spoke Greek and the latter spoke Hebrew or Aramaic (a Hebrew dialect). Note that none of the believers disputed the charge of the Grecians that their widows were receiving a short share of the daily allowance of supplies.

II. The twelve leaders (apostles) took the complaints seriously and decided that the rapid effectiveness of their own witnessing should not be neutralized further by caring beyond this time for the mechanical management of the group. Believing that the growth of God's kingdom should take their full time, they asked the group to select seven men who were guided completely by God's Spirit (the Spirit that had guided their Lord Jesus) and who were known for their integrity. The apostles noted that with this arrangement they could spend all of their time and efforts communing with God and sharing God's New Covenant (Good News) with more listeners. The believing group agreed that the apostles' idea was a good one and proceeded at once to choose seven Grecians (so identified by their names) to assume the procuring and disseminating the necessary daily supplies. The group selected Stephen, Philip, Prochorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas, and Nicolas. The apostles showed their approval of the seven through blessing them by laying their hands upon them. The result of this sharing of responsibilities gave great impetus to their soul winning efforts. Among those who joined the group were "a great number of the (Jewish) priests." Stephen

immediately did much more than pass out sandals and bagels. He demonstrated his profound faith and God's power by performing great wonders and miracles among the people. He is identified in vss. 3,5, and 8 as being full of the Holy Spirit (completely controlled by God's will), wisdom, faith, and power. Philip likewise demonstrated an outstanding evangelical acumen as we shall see in Chap. 8 of Acts. [Nicolas is thought by many to have started a movement later in Christianity based upon false doctrine. See mention of such in Rev. 2:6,15 at both Ephesus and Pergamum. Some Bible scholars associate II Pet. 2 with the evils of this group. In Peter's condemnation of these false prophets are the following: denying the Lord Jesus' sacrifice on the cross as sufficient for ones spiritual wellbeing (vs.1), subscribing to immoral, lascivious (sexual lust) activities as fitting for believers (vs. 2), materialistic coveting (vs. 3), accepting homosexual behavior for believers (vss. 6-10a), wantonly rebelling against established political authority (vs. 10b), and generally disregarding the holy (separated) living to be practiced by believers as taught by the Lord Jesus, vss. 19-22, and also see John 14:15]. I do not believe that the Nicolas among the seven was the same Nicolas (a common Greek proper name at the time) who taught all these nonChristian teachings. Another thought: nowhere in Scripture is one of these seven referred to explicitly as a "deacon." In Philip. 1:1 where "overseer" (pastor or leader) and "those who serve" (deacons) are mentioned for those fulfilling these two offices, the words episkopois and diakonois are used. In Matt. 20:26-27 Jesus talked about greatness (rank?) among his followers and said that if one chooses to attain high worth, let that one be the believers' diakonos, i.e., servant. Jesus said further that if one would be at the pinnacle (topmost) in God's kingdom, he or she should be the doulos (slave) of the group. Note that in Philip. 1:1, Paul refers to himself and Timothy as slaves, for the Greek word is doulos which appears as "servants" in the King James Version. - WA]

III. The continual antagonism of the Jews against this new "sect in Judaism" was especially prominent in the Jewish synagogues where Greek speaking Jews gathered. Since Stephen was of their number (a Hellenist cultured and Greek speaking believer), the Jews were really irked by him. He knew the Old Covenant text well and by it was proclaiming vigorously that Jesus was indeed the Messiah which God had promised in that Covenant. Stephen at this time, as had Jesus, Peter, and John before, was summoned before the Jewish Sanhedrin as a "trouble-maker." The charge was that he was with blasphemous words profaning the Temple and the Law of Moses. These accusations were from hired false witnesses who "interpreted" Stephen's statements as "lies." As Stephen stood before the council (Sanhedrin), his face glowed with enthusiasm because of his faith in Jesus the Messiah (Savior), like a very angel (messenger) of God. [Which he was. - WA]

Stand up, stand up for Jesus, ye soldiers of the cross.
Lift high his royal banner. It must not suffer loss.
From victory unto victory his army shall he lead.
'Til every foe is vanquished and Christ is Lord indeed!

August 20, 2000

"Stephen Joins Jesus"
Acts 7

Couples Class
Wendell Alford,
Teacher

I. Factors that shape human history - some theories:

A. Geographical - The natural supply of basic human, physical needs as found on the earth's surface in various regions determines people's choices as to what they do with their lives. An example is mankind's use of streams and other bodies of water. Babylon was in the Tigris-Euphrates valleys where the land was fertile from the mulch-rich supplies along the river banks. Human food supplies were thus assured because of soil fertility and supply of fish. These conditions exist around the world, e.g., New York City, Chicago, St Louis, New Orleans in this country.

B. Great Man - Thomas Carlyle held and promoted the view that people are for the most part acquiescent socially, i.e., as they relate to one another. Mankind is therefore receptive to the leading of a strong, demanding personality. Carlyle points to such persons as Moses, Jesus, Alexander the Great, Confucius, Julius Caesar, Muhammad, Napoleon, and George Washington as human leaders who have as individuals changed the pattern of human history.

C. Divine Will - Some people believe that human destinies are guided to conform to a great cosmic plan or purpose. The one or thing that plans, guides, or directs that purpose depends on ones why of the universe. In recent years science fiction has referred to such a guider as "the force." Muhammadans (Muslims) believe he is Allah, and others have various names and ideas. (Stephen believed that the one true God of the universe is he who appeared to Abraham, as all of us who trust Jesus as God's Savior do.)

II. Stephen, a Grecian Jew who had accepted Jesus of Nazareth as God's Messiah (Savior), now stands before the Jewish Sanhedrin accused of teaching that Jesus' followers would destroy the Temple and change religious traditions which Moses had delivered for the Jews to follow. The chief priest (Caiaphas), leader of the Jews and moderator of the council (Sanhedrin), asked Stephen whether the accusations were true. The new believer, before seventy-one ardent representatives of the Jewish religion, began to give his answer to the question.

III. Stephen began his oration by recalling for the council how the God and Creator of all things had appeared unto Abraham who was the spiritual and genetic father of them all. God had made himself known to the patriarch in Mesopotamia (Iraq) even before he moved to Charan (Syria). God instructed Abraham to leave his native land (Iraq) and the Chaldeans and move to Haran in Syria. By faith in God's bidding, he moved his entire family to Haran. There his father died, and he thereafter continued to follow God's instructions by moving westward into the land at the east end of the Mediterranean Sea and west of the Jordan River. (Where the Jews lived even as Stephen spoke.) The strength of Abraham's faith is indicated by the fact that he had never been to this area and did not know how the people there would accept him (a strange land). Further, God promised Abraham that the land would pass from him to his children and to his children's children even though he was

well along in age and had had no child as yet! A people would enslave his progeny for 400 years, but God would free them and bring them to live in the land promised originally to Abraham.

IV. Stephen continues: God sealed his promises with Abraham by prescribing the rite of circumcision (Gen. 17:9-14) for all males. The first two to be circumcised (Gen. 17:24-26) were Abraham (at age 99 and with no child by Sarah) and his first born son, Ishmael at age 13. Subsequently, Abraham sired Isaac who sired Jacob who sired twelve sons. One of Jacob's (Israel's) sons, Joseph, was sold through spite to Egyptians to be a slave by his brothers. Joseph became a political leader in Egypt, and in a time of severe drought in Canaan, the Jews were forced to seek food in Egypt. Jacob was enticed by Joseph to move his entire family to Egypt where they lived and grew in number for 400 years. During this long period a new Egyptian ruler came into power who no longer used Joseph as a leader. The Jews were then made slaves to do the menial tasks of the Egyptians. Later the Egyptians attempted to eradicate the Jews by genocide.

V. Stephen continues: God raised up a leader, Moses, who for forty years was an adopted member of the household of Pharaoh. He lived as Pharaoh's child and enjoyed everything available to the supreme ruler of Egypt, included the best of training. However, he never forgot his own people, the Hebrews. One day he witnessed an Egyptian abusing a Hebrew slave, murdered the abuser, and buried his body in the earth. Afterwards Moses learned that someone had seen the murder. From fear of retribution, Moses fled for his life to Midian. He lived there for forty years, married and learned the life of a nomadic herdsman. Abraham's God appeared to Moses in a very unique way and enlisted him to return to Egypt and lead his people, the Hebrews, from their enslavement by the Egyptians. Moses reluctantly obeyed God and led a rebellious and griping people for forty years through the wilderness area of the Sinaitic Peninsula, afraid to enter the land God had promised to Abraham's descendants. During Moses' leadership he received from God on Mt. Sinai, God's coded law for the Israelites to follow after entering and occupying the promised land. But the people chose idols to worship instead of the living God. God made them fashion an ark symbolizing his presence with them as they wandered in doubt in the wilderness. God told the people through Moses that he would send the Israelites a Savior like Moses (a deliverer from bondage). Later after David's glorious reign, God commissioned his son Solomon to build a Temple, but God made the situation clear that the Temple could not be where he lived. Heaven is God's home, and he can not be confined to a structure made with hands. God is the Creator of everything that exists.

VI. Stephen then bluntly tells the Sanhedrin that as their forefathers had disallowed God's prophets throughout history, so have they defied God's final prophet (Heb. 1:1-2), priest, and king, Jesus, God's Messiah (Savior) and very Son. As Peter had done earlier, Stephen accused the Jewish leaders to be betrayers of God and murderers of his Anointed One, vs. 52. His furious listeners moaned loudly and stoned the humble Stephen to death as he called upon the Lord to forgive his murderers. Saul of Tarsus approved of Stephen's murder and held the coats of the murderers.

August 27, 2000

"The Gospel Travels"
Acts 8

Couples Class
Wendell Alford,
Teacher

I. Saul approved of Stephen's assassination, but this incident of prejudice was not singular in the Jerusalem church. The believers in that first group of trusters in Jesus Christ were beginning to sense that they could not accept Jesus as the Messiah and live as acceptable neighbors to Jewish friends. As a result, many believers were finding it necessary to leave Jerusalem and live elsewhere, such as in outlying Judea and even northward to Samaria. The twelve apostles were exceptions to the movement away from Jerusalem. Stephen's death and burial made a profound impression on the Jerusalem assembly. He was, as a Hellenistic Jew, the first believer in Christ who promoted with intellectual acumen the Christian perspective of Jewish history. He noted that God had not exclusively favored those Jews in the Holy Land and Jerusalem itself, but that God was everywhere believers called upon him. No doubt this position gave assurance to believers that Jesus, as God's Son, would go with the believers wherever they went since Jesus had promised that God's Holy Spirit (Paraclete, Comforter) would be with every individual truster of Jesus Christ forever, John 14:16.

II. Saul, the Pharisee and intense devotee of the Jewish religion, was blindly determined to extinguish this new sect of Judaism. (See I Cor. 15:9; Gal. 1:13-14; Philip. 3:6; I Tim. 1:13.) Saul especially hated Stephen, because he, like Saul, was a Hellenistic Jew. Saul asked for and received from the Sanhedrin even to enter private residences and literally drag the occupants (believers in Christ) out for trial as blasphemers and heretics. It is especially noteworthy that the Word states that WOMEN were included in Saul's persecution and humiliation.

III. Stephen had been one of the original seven (Chap. 6) and had experienced martyrdom. Now Philip, another of the seven, as a result of severe persecution, left Jerusalem and "went down" (away from Jerusalem) to Samaria telling the Samaritans about Jesus and God's spiritual salvation through him. The Samaritans overwhelmingly accepted Philip's message as his words were reinforced by many physical and spiritual miracles. The city of Samaria rejoiced with Philip's testimony. However, a certain magician named Simon who glorified himself with magical sorcery was thought by many in the city to be working through God's power. Philip's message concerning God's kingdom and Jesus' part in it revealed the sham of Simon. Simon confessed belief in Jesus, was immersed, and accompanied Philip as the latter performed wonders and miracles in Jesus' name.

IV. When knowledge was received back at Jerusalem that the Samaritans were believing Philip's message, the believers sent Peter and John to learn firsthand what was happening. The new Samaritan believers had not been immersed as Jesus had commanded in Matt. 28:19, i.e., in the name (power) of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. It was paramount that the same sign that God had shown at Pentecost (See Acts 1:5.) be manifested here in Samaria to give complete assurance to the apostles that God had, in fact,

extended the New Covenant outside Jerusalem. In Acts 1:8 extension of God's kingdom was associated with the special anointing by God's Holy Spirit. Peter and John were unwilling to accept God's work in this place as genuine without the special presence of the Holy Spirit. [See also Acts 10:44-48 when Peter accepted the Gentiles because of the special presence of God's Holy Spirit; and at Acts 19:2 when Paul accepted John the Immerser's disciples after they demonstrated evidence of the presence of God's Holy Spirit as that which accompanied those who had been immersed in the name (power) of Jesus, rather than simple repentance.) Interestingly, the apostle Paul did, there at Ephesus, actually reimmerse the new believers at Acts 19:2 (They no doubt had been immersed by John the Immerser.), and also God elected that they receive the special Holy Spirit anointing as Paul placed his hands upon the twelve people involved. The function of the Holy Spirit during this apostolic period was, as Jesus had promised at John 14:25-29, God's method of ascertaining that the believers were properly instructed while the Word was being compiled for future believers whom God would bring into his kingdom.] The new convert, Simon, misinterpreted the act of hand-placing as a magic act and offered Peter and John money to be able to duplicate the procedure. Peter, of course, rebuked Simon and told him to repent of his wrong impression of God's work. Money will not buy God's power and favor! Simon expressed remorse for his wrong attitude and asked for prayer for forgiveness of his wrong. Peter and John continued to tell the message of salvation, through faith in Jesus, in many villages on their way back to Jerusalem.

V. A messenger (angel) of God instructed Philip to leave the city of Samaria and go southward through the desert area to Gaza. In doing God's bidding, he met an Ethiopian eunuch who was the Secretary of the Treasury in Ethiopia where Candace was queen. The Treasurer was riding a chariot as was appropriate to his high political prominence. No doubt Philip better understood why God had sent him this way when he noted that the Ethiopian had come from Jerusalem where he had been to worship. Very probably he was a Jewish proselyte, because he was, at the moment Philip came along side the chariot, reading from the fifty-third chapter of the prophet Isaiah. Philip asked the Ethiopian whether he was understanding Isaiah's prophecy. The charioteer admitted that he needed someone to guide him in understanding the Isa. 53:7-8 passage he was reading. Specifically, he asked Philip whether the prophet Isaiah was referring to himself or someone else in the passage. Philip told him that the prophet was prophesying about Jesus. [I believe Philip pointed out to the well-educated eunuch the specific reference in vs. 8 this clause, "- - Who shall declare this generation?" This concept is noted in Psa. 22:30; Lk 11:30 as well as here in Isa. 53:8. - WA] Philip had no doubt enlightened the Ethiopian as to the importance of being immersed in water as a symbol indicating a believer's identification with Jesus, because he asked Philip if he might be immersed. Philip informed the eunuch that immersion would be proper if he sincerely believed what he (Philip) had told him about Jesus. When the Ethiopian confessed to Philip that he believed that Jesus was God's Son, he stopped the chariot, and they both went down into the water. Philip immersed the eunuch who went on back to Ethiopia rejoicing. Philip went home to Azotus and shared the Good News about Jesus throughout the area to as far away as Caesarea. The Gospel sped on its way as disciples of Jesus followed God's will.

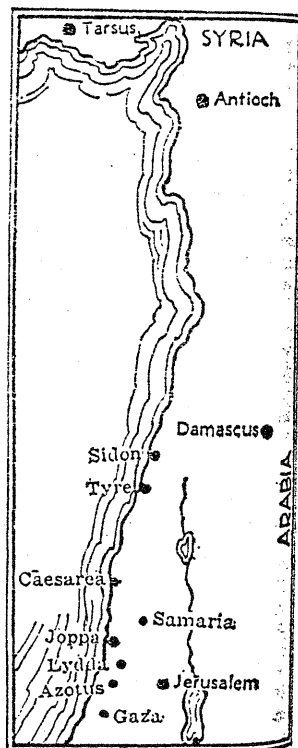
I. Saul, the ambitious Pharisee from Tarsus, was so infuriated that murdering such leaders as Stephen still did not contain the spreading of "the Way" among the Jews, he took the matter into his own hands by asking the Jewish high priest for Sanhedrin authority to intimidate and arrest followers of Jesus as the Messiah. With this authority documented, he headed up north to Damascus to render orthodox Jewish control there. He was authorized to locate Jesus' believers, put them (both men and WOMEN) in stocks, and transport them to Jerusalem for trial.

II. As Saul and his entourage neared Damascus (northeast of Mt. Hermon), he underwent an experience that not only changed him as a person forever, but gave an impetus to the spreading of the Gospel like nothing else since Jesus' resurrection and the coming of the Holy Spirit. Peter was still bound by the Jewish law in a way that required a special act of God (We shall see next week in Chap. 10.) to set him straight about God's lack of respect for some persons above others (Gentiles and all other nonJews). Saul forever and ever after the Lord had salvaged his spirit, never, for a moment, lost sight of the Jesus who was sacrificed by God for him (See Acts 22:4-21; 26:12-23; I Cor. 9:1; 15:8; II Cor. 4:6; Gal. 1:15-20; 2:1-16). Saul was surrounded by a light so bright that it knocked him to the ground and blinded him. On the ground he heard a voice speaking in Hebrew (Acts 26:14) and calling his name asking him, "- - -why do you persecute me?" (Note that even though Saul did not know who was speaking, he knew that royalty was addressing him.) The voice identified himself as Jesus and noted the struggle Saul was experiencing within himself regarding Jesus as the Messiah. Jesus told Saul to go ahead into Damascus, and he would be instructed there concerning his mission. The others with Saul heard the voice of Jesus but saw no person delivering the words. When Saul stood up, he realized that he was blind and must be led into Damascus. Furthermore, for three days he could not eat, drink, or see.

III. A Damascus believer in Jesus as the Christ named Ananias was told by the Lord in a vision about Saul. Ananias was to go to a certain address on Straight Street where a man named Judas lived. There he was told he would find Saul who had likewise, in a vision, been told of Ananias' coming to see him (Saul). Further, Saul knew from the vision that Ananias would, by placing his hands upon Saul, restore his sight. Ananias was somewhat reluctant to follow the Lord's instructions, because he had heard of Saul's reputation of hatred for believers. The Lord assured Ananias that Saul was now God's special agent to the Gentiles, kings, and even to Israel's children (everyone was included). Ananias then followed the Lord's bidding, found Saul, and, addressing him as Brother, laid his hands on Saul who received his sight and was FILLED WITH THE HOLY SPIRIT! Afterward, Saul was immersed in water, ate, became strong, and stayed a while with the believers in Jesus as Christ (Messiah, Savior, Lord).

IV. After a three-year stint in Arabia (Gal. 1:17) "conferring not with flesh and blood," Saul went to Jerusalem (via Damascus) but was not received by the apostles, for they were afraid of him, denying even that he was a believer! But Barnabas (who had proven his loyalty to the Christ and the assembly by his contribution in Acts 4:36-37) vouched for Saul and the reality of his conversion and his Damascus testimony. Saul then spent two weeks with Peter and Jesus' brother James but saw none of the other apostles. The Grecian (Hellenistic) Jews disputed Saul's message, of course, and plotted to kill him. The Jerusalem believers sensed the problems and carried Saul to Caesarea and then to his hometown, Tarsus. With Saul a believer, the churches in Galilee and Samaria realized some less persecution.

V. The Scriptural account now returns to Peter's activities by telling of some of his travels. He went to Lydda, about thirty miles northwest of Jerusalem and met a man named Aeneas who had been bedridden for eight years with palsy. Through Jesus' power Peter healed him, and the residents of Lydda believed because of Peter's healing witness. Then at Joppa (now Tel Aviv), Peter learned of a believer named Tabitha (Dorcas, a doe) who had died, been prepared for burial, and laid in an upstairs room. Peter came from Lydda to Joppa by request where Dorcas' friends showed him the clothing she had made, told him how she had been well known for her charity, and grieved for her. Peter sent every one from the room, knelt down, and prayed. He took Dorcas by the hand and told her to stand up. She did and Peter delivered her back to her friends alive. Peter stayed in Joppa several days, living at the home of a tanner named Simon. The news spread all around the city and many believed because of the miracle which Peter performed.



WA

"Acts Chronology"

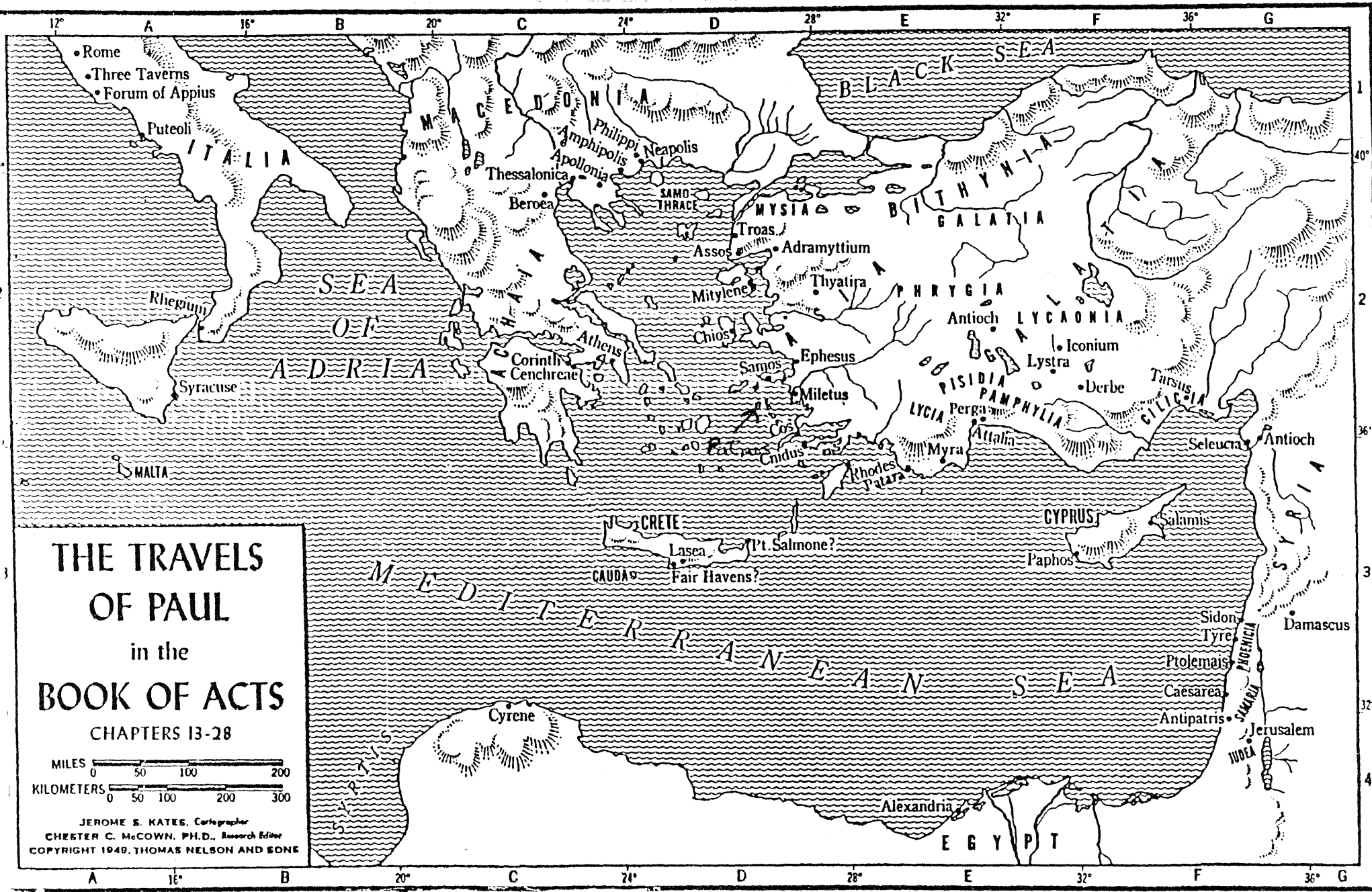
Couples Class
Wendell Alford,
Teacher

9-03-00
Addendum I

Complete data are not given to be absolute about the exact chronology of Acts. The following factors help determine the timing of the events in Acts.

1. Herod's death is known to have been in 44 AD - Acts 12:20-23.
2. Paul's arrival in Jersalem when Herod killed James - Acts 11:30-12:2
3. Paul's departure from Jersalem just after Herod's death Acts 12:23,25
4. #2 and #3 above probably envelop the "14 years" in Gal. 2:1 after Paul's conversion.
5. Paul's conversion occurred about 31 or 32 AD.
6. Therefore, placing 30 AD as the starting point and 60 AD as the known date of Festus' appointment as Govenor at Caesarea in Acts 24:27, the following chronology is calculated:

Jesus' return to the Father	Acts Chap. 1	30 AD
Formation of church in Jerusalem	2-6	30
Stoning of Stephen and dispersion of church	7-8	31 or 32
Conversion of Saul	9	31 or 32
Paul's first visit to Jerusalem after conversion		34 or 35
Conversion of Cornelius, the Gentile		between 35 - 40
Reception of Gentiles at Antioch	11	about 42
Paul's second visit to Jerusalem	11:27-30	44
Paul's first missionary journey to Galatia	13-14	48-45
Council at Jerusalem	15	about 50
Paul's second missionary journey to Greece	16-18	50-53
Paul's third missionary journey to Ephesus	19-20	54-57
Paul left Ephesus in June (I Cor. 16:8)		57
Paul in Macedonia (I Cor. 16:5-8)		57
Paul in Corinth, three months	Acts 20:2-3	Winter, 57-58
Paul left Philippi	20:6	April, 58
Paul reached Jerusalem	20:16	June, 58
Paul in Caesarea	24-26	Summer, 58 to Fall, 60
Paul's voyage to Rome	27-28	Winter, 60-61
Paul in Rome		61-63



I. While Peter was at Joppa on the coast of the Mediterranean Sea, up north at Caesarea a Roman centurion was visited by God for a special purpose. The military officer was named Cornelius, and he commanded a special unit called the Italian squad. Since his family was also there in Caesarea, he was probably on permanent assignment and was body-guard of the governor's assignment from Rome. In addition to his military and political eminence, he was devoutly religious and worshipped the God of the Jews. He feared God (held him in awe and reverence) but had not become a Jewish proselyte, i.e., he had not been circumcised. He practiced a lifestyle of charity and prayed continually. One day about three O'clock in the afternoon at prayer time, Cornelius had a vision in which a messenger (angel) of God came to him and called his name. Cornelius was afraid, but the messenger commended him for his prayer life and works of charity. He then told Cornelius to send messengers down to Joppa to the home of Simon where Peter was staying. There his men were to ask for Simon Peter who would give him instructions for further action. Cornelius sent two aides and even his personal valet to Joppa after telling them what the mission was.

II. The next day about noon while Cornelius' men were on their way to Joppa (about 25 miles), Peter went up to the roof of Simon's house to wait for the noon meal to be prepared. He became very hungry and entranced, saw heaven open, and a certain carriage descend to him. The carriage appeared as a sheet with each corner tied into a knot. As the litter came down to earth in Peter's presence, he saw thereon several types of four-footed animals, wild beasts, creeping things (snakes and lizards), and flying animals (fouls). To Peter's surprise a voice from heaven then commanded him to get up, kill some of the animals, and satisfy his appetite by eating them. Peter refused saying that he was a Jew devoted to God's law which disallowed such eating. Further, he said that in his entire life he had never eaten any meat contrary to the command of God's law. The carriage lifted and Peter perhaps thought he had won the contest, but the object came down the second time. The same voice from heaven then told Peter not to presume any food which God had pronounced clean to be otherwise (See Mark 7:14-23). The word at this point does not give Peter's response even after the third lowering of the sheet except to state that Peter was left puzzled about what all this meant. At the conclusion of the vision, the men from Cornelius in Caesarea arrived asking Simon whether Simon Peter was there.

III. Peter went down from the roof and introduced himself to Cornelius' men who told them what had happened to their commander. Peter invited them to spend the night, and the next day, he, along with some other believers of Joppa, accompanied Cornelius' three men back to Caesarea. While Cornelius waited for Peter and the group, he invited his relatives and friends to be there for Peter's visit. As Peter approached Cornelius, the latter fell down at Peter's feet to worship him, but Peter told him not to do that for he was a fellow

human being, not a god. The group that had gathered was rather large, and Peter began by saying that as a Jew he was forbidden by God's law to enter the home of, or even associate with, a nonJew. This incident revealed to Peter what his roof-top vision meant: he (Peter) should not consider any person, Jew or Gentile, unclean, because God did not. Cornelius told Peter and the group of his experience four days earlier about the visit of God's messenger with God's instructions.

IV. Peter was gradually beginning to see the import of what God was revealing to him about what Jesus had conveyed to the disciples of John the Immerser at Matt. 9:14-17. Jesus there answered the question regarding the relationship of the Old Covenant with what was changing by means of God's sacrifice of his only Son, Christ (the Messiah) Jesus. God was through Jesus creating a New Covenant with mankind in which there would be no difference between Jews and anyone else. God was not attempting to put a patch on an old "garment," but rather calling out a new people, the ecclesia (church), before establishing again the nation of Israel, Acts 1:6-8; Rom. 11:25-32; Rev. 20:4-6. Peter knew by the vision he had witnessed that God at this time is accepting anyone who will accept Jesus as Lord and Savior. Jesus is, indeed, the Savior of the whole world. God has made this message fact by bringing Jesus back from the abode of the dead. Peter's message continues: Peter had been an eyewitness himself of God's creating the New Covenant with all mankind. Further, Jesus had commanded his witnesses to spread the Good News to EVERYONE everywhere, and any person who accepts that Good News will receive eternal life.

V. After Peter related God's Gospel (Good News) to the unbelievers (Cornelius' relatives and friends), the group believed that Jesus was God's Savior as evidenced by their being filled with the Holy Spirit as they spoke in tongues magnifying God (God's apostolic-period sign of the New Covenant) as God's evidence that nonJews were, in fact, to be added to the Kingdom of God (not the kingdom of Israel, Acts 1:4-8). Those who had accompanied Peter from Joppa to Casarea (believers in Jesus as the Messiah and who had been Jews or Jewish proselytes) were astonished that God would also receive Gentiles into his ecclesia. However, the apostolic - period evidence was given (speaking in tongues) which made the filling of the Holy Spirit obvious to Peter and the other believers from Joppa, because Peter stated that that was the same evidence given to him and the others at the beginning as evidence of the in-filling of the Holy Spirit, Acts 2:4,14-17; 10:47; 19:1-7. Therefore, Peter then asked the group whether anyone objected to the new believers' being immersed in water to signify their becoming members of the New Covenant ecclesia. They were then immersed in the name of Jesus.

VI. Biblical references to speaking in tongues, the New Covenant, and the use of signs by God in speaking to his people: Isa. 28:11-12; Joel 2:28-32; Mark 16:14-18; John 2:18-19; 4:48; 20:29; Acts 2:24-21; 10:44-47; I Cor. 1:22-23; 14:21-22; Heb. 8:7-13.

VII. For further study, compare Gal. 2 with II Peter 3:11-18.

9-24-00

"Gentile Believers Get A New Title"
Acts 11

Couples Class
Wendell Alford,
Teacher

I. When the apostles and the other members of the Jerusalem church heard of what Peter had done at Joppa with nonJews (Gentiles) from Caesarea, they wanted an explanation of this diversion from the established pattern of evangelism, i.e., accepting nonJews into the fellowship. The "circumcision party," those who believed that a person must be a Jew before he or she could trust Jesus as Savior (Messiah), especially wanted Peter to explain what they were hearing about his activities. They had already decided that he had broken God's law by associating with the uncircumcised, even eating with them! (See Jonah 1:1-3; 3:15,10; 4:1-3,9-10; Luke 11:30-32)

II. Peter went to Jerusalem and there was confronted by the contending party of the church (ecclesia). He very meticulously recalled (King James: "by order") his experience at Joppa. He told them of his prayer time, the trance, and the vision. A vessel like a large sheet was let down from heaven to him filled with many unclean animals from which he was commanded to arise, slay, and eat. He refused according to his Jewish tradition, and the same thing happened a second time during which Peter was informed that what God had cleansed, he was not to consider profane. After the descent of the animals the third time, three men sent from Caesarea were already in the house to see him. Peter then said that God's Holy Spirit instructed him not to doubt the message he had been told. Then, accompanied by six fellow-believers of Joppa, Peter went up to Caesarea from, where the three messengers had been sent. Peter had been revealed to a Man (Cornelius) in a vision as the one who could inform him as to how God would save him and his family. Peter noted that as he (Peter) began to speak the Good News of Jesus Christ, the Holy Spirit fell on the hearers as it had to the first believers at Pentecost time (Acts 2:4). While this was happening, Peter said that he remembered Jesus' promise that as John the Immerser had immersed in water, even so would believers in Jesus (after the coming of God's Holy Spirit) be immersed in the Holy Spirit. Peter related that at this point he could not deny that God had indeed certified (by the acceptable apostolic sign, speaking in tongues) their acceptance by God through their confessing Jesus as their Messiah (Savior). The Jerusalem leaders accepted Peter's testimony that God was, in fact, granting spiritual salvation (eternal life) to the uncircumcised (Gentiles), Matt. 14:33; 16:13-20; John 10:1-39 (especially vss. 7-16).

III. Luke here mentions the sacrificing of Stephen (Acts 7:54-60) and the resulting scattering of the believers from Jerusalem to many outlying areas, e.g., Cyprus, Cyrene, and Antioch. The Jews living in these areas were Grecian (Greek cultured), of course, and many were persuaded by those who had experienced the coming of God's Spirit at Pentecost as many trusted Jesus for eternal life. However, the Good News was being shared to Jews only by these disciples.

IV. The News of the acceptance of Jesus as Messiah by the scattered

Grecian Jews was getting back to Jerusalem, and the leaders there asked Barnabas to go up to Antioch to encourage the believers in their faith in Jesus as Savior and Lord. When Barnabas (See Acts 4:37-37; 9:27) arrived in Antioch and saw how the believers were responding to the leadership of God's Holy Spirit, he was very pleased and encouraged them in their faith in the Lord Jesus. Because of Barnabas' own ardent faith, many people were added to the kingdom of heaven, but, even so, he apparently felt the need for help. Evidently, he believed that the cause there would be greatly enhanced by the services of Paul's ministry. Paul had been rejected by the Jews in Damascus after his miraculous conversion experience on the road there from Jerusalem years before. Paul had spent some three years searching for the Lord's direction after his conversion, Gal.1:15-24, Further, he was likewise rejected in Jerusalem and Caesarea and as a result returned to his home-town, Tarsus. Barnabas knew that he could likely find Paul at Tarsus and went there to search for him. When Barnabas found Paul, the latter agreed to return to Antioch with him. Paul was especially interested in Antioch, and there he labored with Barnabas for a full year establishing what was the first assembly of believers whose membership consisted primarily of Gentiles. The fact that the believers were nonJews gave need for a new designation for those who trusted Jesus for spiritual, eternal life. The new name whom followers of Jesus as Savior were called first in Antioch was, "Christian," vs. 26; Heb. 8:7-13. The new title "Christian" with its suffix "ian" tells us that these new believers in Jesus were related for eternal life, not to the witnesses who had told them about the Lord Jesus for spiritual salvation, but to Jesus himself as the Messiah, Christ the Savior. [The word "Christian" has come to mean a variety of things since its first use in Antioch. Some believe it refers to those who have accepted Jesus as Savior and Lord for eternal life and whose lives reflect a love for Jesus by seeking to keep his commandments, John 14:14-23; I John 1:7-2:6; others, ones from a Christian family (parents are professors of Jesus as Savior); ones who have been baptized by one with the "proper authority;" ones who are citizens of a "Christian country;" those who are members of the "right" church organization or denomination; those who keep the ten commandments; one who has spoken in tongues; those who talks the talk and walks the walk; those who are followers of certain "Christian leaders;" etc.]

V. In an interchange of Christian personnel between Jerusalem and Antioch, a certain prophet named Agabus informed the Antioch church that there was coming a famine in Judaea. The famine occurred during the reign of Claudius Caesar from 41 to 54 AD. [Claudius died on 10-13-54 AD, by poison administered by his fourth wife, Agrippina, the mother of Nero.] The believers in Antioch under the leadership of Paul and Barnabas collected an offering for the relief of the believers in Judaea during the dearth of the famine in that area, especially at Jerusalem. In fact, Paul and Barnabas delivered the relief in person as requested by the Antioch church. This is the first such effort by one group of Christians to relieve the sufferings of believers in another location. [Today we do the same thing for suffering, needful fellow-believers and others around the world.]

I. Herod began to single out certain leaders among the Jerusalem believers for persecution in order to discourage the growth of the group. At first he had James (John's brother) killed with a sword (probably decapitated).

The Herods (Idumean, i.e., Edomites and offspring of Eseau):

1. Herod the Great, second son of Antipater. He was appointed procurator (governor) of Judea by Julius Caesar in 48 or 47 BC. After a reign of 37 years during which he built the magnificent Jewish Temple, slaughtered Jewish infant males, he died of a terrible (sexual?) disease in Jerico at the age of 70 in April, 4 BC.
2. Herod Antipas, son of Herod the Great by Malthake, a Samaritan. He was rebuked by John the Immerser for marrying his half-brother's (Herod Philip I) wife Herodias, the sister of Herod Agrippa I. Herodias' daughter, Salome, was the dancer who so satisfied Herod Antipas, Herodias' husband and who asked for the head of John the Immerser on a platter after the dancing performance, Matt. 14:1-12. He reigned until 39 AD and died in exile by the Roman Emperor Caligula.
3. Herod Philip I, son of Herod the Great and father of Herodias who later married Herod Antipas.
4. Herod Philip II, son of Herod the Great and Cleopatra. He built the city of Caesarea Philippi near the sources of the Jordan River. He married Salome, the daughter of Herod Philip I and Herodias. He died in 34 AD.
5. Herod Agrippa I, grandson of Herod the Great and son of Aristobulus, Acts 25:13. He was the "Herod the King" of Acts 12:1 in today's lesson. Like his grandfather he died of a terrible disease which Luke attributes to his having claimed to be a god rather than a man at Acts 12:22-23 in today's lesson. His agreement to kill James in Acts 12:3 was an effort to please the Jews.
6. Herod Agrippa II, son of Agrippa I, before whom Paul was tried in Acts Chaps 25 and 26. He turned against the Jews before the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 AD and died childless and a Roman vassal (a subserviant position) in 100 AD.

II. As stated above, Herod Agrippa I was killing key leaders in the Jerusalem group of believers one at a time to satisfy Jews and also Rome. Peter was next in line for martyrdom and was captured and held in prison at Passover (Feast of Unleavened Bread, Luke 22:1). Herod was careful to wait until after Passover (Easter, King James Version) to make public his intentions of killing Peter. Sixteen soldiers guarded Peter (four on duty every six hours). The believers in Jerusalem made Peter's imprisonment an object of continual, fervent prayer.

III. On the night before Herod was to try Peter publicly and as two of the soldiers stood at his sleeping place, a miracle

happened. A messenger sent by God shook Peter to awaken him and told him to get up quickly. As Peter did so, the chains around his wrists fell away, and the Messenger (angel) told him to get fully dressed and follow him. They walked away from the two guards at his side, past the other two guards at the cell door, and the iron gate of the stronghold opened allowing Peter to enter the residential area of Jerusalem. The angel left at this place and time, and Peter felt as though he was only partially conscience. In fact, he wondered whether he was dreaming. Upon realizing that he really had been freed by God from Herod and the Jews, he made his way to the home of John Mark's mother (Mary) where many believers were gathered praying.

IV. When Peter reached Mary's home, he knocked on the door and asked the person inside to open the gate so that he could enter. The young girl inside, Rhoda, was so excited when she recognized Peter's voice that, rather than let him in, she ran back to the praying believers and told them that Peter was at the door. They told Rhoda that she surely was mistaken and that if Peter were there, it was his spirit, not Peter in the flesh. All of this speculative thinking did not keep Peter from continuing to knock on the gate. Finally, they opened the gate, saw Peter, and were dumbfounded. There was much elation and noise and Peter quieted the group down by telling them to tell James (the Lord's brother and pastor of the believers there in Jerusalem) and the others that he had been freed from prison. After making sure that they knew what God was doing, he left Mary's home where he, no doubt, knew Herod's soldiers would expect him to be. When morning came, there was much confusion at the prison among the soldiers about Peter's absence. Herod sent for Peter according to his plans to try him. The soldiers reported that Peter had escaped. Herod court-martialed the guards and had them killed. He himself apparently saw in the episode the possibility of self-humiliation. He therefore left Jerusalem and went to Caesarea on the Mediterranean.

V. At this point in his Acts account, Luke feels it necessary to reveal what happened to Herod Agrippa I. Over on the coast the people of Tyre and Sidon did something (We are not told what displeased the people there.) that displeased Herod immensely. He controlled their food supply since they could grow no food, and he ruled Judaea from where their supply came. Herod's treasurer, Blastus, convinced the king to meet their needs. The residents of the area as a result of Herod's generosity after a speech by the king, hailed him as a god. Because Herod accepted their worship and did not give God the glory (credit), Herod was "eaten by worms" (a very serious illness, perhaps syphilis) and died there. All this news (Peter's miraculous escape and Herod's terrible death) gave impetus to the spreading of the Good News about God's people who believed in Jesus as the Savior of God. Barnabas and Saul returned from Jerusalem to Antioch from where they went on a mission taking with them John Mark. (Barnabas and John Mark were cousins, Col. 4:10.)

Oct. 8, 2000

"Antioch Sends Out Missionaries"
Acts 13

Couples Class
Wendell Alford,
Teacher

I. Paul and Barnabas had been at Antioch of Syria for over a year (Acts 11:1-3) teaching the local congregation about God's Christ (Savior) that the members of the group (mostly nonJews, i.e., Gentiles) were not identified as converted Jews but directly and solely related through their faith in Jesus Christ for the first time as "Christians." This designation was different and indicated a new method of God's relating to human beings that bypassed the first arrangement made by God with his human creatures. The Old Covenant (Law) was no longer the factor that made mankind pleasing to God, but now through his Son, Jesus, a New Covenant (Grace) was created whereby all people could be made eternally alive spiritually (like God is alive), John 3:5; 4:24; Acts 2:18-19; Heb. 8:7-13. Paul's and Barnabas' teaching was so effective that certain men became prophets (proclaimers, messengers of the Gospel) and teachers. Luke names five of these: Barnabas (Note that Saul was named last indicating, I believe, that he was the one who had taught them all, even Barnabas.), Simeon Niger, Lucius from Cyrene, and Manaen. The last had been reared as a foster child in the home of Herod Agrippa I (#5 in last weeks outline). These five served the Lord and used their time almost entirely (fasted) for teaching and preaching. As God noted their devotion to their duty of serving him, he, through his Holy Spirit, indicated to the Antioch congregation that Barnabas and Saul should be commissioned to leave the Antioch area and take the Gospel elsewhere. The Holy Spirit revealed that he had a special mission for them, and, although it is not stated that John Mark was ordained (had hands laid on him) as were Saul and Barnabas, he accompanied them on this, Paul's first missionary journey. The three left Antioch of Syria with the Antioch congregation's blessing.

II. As the Holy Spirit led them, the three went to Selucia, a seaport on the Mediterranean Sea about sixteen miles west of Antioch of Syria, They sailed from there to Salamis, a seaport on the east side of the island of Cyprus, and shared the Gospel with the Jews in the synagogues there. (Barnabas was a Levite and native of Cyprus.) They traveled by land across the island to the port of Paphos on the west side of the island. In Paphos they were entertained by Sergius Paulus, an official of Cyprus, who asked them to tell him about God's message. Associated with the official household was a Jew named Barjesus who was a magician and also was known in the area as Elymas, Greek term for Sorcerer. Barjesus claimed to have some religious authority, but Saul (hereafter called Paul) realized that he was, in fact, a false prophet. The Spirit of God took over Paul's thinking. He stared at Barjesus and identified the sorcerer's true position. Paul called him an offspring of the devil, perverting the Lord's truth and turning people away from the Lord. Paul told him further that God would deal with him now causing him to be blind for a while. Barjesus immediately was made blind by the Lord and asked someone to lead him

about. This episode was witnessed by Sergius Paulus who was favorably impressed by the Lord's work and believed that Jesus is Lord.

III. From Paphos the missionaries sailed north to Perga on the coast of Pamphylia (Greece). John Mark for some reason elected not to continue with Paul and Barnabas on their missionary endeavors. Instead, he returned to his mother's home in Jerusalem. From Perga Paul and Barnabas went on to Antioch in the province of Pisidia. In Antioch of Pisidia the two went to the synagogue on the Sabbath to worship and simply sat in the group. After the regular reading of the Law and the prophets, the synagogue leaders invited Paul and Barnabas to share with those assembled for worship, any exhortation they had from God for the people there. Paul stood, raised his hand for attention, and began an historical resume of God's relating to the Israelites beginning with their servitude in Egypt under the Pharaohs. He tells the group how God in leading the Israelites back to their promised land, the people were less than faithful to God's promise to protect them. Even in their reluctance God destroyed seven nations in Canaan and divided the land among the tribes of the sons of Jacob. After a period of about 450 years with judges, the great prophet Samuel led the Israelites, but the people insisted upon a king like their neighbors had. God gave them a man after God's own heart. At this point in his historical summary, Paul connects David to Jesus in the lineage of Jacob. This Jesus, Paul says, is the Savior (Messiah) promised to Israel by their God, Jehovah. God's Messiah, Jesus, was put to death at the request of the Jewish leaders in Jerusalem, even though the Roman in charge of the area, Pilate, could find no reason for even punishing him. However, God would not leave His Son, Jesus, in the place of the dead (Hades), but brought him back to life from the dead. Jesus was like David in that he died as all men, but Jesus was God, because his body did not suffer decay. He is eternal as God is eternal.

IV. Paul then makes the message clear, the Law of Moses will not make one right with God, but forgiveness comes through faith in Jesus as the Christ. After the service was over, the Gentiles heard what Paul had said about Jesus (Paul had said that All that believe in Jesus are justified.) and asked whether they might come and hear Paul's message the following Sabbath. Paul agreed and the crowd which came made the Jews very envious. They therefore discredited Paul's position that Jesus was God's Savior. The two missionaries declared that they necessarily had to bring God's message of salvation to the Jews first, but now that the Jews had spurned God's offer of eternal life by trusting Jesus Christ, Paul and Barnabas would take the glorious Good News to the Gentiles. The Gentiles were very glad, received the message, and were added to the family of God. Those who believed were rejoicing, but the Jews caused such turmoil that Paul and Barnabas found it necessary to leave Antioch of Pisidia. They went from there southeast to Iconium.

I. After being declared persona non grata by the Jews in Antioch of Pisidia, Paul and Barnabas shook the dust off their feet (See Neh. 5:13; Matt. 10:14; Lk. 9:5; 10:10-11.) and went to Iconium. Iconium, now Konia, was a large and rich city, 120 miles north of the Mediterranean Sea, at the foot of the Taurus Mountains, and on the great line of transportation and communication between Ephesus and the western coast of the peninsula on one side; Tarsus, Antioch of Syria and the Euphrates River basin on the other. Iconium is east of Antioch in Pisidia. The two missionaries went together into the Jewish synagogue in Iconium and presented God's Gospel of Jesus Christ to them. Many of the Jews believed their message along with many Gentiles. The Jews who did not accept Jesus as God's Messiah ignored the miracles performed by Paul and Barnabas and chided the Gentiles who had listened positively, causing a misunderstanding. The end result was that the city of Iconium as a whole was divided. Finally, the Jewish rulers convinced the political authorities to ridicule them and chase them from their city. Stoning them was the method proposed, Lev. 24:13-14, for what was considered blasphemy against God. The two believers from Antioch or Syria realized that their ministry was no longer effective in Iconium and therefore left there and went into the Lystra-Derbe area to the south.

II. As Paul and Barnabas preached the Gospel at Lystra, they met a man who had never been able to walk because of a congenital malady. As Paul preached, he realized that the man was interested in exercising faith in Jesus Christ to be healed. Paul shouted for the man to stand up. He did so and not only stood on his feet which had never held him up before, but he leaped around and walked about. The missionaries were surprised when the local citizens, in their local dialect, expressed the belief that the Roman gods Jupiter (Zeus) and Mercury (Hermes) had come down from the heavens in the likeness of men. They believed Paul was Mercury (because he was the message bearer) and Barnabas to be Jupiter (the chief god of Roman theology and husband of Juno). When the priest of Jupiter (who served at the shrine of Jupiter just outside the gate of Lystra) heard that representatives of his god and Mercury were in the city, he brought sacrifices to Paul and Barnabas. He brought oxen for the sacrifice and garlands for the missionaries' heads. This misunderstanding made Paul and Barnabas sorrowful, and they expressed their feelings by tearing their clothing. They also ran among the people telling them that they (Paul and Barnabas) were only human beings even as the Lystrains were. Also, people should give up their belief in the false pagan gods and believe in the true, only living God, the God who created everything. Paul told them that the one true God had until now provided their needs in nature and permitted all nations to walk according to their own customs. Paul's testimony scarcely restrained the crowd from using the missionaries as

gods worthy of blood sacrifices.

III. Although Paul and Barnabas had only been threatened with stoning at Iconium (before they fled), the hatred for them had followed them to Lystra. Some of the Jews from Antioch in Pisidia and Iconium came to Lystra and convinced the citizens there that Paul and Barnabas were bearing false testimony. The Jews took Paul out of the city, stoned him, and, this time they stoned him so badly that he was considered dead. The Jews, no doubt, thought for sure that Paul would no longer be a threat to their religion. They were wrong, because as the believers gathered around the stoned Paul, he stood to his feet, entered the city for the night, and left with Barnabas for Derbe the next day, II Cor. 11:25; II Tim. 3:11.

IV. Derbe is the only place in Galatia where no overt opposition to the preaching of Paul and Barnabas was experienced. They preached and taught there and then returned to Lystra, Iconium, and Antioch of Pisidia. Why did Paul at this time decide to turn around and go back through the places he had already been? Also, why did he decide not to continue to the west after arriving first at Antioch of Pisidia? Instead, he went east to Iconium as though they were veering back toward their beginning point, Antioch of Syria. I suggest that there were several reasons for the apparent change of plans:

1. Paul never expected as much opposition to their ministry as they encountered. It is true that when the Grecian and Hellenist Jews (Paul and Barnabas were in this category of Jews.) in Galatia realized what was happening to their established Jewish traditions through Jesus' position and teachings, they knew that something must be done to counteract the influence, or their own religious position would be jeopardized.

2. Paul realized that more time and effort should be given to strengthening the local believers before leaving them to withstand such opposition noted in #1 above. Note that in vss. 14:22-23 the missionaries returned to Lystra, Iconium, and Antioch of Pisidia expressly to encourage the new disciples' spirits, to plead for their continued faith in Jesus Christ, and to expect opposition to their being believers in Jesus as God's Savior.

3. There is strong evidence that Paul experienced illness during the period. In his letter to the Galatians later, he recalls for them that he preached to them first because of an "infirmity of the flesh," i.e., his attention to their need for the Gospel was sequenced by his illness, Gal. 4:12-18.

V. Paul and Barnabas left Perga and went to the coast at Attalia and sailed therefrom back to Seleucia. They went from there to Antioch of Syria to the local church which had commissioned them as missionaries. The church gathered together, and Paul and Barnabas told them the wonderful news of how God had opened the door of his kingdom to the Gentiles through their witness. Afterwards the two tired missionaries stayed at their home church and enjoyed the fellowship of their fellow believers.

I. While Paul and Barnabas recuperated at Antioch from the first Missionary experience into Cyprus and Asia Minor, a group of men came down from Judaea and contended that for a person to be in God's will (be assured of eternal life) he or she must be circumcised (become a Jew religiously) before being baptized as a testimony to becoming a Christian. In other words, one must be of the Jewish faith before he or she could become a Christian. The dispute of these "Judaizers" with Paul and Barnabas was so intense that the Antioch church decided to confer with the Jerusalem church. They, therefore, sent Paul and Barnabas along with representatives of the Judaizers to the Jerusalem church. Being true missionaries, Paul and Barnabas told the people on their journey through Phenice and Samaria about how God was being merciful even to Gentiles through trust in his Son, Jesus Christ. Members of the Antioch entourage arrived in Jerusalem and were received by the church there. Evidence became apparent immediately in the Jerusalem church that the Pharisees who professed Jesus as the Messiah and were members of the church there, insisted that not only must Gentiles be circumcised before becoming true Christians, but that they must also keep the law of Moses after conversion to God's will through faith in Jesus as the Messiah.

II. The Jerusalem church leaders held a business meeting to consider the relationship of faith in Jesus Christ to faith in the rite of circumcision and keeping the law of Moses. There was a heated discussion from which no consensus came. In the impasse Peter was given the floor and related how (Acts 10:34-35) God had made clear to him by the sign of speaking in a divine language (Acts 10:44-48) that Gentiles are in God's favor (grace) through trusting Jesus for eternal life. In summary, Peter agreed with Paul and Barnabas. Note also Paul's experiences at Acts 19:1-7 and I Cor. 12:27-31.

III. At this point in the deliberation Paul and Barnabas related how God had worked through them in Cyprus and Asia Minor to bring many to trust Jesus Christ, even Gentiles. After their testimony, James (evidently at this time the senior pastor in the Jerusalem congregation) told the congregation that he agreed with Peter, Paul, and Barnabas, because the Scripture (Old Testament) states clearly that God intended to select a people from among the Gentiles before returning to rebuild David's kingdom (Amos 9:11-15), and see Romans Chapter Nine. James further suggested that the Jerusalem church send a written message to the Antioch congregation telling them what their position was on the questions raised, i.e., being circumcised and keeping Moses's law were unnecessary to become believers in Jesus for eternal life and to become citizens of the kingdom of God. He did say, though, that believers should be told to refrain from giving any credence to any idols, refrain from sexual intercourse with anyone other than ones spouse, and,

because of the social intercourse between Jewish and Gentile Christians at the time, refrain from eating meats (including meat containing blood) that did not conform to Moses' law. (Relate vs. 20 with vs. 21.) The committee of apostles and elders (vs. 6) agreed with the Peter-Paul-Barnabas-James position, and presented the recommendations to the church who agreed. They agreed to send their conclusions to the Antioch church in writing. The messengers chosen to accompany Paul and Barnabas back to Antioch were Judas Barsabas and Silas. The latter was an outstanding teacher in the Jerusalem church. The letter sent follows:

GREETINGS TO GENTILE CHRISTIANS IN ANTIOCH, SYRIA AND CILICIA:

We have heard that men from our area (Judea) have troubled Gentile believers in your area (Syria and Cilicia) by saying that they must become Jews before becoming true believers in Jesus Christ. This is not the position of the Jerusalem church. In fact, the Jerusalem church in business conference has formalized our position against such doctrine. We are sending with this letter two Jerusalem church members, Judas and Silas, who will personally assure you of the authenticity of the letter's message. Further, the Holy Spirit himself, in our opinion, agrees with our position that Gentiles are not required to become Jews before becoming believers in Christ Jesus. We do, however, believe that such believers should not eat meat or blood which offends those who have been cultured in the Jewish faith, i.e., meat offered to idols, nor should believing Gentiles practice sexual immorality.

FAREWELL.

IV. The Jerusalem church sent the four with its letter and its blessings to Antioch. At the Antioch church's next business meeting (no doubt called special for this special purpose), the letter from the Jerusalem church was read amidst much joy and elation. Afterward Judas Barsabas returned to Jerusalem, but Silas remained in Antioch with Paul and Barnabas. After a while Paul suggested to Barnabas that they return to the congregations they had established on the missionary trek to the west. When Barnabas expressed the opinion that John Mark be invited to go with them, to perhaps redeem his earlier desertion, Paul disagreed so emphatically that the two agreed that they should go separately, Barnabas with John Mark and Paul with Silas. This dissension among early leaders in God's work seems strange to us, although it should not. That is the reason we have so many different groups who each claims to be in God's will as they disseminate their own "brand" of God's Gospel. I am reminded of God's Word at Phil. 1:15-18 where Paul stated, "Some indeed preach Christ even of envy and strife, and some of good will. One preaches Christ of contention, not sincerely, supposing to add affliction to those [true to the Gospel]. - - - What then? notwithstanding, every way, whether in pretense, or in truth, Christ is preached; and I therein rejoice, yea, and will rejoice." Paul and Barnabas were both all right.

Nov. 05, 2000

"Missionaries Beaten And Jailed"
Acts 16

Couples Class
Wendell Alford,
Teacher

I. Geographic overview: Derbe; Lystra; through provinces of Phrygia, Galatia, and Mysia; Toras; Samothracia Island; Neapolis; and Philippi

II. Paul and Silas, after leaving Antioch in Syria, went on through Syria and Cilicia to Derbe and Lystra. At Lystra the missionaries met a young man named Timotheus (Greek) whom Paul appreciated very much. Timothy's mother was Jewish and a believer in Jesus as the Messiah, Savior. His father, however, was a Greek and uncircumcised. Although Timothy was a God fearer and well respected there at Lystra and at Iconium where Paul had been on his first missionary journey with Barnabas, he was uncircumcised like his father. Timothy had become a believer in Jesus Christ, and his mother, Eunice, as well as his grandmother, Lois, were or had been women of profound faith. The young man had become a disciple of the Lord Jesus through Paul's witness, and Paul wanted Timothy to accompany them as they continued their journey westward. Contrary to Paul's own theological position concerning circumcision (See Rom. 4:11-16; I Cor. 7:18-20; Gal. 2:1-5), he circumcised Timothy so that the Jews, who knew that Timothy's father was a Greek and uncircumcised, would not be completely disinterested in either Paul's or Timothy's testimony. Paul, Silas, and Timothy left Lystra and visited the cities in the provinces of Phrygia and Galatia, but God's Holy Spirit would not permit them to enter Asia or Bithynia. They established churches wherever they went building upon the Jewish populous where possible. The churches were founded on faith in Christ Jesus as God's Messiah and grew in numbers day by day. The documentation which Paul presented to each congregation was based upon the deliberations in which the Jerusalem church had concurred with the proposal of the Antioch of Syria church (See Acts 15:23-29) concerning the relationship of Gentile believers in Christ to the law of Moses. The churches which had been established earlier were strengthened by the new understanding.

III. The missionary party then passed by the territory of Mysia and came to Troas, the seaport city on the extreme western tip of Mysia. Here a grave decision had to be made about whether to go farther west or turn back eastward. To go west beyond this point would mean that the Gospel would be preached for the first time in Europe. (Apparently Luke, the author of Acts, joined Paul, Silas, and Timothy at Troas as is indicated by the person of the pronouns "them," "they," and "he," but note that in the latter part of vs. 10 and in vs. 11, "us" and "we" are used.) So, to enter Europe or not to enter Europe with the Gospel was the burning question which Paul must decide. One night during sleep, Paul saw a man from Macedonia (across the water in nearby Europe) asking for help for him and his people. Paul interpreted this dream as an order from the Lord to advance westward to Macedonia and Europe to share the Gospel with the people there. The group immediately made preparation to sail from Troas through

Samothracia to Neapolis and on to Philippi where Paul felt safer, for the Romans maintained a military contingency there. They stayed at Philippi for some time, but a problem existed: No synagogue was available where Jews gathered to worship on the Sabbath days. Although Philippi is inland about nine miles, a river flows by the city to the sea. Along this river women gathered for prayer, and it was to these women that Paul brought the Gospel for its first hearing in Europe.

IV. Among the women who heard Paul preach one Sabbath was a certain business woman, Lydia, from the city of Thyatira in the province of Asia on the Galatian peninsula. Her business had to do with Purple cloth. She heard the Good News about what God was doing for all people through his Son, Jesus Christ. God's Holy Spirit opened her heart, she accepted Jesus as her Lord and Savior as did her associates, and they were immersed as a public testimony of their faith in Jesus Christ. Afterwards, Lydia as a new believer, begged Paul to bring the group and stay at her house while they were in Philippi. When she made their willingness to stay a matter of believing the sincerity of her faith in Christ, Paul agreed to stay at her home.

V. Later at one of their worship meetings, a young girl shouted that Paul and his group were sharing Jehovah God's plan of salvation, but her intention was inappropriate. She was employed by those who used her as a fortune-teller or soothsayer for profit. Paul with the power of the Holy Spirit corrected her evil spirit, and she was no longer able to perform her magic activities. Her employer aroused the public and took Paul and Silas before the political authorities as Jewish troublemakers. To quiet the uprising, the authorities had Paul and Silas publicly beaten and placed in the stockade in stocks with the other prisoners. In prison about midnight Paul and Silas, even after the public humiliation, rejoiced in the Lord by praying and singing. As they did so, an earthquake shook the place, opened the prison doors, and unshackled the prisoners. The commotion awakened the jailer who realized what had happened and prepared to take his own life before his superiors did. Paul yelled for him not to do this, because none of the prisoners was gone. The jailer was filled with gratitude and asked Paul to tell him about this plan of salvation he had been talking about. What would he, the jailer, have to do to be in the plan? Paul told him that he and his family could be made right with their Creator by simply trusting God's Son, Jesus Christ. They went to the jailer's house and witnessed to the jailer and his family members. The jailer and his family believed Paul's message of salvation through Jesus Christ. Then, the jailer and his family were immersed to express their faith in Jesus, and the entire group dressed the prisoners' wounds and ate. They rejoiced in their newly found faith in God's salvation. At daylight the judge instructed the guards to release the prisoners and tell them to leave the town, but Paul refused to accept the punishment as untried Roman citizens. The authorities relented, and the group returned to Lydia's home, informed the congregation of the event, and departed.

I. The two missionaries, Paul and Silas, along with Timothy, their associate, left Philippi and went through Amphipolis which is 33 miles southwest of Philippi and about three miles from the sea. Apparently nothing of significance happened there or in the next city they passed through, Apollonia. Apollonia is about 30 miles from Amphipolis and 37 miles from Thessalonica. As in Amphipolis, nothing of consequence happened in Apollonia. However, in Thessalonica Paul and the crew spent three Sabbath days discussing the fact that the Scriptures attest that Jesus of Nazareth as the Messiah, Savior, necessarily had to suffer, die, and rise from death to qualify as God's promised Savior, Isa. 53. Many of the God fearing Greeks (Gentiles), both men and women, understood and believed the Gospel.

II. After only three weeks, the Jews who did not believe Paul's message made efforts to disqualify him and to insist that the missionaries leave Thessalonica. To do this the disbelieving Jews hired some thugs and punks to rabble the citizenry into a mob. The mob was incited to enter the home of a person named Jason, Rom. 16:21, who had evidently been entertaining the missionaries in his home. At the time the mob invaded Jason's home, Paul and Silas were not there, but they dragged Jason out with some other believers and took them to the mayor and city council. The Jews' accusation was that Jason was harboring a ban of criminals who were breaking Caesar's laws by claiming that one Jesus was a king in opposition to the Caesar in Rome. The city officials were disturbed, of course, but did rescue Jason and the other believers from further harm by the mob.

III. The believers in Thessalonica, in order to save Paul and Silas from harm, sent them on down the coast to the city of Berea about 45 miles southwest of Thessalonica. The missionaries went immediately to the Jewish synagogue and presented the Gospel. The Jews there were less prejudiced (King James, more noble) than those in Thessalonica as indicated by their willingness to examine the Scriptures (Old Testament) concerning Paul's assertions. Among those interested were many God fearing Greeks (Gentiles), both men and women. As one would expect, the Jews in Thessalonica received word that the "troublemakers" were down in Berea "doing the same thing there." They came there and aroused the crowds as they had done in Thessalonica. The decision was made that Paul would sail down to Athens and leave Silas and Timothy in Berea to further establish and encourage the congregation. However, Paul told them that, should he send them word, they should join him hastily.

IV. While Paul waited for Silas and Timothy to finish the work in Berea, he met daily with the leaders of the synagogue in Athens and with anyone who would listen to him in the market place. He met with opposition and unbelief in every instance and thereafter engaged the Greek scholars attending the prestigious Athens

Academy,. These "learned men" considered Paul to be an intellectual dwarf, perhaps because he was unknown to them. Also, he was emphasizing a particular religion rather than the more important (to them) general philosophy, the pursuit of wisdom through logical reasoning rather than factual observation. In particular these philosophers were in one of two philosophical persuasions, Epicureans or Stoics whose positions were briefly as follows:

A. Epicureans - Named for Epicurus (342-271 B.C.), a Greek philosopher whose doctrines sought to find in philosophy a practical way to happiness. True pleasure (physical) and not absolute truth was the end at which he aimed. Experience and not reason was the test on which he relied. The inevitable result of such a system would degenerate by natural decline into brute materialism. Epicurianism in this form was the popular philosophy among the Greeks at the beginning of the Christian era. Its chief opposing philosophy was Stoicism, next noted.

B. Stoics - First systematized by Zeno in about 280 B.C., just following the death of Epicurus. Its name was taken from the portico (Greek, sto) at Athens where Zeno taught. They believed that God is power and creation the results of his exercising that power. All matter, then is passive and is important only as an expression of the divine energy required to create and sustain it. Ethical concerns involve protesting moral indifference. Their chief goodness resulted from living in harmony with nature; and in utmost indifference to pleasure, pain and all external good or evil. One of the chief differences between Stoic and Christian ethics is that Stoicism is based upon pride (in self-made rightness), while Christianity bases genuine rightness on humility, i.e., a complete dependency upon God's mercy through faith in what God himself has done in Jesus Christ. Stoicism's ultimate result is subject to the Fates (chance), but Christians believe that anyone's ultimate disposition is determined entirely as prescribed by God's WORD (Communication), Jesus, John 1-3. Stoics probably come closest to Christian beliefs in: fatherhood of God (as Creator, but not ReCreator, brotherhood (common bonds) of mankind, and the sovereignty of the soul (human spirit).

V. Paul's attempt to reveal the truth of God to these philosophers involved agreeing that the Creator God was indeed unknown by them (their unknown God). Further, God did create all things and therefore should be worshipped directly as God rather than worshipping his creation. Since people are God's creation, made by God in his own image, God is not far away but near everyone. In fact, people are sustained by God. The time has come, however, when God wants all people to turn to him and admit that he has made only one man to be judge of everyone. That man was approved by God's having raised him from death. Paul's referring to ones being raised from death brought scorn and ridicule from the philosophers. They wanted to think more about Paul's message, perhaps because Paul had quoted from one of their poets, Epimenides, in vs. 28, "in him we live, and move, and have our being." Some believed Paul's message and accepted Christ as Lord and Savior. Among them were Dionysius, a member of the Supreme Court, and Damaris, a woman. The ones who believed joined Paul.

I. Paul left Athens alone and went to Corinth. There he met a Jew named Aquila and his wife Priscilla who were from Pontus, but had later moved from Rome, because Claudius had commanded all Jews to leave Rome. Aquila originally moved to Italy to practice his trade, tent making. Having been driven from Rome as a Jew, he then decided to move to the thriving metropolis of Corinth. Paul no doubt met the couple because he was also a tent maker by trade, II Thes. 3:8, and they worked together and lived in the same area. On the Sabbath days Paul followed his regular custom of going to the Jewish synagogue for worship. At these assemblies he presented Jesus as the Messias (Christ). Many Jews and Gentiles believed his testimony. Silas and Timothy arrived in Corinth after Paul had been there a while, and their presence encouraged Paul to be even bolder in the spreading of the Gospel. The Jews were split in their opinions regarding Jesus and began to be vindictive toward Paul. Paul, in effect said, "I've had it with you, your blood (life) be accountable to your own choice. Beginning now and hereafter, I will work with the Gentiles among you." Earlier, Paul had reasoned with both the Jews and Gentiles before the Jews became disgruntled, denied that Jesus could be the Messiah.

II. As a result of his decision, Paul stopped attending the Jewish synagogue, but instead went next door to the home of one Titius Justus who was a man who revered Jehovah God. God's Spirit won the heart of Crispus, the chief ruler of the synagogue, through Paul's witness. Crispus' entire family believed in Jesus and was immersed personally by Paul, I Cor. 1:14, and this public testimony moved many other Corinthians to accept Jesus as their Messiah, Savior. Paul apparently became somewhat discouraged during this eighteen months here in Corinth, for the Lord appeared to him one night in a dream (vision). In the vision Jesus told Paul not to become afraid to continue testifying to God's saving grace. There are many in Corinth who are to become citizens of the kingdom of heaven through your witnessing. Continue what you have been doing, because I am depending upon you in this place. Jesus' vision is the reason Paul stayed as long as he did at Corinth on this visit during the second missionary journey.

III. Luke here ties his account in Acts to the political situation in the Achaian Province in AD 53. Gallio was the Roman proconsul under the emperor Claudius. Gallio was the brother of Lucius Seneca, the noted Greek philosopher. The proconsul was either killed in AD 65 by Nero or was a suicide, historians disagree on the exact cause of death. [I believe that Nero ordered him to commit suicide in favor of the teachings of Epicureanism. Seneca was a Stoic and advisor to the Roman emperor. WA] During Gallio's proconsulate, the Jews in Achaia decided, through concerted action, to get rid of Paul for the sake of their religion, once and for always. The Jews compiled a case against

the missionary and took him to the court of Gallio. The chief charge was that Paul was persuading people to worship God contrary to the law. The legal technicality which the Jewish leaders were trying to present was that Christianity was not a licensed religion according to Roman law, i.e., Christianity was not a legitimate sect under the umbrella of Judaism such as the Pharisees, Sadducees, etc. The Jews were saying that these Christians are not part of our religion which is recognized and licensed under Roman law but a new religion which must be licensed on its own. [In the USA today the like argument would be whether a given denomination could receive donations which would be exempt from federal taxes. WA] After the Jews had presented their case and even before Paul had made the defense, Gallio could understand that the case before him was a religious dispute. The proconsul said that the Jewish case did not pertain to the infringement of Roman law, but had to do with illusive names and other words relating to various Jewish traditions and customs. The Jews would have to present a case that explicitly involved trespassing Roman law such as an obvious wrong doing, like wicked lewdness. Gallio refused to hear the case further stating that his authority was under Roman law not in matters having to do with differences within religious beliefs. The differences being presented to him should be settled out of court by the parties themselves. "Take care of the problems yourselves," he said. As a consequence of these proceedings, the crowd took Sosthenes, the chief ruler of the local synagogue and successor to Crispus who had become a Christian believer, and beat him right before the judgment seat. Gallio did nothing to constrain the crowd.

IV. Sometime later Paul left the church at Corinth with Priscilla and Aquila to return to home at Antioch. On their way to Ephesus, Paul stopped in Cenchreae, the western port of Corinth, and had his head shaved to indicate a vow he had made. Luke does not mention why the vow was made, but possibly he had vowed to be in Jerusalem for Passover. Ephesus was merely a stop over for the ship on which Paul was taking to Caesarea. However, Paul did attend the synagogue briefly and witness there. He left Priscilla and Aquila at Ephesus, and even though the believers asked him to stay longer, he told them that he needed to be in Jerusalem at Passover time. He did promise, as he boarded a ship sailing for Caesarea, that he would return if God permitted. After arriving at Caesarea, he visited the Jerusalem church and then went to his home church, Antioch in Syria. Luke then introduces Paul's third missionary journey by stating that he stayed in Antioch for a time and then went again through Galatia and Phrygia encouraging the churches there.

V. After Paul left Ephesus, a man named Apollos came there and was teaching the message of John the Immerser: confessing ones sins, repenting, and being immersed. Aquila and Priscilla instructed him that Jesus, God's Messiah, had come. God's grace in Jesus Christ is God's final WORD, and therefore pleasing God involves confessing Jesus as God's Savior and being immersed in Jesus' name is now God's ultimate plan of spiritual salvation.

I. At the end of Acts, Chapter 18, a man from Alexander, Egypt by the name of Apollos came to Ephesus. He was an Old Testament scholar and an excellent public speaker. He had a major theological handicap in that he knew only what God had done through John the Immerser. Apollos knew that people were in need of God's forgiveness, but not that God had sacrificed his only Son for the restitution of mankind's sins. Aquila and Priscilla had heard him and further enlightened his knowledge of Jesus' having finalized God's plan of salvaging people's spirits. Now here in Acts, Chap. 19, Luke tells of twelve men who had accepted John the Immerser's testimony as presented by Apollos in Corinth when John proclaimed God's message of repentance. John had baptized them. These men were in Ephesus when Paul arrived from a portion of his third missionary journey through the provinces of Galatia and Phrygia (see Acts 18:23; 19:1). God had not sent the special outpouring of his Holy Spirit during John's ministry, and therefore these twelve men had not heard either of God's Son, Jesus Christ, or his Comforter, the Holy Spirit. Their commitment (immersion) to God was only to John's message of repentance (personal guilt and need for forgiveness). Well, Paul informed the twelve of the Gospel of God in Christ, and when they believed in Jesus' power, they committed themselves (were immersed again in Jesus' name) to Jesus as their Savior and Lord of life and were filled with the Holy Spirit. After this confession of their faith in Jesus as their Savior, they received the apostolic sign of entering God's kingdom, i.e., speaking in tongues other than their native language. [At this point and since this is the last mention in Acts of an incident of believers' speaking in tongues, I have chosen to review these occurrences. - WA]

II. One of the SIGNS of the New Covenant was the sharing of God's new message with other than ones own tongue, i.e., in another language, or, to pray, in a mysterious (angelic or spiritual) language (see Isa. 28:11-12; Mk 16:17-20; [Acts 28:3-6] Acts 2:1-18; 10:44-48; 19:1-7; I Cor. 13:1; 14:1-4,18-24,33,40)

- A. The original, New Covenant use of foreign languages was unique and for a very special purpose, the birthing of Christ's bride the ecclesia, Matt. 22:1-3; Rev. 19:7-10.
1. The languages were spoken by believers in Christ through a special anointing of God's Holy Spirit.
 2. The languages spoken were of nations other than the native languages of the speakers themselves.
 3. The Christians were miraculously given the ability by God's Holy Spirit to speak languages of the foreigners present, languages the speakers did not know through normal assimilation and learning.
 4. The message given by the miracle was to communicate what God was doing for mankind through Jesus the Messiah.
 5. The language miracle was a fulfillment of a promise of

- God during the Old Covenant, Acts 2:16-18. (Joel 2:28+32)
- B. Early abuse of speaking in angelic tongues in the church, as given by Paul (God's Word) in I Cor., Chaps. 12-14.
1. In discussing the variety of spiritual gifts, Paul mentions that apparently some members felt that their own gifts somehow made them spiritually superior, I Cor. 12:25.
 2. The Scripture makes it clear that not every believer, even during the apostolic period, was speaking in angelic tongues, I Cor. 12:30.
 3. Paul asserts that properly speaking in angelic tongues should be considered prayer, i.e., conversing with God, and that such activity is for self-help, not for helping the church, I Cor. 14:1-4. The better way to speak in worship services is to speak in ones normal language, I Cor. 14:7-25.
 4. Speaking in angelic languages was creating confusion in the church worship services, and God is not the Creator of confusion, I Cor. 14:33,40.
 5. EVERY BELIEVER in Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord receives the Holy Spirit and is sealed by that Spirit, Acts 2:3-4,38; I Cor. 12:1-4; Eph. 1:13-14; 4:30.

III. For three months after Paul arrived at Ephesus, he witnessed in the Jewish synagogue. Some Jews were so divisive that Paul left the synagogue with the believers in Jesus and for two years lectured at the school of Tyrannus. During these two years God approved of Paul's message by performing many miracles through the missionary. In an attempt to contradict Paul's message, the Jewish leaders, including seven sons of one Sceva, the chief priest in Ephesus, were using the name of Jesus as Lord to try to do miracles. This pseudofaith in Jesus backfired, and the result was that Paul's message was magnified throughout the area.

IV. As the Jews had attempted to use Jesus' name (power) to further their own message and were confounded, the Ephesus believers in a false goddess were also confounded. The Ephesians worshipped Diana (Latin) or Artemas (Greek) represented by a huge temple erected in her honor. Evidently she was the outgrowth of religious sentiment associated with a meteor which had supposedly fallen from Jupiter, husband of the Roman God, Juno, queen of heaven. A silversmith, Demetrius, was especially disturbed when his trade was threatened by Paul's message of monotheism and against gods made with men's hands. The Jews as well had become a like target of the Ephesian wrath, because all knew that the Jews were also against manmade gods. The Jews had a spokesman, one Alexander, who was ridiculed by the people of Ephesus in the mob incited by Demetrius. For two hours the mob chanted their allegiance to their goddess Diana, and Paul would have entered the fray except that some believers dissuaded him because of his plan to return to Jerusalem. The city clerk persuaded the Ephesians that their god Diana was based upon a natural phenomenon (the meteor from heaven which was undeniable) and was, therefore, secure from all criticism.

12-10-00

"Paul Continues Third Journey"
Acts 20

Couples Class
Wendell Alford,
Teacher

I. Geographic synopsis of Chap. 20: Began at Ephesus in western Asia and left for Macedonia and Achaia (Greece). Intention to sail for Syria was thwarted by Jewish plot so began return to Syria through Macedonia from Philippi by ship to Troas in Asia (Mysia), to Assos, Mitylene, Chios, Samos (Port there called Trogyllium), and at Miletus, at end of Chap. 20, c. AD 57-58.

II. This chapter begins at Ephesus with the Demetrius uprising settled down and with Paul meeting with the believers to say farewell. After the emotional good-bye, he left Ephesus and went to Macedonia and the cities there. Luke does not name the stops Paul made, but he does state that after entering Achaia (Greece), he stayed there three months. [It is generally agreed by Bible scholars that these three months were spent in Corinth during which Paul wrote the epistle to the Romans, and I agree.] As Paul left for his return to Asia, he had with him seven men from the area: Sopater of Berea, Aristarchus and Secundus of Thessalonica, Gaius and Timotheus of Derbe, and Tychius and Trophimus of Asia. Paul evidently stayed at Philippi until joined by Luke (See first person plural pronouns "us" and "we" in vss. 5 and 6.) The other seven men continued on to Troas and waited for Paul and Luke there.

III. Paul and Luke sailed from Philippi just after the days of unleavened bread (Passover, about the middle of our April). It took the couple five days to go from Philippi to Troas where they stayed for seven days. Paul was, of course, invited to speak to the Troas believers on the first day of the week (Sunday, the Lord's Day) that they stayed. At the worship service the Lord's Supper was observed, and since this was the last day before leaving for Assos, Paul was still speaking at midnight. Ample light was provided (probably candles) in the upstairs (third floor) where the believers congregated. The room was filled to overflowing, and people were even sitting in the windows! A young man by the name of Eutychus fell sound asleep which probably would have been no problem except that he had one of the window seats! Eutychus not only fell asleep, he also fell to the ground outside the building. The commotion surrounding his falling broke up the regular worship service, and Paul went down and revived him. Assuring the group that Eutychus was again well, Paul ate with them and continued discussing church concerns with them until daylight. As Paul and the missionary entourage left, everyone marveled that the young man who fell from the window was alive and well after so serious an accident.

IV. When the group went to board the ship at Troas sailing for Assos, Paul, for a reason Luke does not disclose, decided to go overland by foot. At Assos he rejoined the group, and they went in turn to Mitylene, Chios, Samos (Trogyllium), and Miletus. No doubt Paul would have stopped at Ephesus under

ordinary circumstances, for he had spent three years there and had many dear friends in the city. But he did not have time if he would be in Jerusalem on the day of Pentecost. Pentecost is only fifty days after the days of unleavened bread when he had been at Philippi. Some three or four weeks had already lapsed since he was in Philippi.)

V. At Miletus Paul sent messengers back to Ephesus asking the church leaders (elders) there to come down to Miletus and visit with him. The distance between the two cities was about thirty miles, and by the time the messengers went and the church leaders came, perhaps three days had passed. Some question whether it would have been better simply to have gone by Ephesus at the first. There are several reasons why such did not happen. First, Paul did not have a private ship at his command. The pilot of the ship was no doubt under orders concerning freight loading and discharging at the various ports en route. Secondly, one of the reasons Paul was returning to Jerusalem was to deliver an offering to the needy Christians there. (Acts 24:17; Rom. 15:25-27 I Cor. 16:14) He wanted to be sure that every fellowship which he had established would have a chance to contribute to the Jerusalem collection, hence a need for personal contact with the Ephesus fellowship. Thirdly, there could have been a need for the ship to be at Miletus for several days. Note that it is located on a rather large stream which goes back inland some distance. The information which Paul shared with the church leaders contains many very personal experiences. He reminds them that his long stay at Ephesus was a period of much humiliation for him, with a constant pressure from Jewish opposition, tears and temptations. His service there was exhausting for everyone, Jews, Gentiles, and even door-to-door evangelism, with the most important message that God has for all people: repentance toward God and faith in his Son, Jesus Christ. Paul admits that Christians' testimonies in all the places he visits are that trouble lies ahead for him in Jerusalem, but he confesses that his mission there is worth more than even his own life. The missionary then cautions the church leaders that they are to take their responsibilities very seriously, because after Paul is gone, there will appear among them ones who will seek their own monetary gain at the expense of the truth of God's grace in Christ. He had supported himself by his own labor (tent making). Jesus is quoted by Paul at this point as having said, "It is more blessed to give than to receive." This direct quote is not found in the Gospels or elsewhere in the Bible. One should remember that Paul after his miraculous conversion from Judaism to the risen Lord, Jesus Christ, on the road to Damascus, spent three years in Arabia where he, no doubt, learned many things directly from the Lord, Gal. 1:11-24. Paul then told the church leaders from Ephesus that he would not be seeing them again in the flesh because of his plans to go to Jerusalem, Rome, and, Lord willing, even to Spain. He had told the Roman believers as much in the letter he had written to them recently from Corinth. In that letter he also mentions that he would be taking the offering to Jerusalem, Rom. 15:24-28.

12-17-00

"Paul And Party Reach Jerusalem"
Acts 21

Couples Class
Wendell Alford,
Teacher

I. Geographic summary of Chap. 21: Left Miletus for Coos, to Rhodes, to Patara, by Cyprus, to Tyre in Syria, to Ptolemais, to Caesarea, and to Jerusalem: End of Paul's third journey.

II. After saying good-bye to the believers at Miletus, Paul and the group boarded ship and sailed directly to Coos, Rhodes, and to Patara. At Patara they boarded a larger ship sailing for the Phenicia area. The ship sailed by Cyprus on the south of the island and docked at Tyre in south Syria where its cargo had been sent. They sought out followers of Christ in Tyre and lodged with them for seven days. The believers of Tyre (whole families) went with the mission group down to the dock area where they all knelt and prayed especially for Paul's safety upon arriving at Jerusalem. When they had first arrived, the church members had related to the travelers how explosive the conditions were in Jerusalem for Jews and Christians. Their ship sailed south down the coast to Ptolemais where they spent one day with the believers, and the next day they came to Caesarea where they lodged with the evangelist, Philip, who was one of the original seven servants (deacons) elected by the Jerusalem congregation to care for the day-to-day physical matters of the church's business. By this time Philip and his wife had four unmarried daughters who had become prophets (preachers). (See Joel 2:28; Acts 2:16-17.) The group stayed with Philip for several days, and during their stay the prophet Agabus came to Caesarea from Judaea (Jerusalem area). Agabus had a message for Paul which he wanted to clarify explicitly. [Note Agabus' status as a prophet earlier at Acts 11:28 regarding an upcoming drought in the area of Judaea.] To make his point, Agabus took Paul's girdle (belt) and tied his own hands and feet with it, signifying that such would surely happen to Paul upon his arrival at Jerusalem. Further, he stated that such bondage would happen at the hands of the Jews who would place him under the authority of the Gentiles (Romans). After this graphic demonstration of Paul's destiny, both those traveling with him (including Luke) and also the local congregation there in Caesarea, with tears, begged Paul not to go on to Jerusalem. Paul's answer was that, though they were appreciated for their concern and attempt to change his mind (break his heart), he was absolutely determined to go in the name of the Lord Jesus to Jerusalem even if his presence there brought about his physical demise. When his friends understood his determined mental state, they agreed that Paul's going must be the Lord's will. After the period was ended for their stay in Caesarea, the group loaded their baggage and headed off southeast toward Jerusalem, about 65 miles. Some of the believers of Caesarea went with them along with one Mnason, native of Cyprus, who now lived in Jerusalem. They were to lodge at Mnason's home while in Jerusalem.

III. At Jerusalem the church members received Paul and the group with open arms, and the following day James, the Lord's

brother and pastor of the Jerusalem congregation, along with the other church leaders (elders, deacons) met with the missionary Paul and his group. Paul and the others with him explained how God was working through them to bring believers in the Lord Jesus into his kingdom. James and the other church leaders glorified the Lord for the good news about the expansion of God's kingdom among the Gentiles. But immediately following the rejoicing, James and the local group related how some of the believing Jews (Judaizers) were still so devoted to Moses' Law that they openly opposed Paul's missionary activities among the Gentiles. [Note that Peter is not mentioned as being in the Jerusalem church at this time. I believe that he was no longer acceptable there, because he had taken a firm stand that God was, in fact, accepting Gentiles into his kingdom. See Acts 10:34 and Gal. 2:11-21 for the basis of my belief. WA] James told Paul that the Judaizers were aware of Paul's lack of instructions to new Gentile believers about circumcising their male infants or keeping the other customs of the Jewish faith. [See Jesus' teaching about the coming difference between God's calling out the ecclesia and maintaining the Jewish Law (rituals) at Matt. 9:16-17; Mk 2:27-28. WA] What should be done therefore to neutralize the opposition of the Judaizers to Paul's presence in Jerusalem? James outlined a plan to satisfy the opposition to Paul: they (the Jerusalem congregational leaders) had found four men with whom Paul was to satisfy the Law's requirements for purification by taking a vow and shaving his head with them. This procedure was to indicate publicly that Paul was, in practice, continuing to meet the requirements of Moses' Law. The ritual was to require seven days for completion (See Numb. 6:9,18,24-26) and to be registered at the beginning with the Temple priest, note also Acts 16:3.

IV. Just before the seven-day period was to end, some Asian (Ephesus area) Jews recognized Paul in the Temple and made a public pronouncement to the crowds there that Paul was polluting the Temple by bringing a Gentile, an Ephesian, into the sector where only Jews were allowed. The news spread quickly, the doors to the Jewish area were closed, and Paul was in danger of his life. The commanding Roman officer saw what was happening and rescued Paul by binding him with two chains and placing him in protective custody. The crowd began yelling accusations against Paul and demanding that he be punished. With the crowd following, the Roman officer led Paul from the Temple toward the military headquarters (castle) nearby. To enter the building a stairway was taken to the entrance. There Paul spoke to the captain in Greek, and the officer was surprised by his linguistic abilities. The captain asked Paul about his citizenship status. Had he recently led an uprising against the Romans? Paul told him that he was, in fact, a Jew from Tarsus in Cilicia. He then asked the captain for permission to address the crowd and was granted his request. Paul addressed the crowd in Hebrew (probably Aramaic). The crowd came to a quiet hush to hear what this object of their contempt had to say in their language!

I. Paul, with the permission of the commanding Roman officer, addressed the antagonistic crowd of fellow-Jews by first calling them "men, brethren, and fathers" (today we would say, "gentlemen,"), because there were no women in that area of the Temple. [Oddly enough, Paul had heard Stephen address the Jewish leaders with the same greeting on the day Stephen was stoned to death for his confession of Jesus as the Messiah (Savior), Acts 7:2. I believe that this experience was indelibly fixed in Paul's memory and gave impetus to his later conversion and loyalty to Christ as an apostle. WA] Now Paul stands before his own people, the Jews, and announced that what he was about to tell them was his defense for his present position.

II. Paul begins his testimony by properly identifying himself as a Jew born in Tarsus, Cilicia, who had his advanced religious training entirely, i.e., brought up, under the tutelage of Gamaliel. Gamaliel held a doctorate in Jewish Law and also had an excellent reputation among the Jewish scholars in Jerusalem. The implication in Paul's remarks was that he himself was an attentive student of Gamaliel and had learned in "perfect manner" (thoroughly) the Law of the fathers and oral traditions. In other words, Paul considered himself not only well versed in the Law (Pentateuch), prophets, and poetic literature of the Old Testament, but also knowledgeable of the interpretations of that same material which had become a written part of Jewish tradition. Further, Paul had demonstrated a zeal for keeping God's will even as the Jewish leaders among them were so doing even in this very instance. The display of Paul's religious enthusiasm had been so real and unequivocal that he had personally sought out those who were persuaded to follow Jesus (the Way), in order for them to be imprisoned and thereby stop their "apostasy." In the course of routing out these "religious fanatics" (The high priest himself as well as the entire Sanhedrin could attest to Paul's activities in this regard.), Paul said that he had, on one such occasion with proper letters of authorization from Jerusalem headquarters, gone down to Damascus to arrest and bring back to Jerusalem those there who were followers of the Way. Paul admitted that at the time he thought that he was doing God a favor by helping stamp out this "heresy." (See John 16:1-3; Acts 26:9.) As he neared Damascus on this occasion, at about noon time, suddenly a brilliant light from heaven surrounded him. The light forced Paul to the ground, and in this fallen position, he heard a voice calling his name and asking him why he was persecuting the very one who was speaking to him. Paul questioned the one calling him by asking him to identify himself. The voice said that he was the one whose memory Paul had been trying to obliterate, Jesus of Nazareth. [This appearing of the Lord Jesus to Paul was considered by Paul to be the same type of experience as that of Jesus' appearing to Peter, James, and all the others after the resurrection, I Cor. 9:1; 15:3-9.] Those who were with

Paul on the way to Damascus did not understand the voice but did see the bright light which had knocked him down. Paul asked the Lord what he should do. Jesus told him to continue into Damascus and there he would be told what he should be doing. Because the new disciple could not see, those in the party led him into the city. In Damascus a religiously devout man named Ananius came to Paul and addressed him as Brother Saul. At that moment he could see again and was told by Ananius what his mission was to be. The God of the Jews had chosen Paul to know his will by being the Just One's witness to all people of what Jesus would tell him. Paul was then immersed calling upon the name of Lord Jesus. After a long time (three years Gal. 1:10-24), Paul did return to Jerusalem, and there in the Temple he was deep in the Spirit (in a trance, II Cor. 12:1-12) and was told by the Lord to leave Jerusalem where he would not be welcome. Paul expressed some concern about whether the Jewish believers would ever listen to him since he had persecuted and imprisoned them. He confessed that he had been a part of Stephen's martyrdom and had personally participated in his death, Acts 7:59-8:1. Evidently the Lord agreed that Paul would be more effective with people who were not Jews, and so he said that he would send Paul therefore to the GENTILES.

III. When Paul mentioned Gentiles in his defense, his antagonistic listeners would hear him no more. They yelled to the Roman commander that Paul was not worthy of life but should be killed. They expressed their venomous hatred of Paul by taking off their clothes and throwing them with dust into the air. Obviously Paul's safety was in jeopardy, and the chief captain (commander) gave orders to take him into the military fort adjacent to the Temple. The officer was still not sure why the Jews were so upset. He was about to torture Paul for the truth by having him beaten. When Paul was taken away by the soldiers for the torture, he asked the one in charge whether it was legal to administer such treatment to a Roman citizen without due process under Roman law. The captain in charge of the punishment did not miss the import of the prisoner's question. He immediately passed the word along to the commander who asked Paul directly whether he was a Roman citizen. The prisoner assured the commander that he was, in fact, a free born citizen of the Roman Empire. The chief dismissed the torture detail, but was left with a dilemma: if he punished Paul as requested by the Jewish leaders, he would be doing an illegal act (his Roman superiors would retaliate), and if he released Paul to the Jewish crowd, they would surely kill him as they had Stephen. The commander's decision was to keep the prisoner in protective custody (but remove chains) and summon the Jewish leaders (the Sanhedrin) the next day for a council meeting to consider the problem. He did this and brought Paul before them. What defense will the great missionary give before the same Sanhedrin that condemned his (and our) Lord and the first Christian martyr, Stephen? And what was the result of Paul's testimony before them? We will examine the ongoing life of the channel, Paul, of much of God's Word to us next week.