

Jan. 05, 2003

"Dedicated to God"

Dan. 1

Couples Class
Wendell Alford,
Teacher

I. The history of the nation of Israel indicates a people who have had a continual "roller coaster" existence. Although he had a singular faith in Jehovah God, Abraham lived a nomadic, hectic life. Moses' era of leading the Israelites was likewise a period of unhappiness, slavery and wandering in the desert. Settling the Promised Land made the judges' and David's leadership a tentative time of continual war and turmoil. From a political or national standpoint Solomon's reign over Israel was its pinnacle of strength and glory. Following that crest of political and material success, the Israeli throne was occupied by mostly immoral, self-centered men of questionable integrity. God sent the prophets during this dire time for the Jews. Jesus, in looking back over Jewish history, divided the long history into the law and the prophets, Matt. 5:17; 7:12. In our generation we have witnessed the reestablishment of the nation of Israel in 1948 just following the tremendous humiliation and destruction of millions of Jews by the Germans under Adolf Hitler. What is to be the future of those people with whom God covenanted several millennia ago and to whom he promised such great things? God commissioned the prophets over several hundred years to lead the Jews to expect a Messiah who would save the nation and lead them during a period of blessings in a special Kingdom of God. Today we begin an examination of one of those prophets of God, Daniel, who announced what would happen to the Jews as the history of God's world progresses. God sent his only Son Jesus Christ to earth to fulfill his promise to send a Messiah and set up his own Kingdom, but the Jews refused to accept Jesus as God's Messiah and his Kingdom, Mal. 4:5; Matt. 11:7-15; Lk 1:17; Acts 2:22,36. The ekklesia era (the time of the Gentiles) became a period which could have been omitted (from a human viewpoint) had the Jews accepted Jesus as the Messiah immediately, for the ekklesia is not mentioned, per se, in the Old Covenant. The Jews' refusal of Jesus gave us Gentiles an opportunity to know and be reconciled to God through Jesus Christ, Rom. 11:25-36. Therefore, the prophecy of Daniel concerns the Jews and God's plan for them in human history, and Daniel was not permitted to amplify on a period near the culmination of history, Dan. 12:4,9,13. What Daniel could not prophesy in his day, God made a part of his Word (the Revelation) to mankind through his last apostle, John, on the Isle of Patmos in about AD 95-97. If the Lord permits, we shall examine God's final Revelation at some later date.

II. Israel became a monarchy with the first king, Saul, and the nation remained intact, more or less, until after Solomon's death. After his death the kingdom divided into a northern kingdom, Israel, and a southern kingdom, Judah. In about 725 BC Israel ceased being a nation, but Judah continued on. Judah, in about 608 BC, was ruled by Jehoiakim who was placed in that position by Pharaoh Necho of Egypt, II Chron. 35:20,22; 36:4. From the other direction (east) came Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon who captured Jerusalem in about 604 BC. Nebuchadnezzar disrupted Jerusalem's government by making Jehoiakim, in effect, to be his vassal and took thousands of the "cream"

of Judah's personnel back to Babylon. Among those taken captives were Daniel and three of his friends. Then Jehoiakim's son, Jehoiachin, became a vassal, but he rebelled against Babylon. His uncle Zedekiah became king and also openly rebelled against Babylon, and Nebuchadnezzar came personally to Jerusalem. The gory results are recorded in II Kings 25:5-7. At this time most of Jerusalem's people were taken to Babylon and made citizens there. The Jews remained in exile in Babylon for seventy years. When Nebuchadnezzar first conquered Jerusalem, he carried part of the vessels from the Temple back to Babylon where they were used to worship the king's god. The select group of the Jewish captives which were taken to Babylon were the best young men, mentally and physically. Some of these were relatives of King Jehoiakim, vs. 3. Daniel and his three friends were good looking, young (Daniel was perhaps sixteen.), intelligent, and were taught the Chaldean language and literature, vs. 4. (I believe that they were made eunuchs since they were subject to Ashpenaz, master of the eunuchs. Also, Daniel never married.) After these young men were "prepared" to serve the king, they were placed on a diet from the king's table. The standard procedure was to continue this regimen for three years before they gave personal service to the king. The four young Jews were also given Chaldean names to replace their Jewish names: Belteshazzar (Daniel), Hananiah (Shadrach), Mishael (Meshach), and Azariah (Abednego), vs. 7. At the outset of this experience, "Daniel purposed in his heart that he would not defile himself (perform contrary to the Jewish Law which he had been taught as a child, Lev. 10:8-11; 11:41-47), with the king's "unclean" meat and wine. Obviously, Daniel had dedicated himself to his God Jehovah and was determined to practice the faith he professed, vs. 8.

III. At this time Ashpenaz had placed Daniel and the other three under an underling, Melzar (the steward). Melzar agreed to permit the four (at Daniel's insistence) to forego the king's prescribed diet on a trial basis for ten days. They ate vegetables during the ten days, and the results were very favorable. The four continued to advance in knowledge, skill, and literature. Daniel had a God-given special ability to understand a perspective of related facts and the over-view of those relationships. (King Uzziah of Judah had the same ability, II Chron. 26:1-5; Isa. 6:1.) When the three-year preparation period was over for Daniel and the three others, the chief eunuch presented them to King Nebuchadnezzar who was especially favorably impressed with the four and conscripted them for immediate service, vs. 19. At the end of this chapter the statement is made of the exemplary reputation of the four Jewish refugees, "And in all matters of wisdom and understanding, that the king asked of them, he found them ten times better than all the magicians and astrologers (advisors) that were in all his realm," vs. 20. Finally, in vs. 21 the Word states that Daniel's political service there continued during the entire seventy years of the Jewish exile in Babylon, until the first year of Cyrus' reign. The dedicated prophet lived about ninety years, but apparently he never returned to his beloved Jerusalem. At any rate, the Bible does not relate that he ever saw again his native land, Judah.

I. Last week we noted that the nation of Israel had been overcome, and from Daniel's first chapter that, finally, Judah was taken by the growing empire of Babylon under the awesome Gentile King Nebuchadnezzar. Daniel and three of his friends were brought from Judah to Babylon and made a part of the king's elite staff of advisors and counselors. Now in Chap. 2 Daniel has become a direct servant and is expected to satisfy every whim of the king's desires. One such eerie desire which the king presented to his staff was a dream that had brought much consternation to the monarch. He had become the leader of what was becoming a world empire rather quickly. He had been king for only two years, and his future bothered him greatly. Under such tremendous pressure, Nebuchadnezzar was losing sleep at night worrying about what to do with his newfound authority. One night he dreamed of an experience which further baffled his view of the future. Since he did not know the dream's meaning, he did what any good leader does. He called together his cabinet of advisors (They were called magicians, astrologers, and sorcerers by the Chaldeans.) and told them of his dream which he wanted them to bring to mind and to interpret. However, he wanted them not only to interpret the dream, but also to conjure up the dream without being told even what the dream was. The results of not bringing the king an answer to his question, were that they would be, "- - if ye will not make known unto me the dream, with the interpretation thereof, ye shall be cut in pieces, and your homes shall be made a dunghill (ash heap), vs. 5. (Of literary significance is the fact that the Book of Daniel is written in Aramaic from 2:4b through 7:28 rather than Hebrew. Aramaic was the court or diplomatic language used in Babylonian political affairs. Further significance, is the fact that God is saying that the Jews are being removed from worldwide political competition until the end of "the times of the Gentiles,") Lk 21:24; Rom. 11:25.

II. Now back to the dream: Just as destruction would follow not meeting the king's demands, so would fame and reward be given for doing so. For a solution to the king's dilemma, the advisors would be given gifts, rewards and great honor, vs. 6. The men were in a quandary because as they told the king, they would certainly be unable to give an interpretation unless he would reveal the dream. The king accused them of stalling for time (and their lives). They told the monarch that, "There is not a man upon the earth that can solve the king's matter." The king was furious and sent out a decree that his threat be carried out. Daniel, God's prophet, was among those to be destroyed, and when he heard of the decree, he consulted with Arioch, the captain of the king's guard, and asked for a conference with the king. Daniel asked the king for a little time to consider the matter, and he would then reveal to the king the information he desired. The king's favorable opinion of Daniel is evident in the monarch's reaction. While he had refused all the other advisors, he gave Daniel more time to consider the challenge. Daniel went home and conferred with his three companions. They agreed that only their "God of heaven" could reveal the necessary informa-

tion for the king. God revealed the dream of Nebuchadnezzar and its interpretation to Daniel in a dream. The prophet prayed, "Blessed be the God of heaven for ever and ever, for wisdom and might are his: And he changes the times and the seasons. He removes kings and sets up kings. He gives wisdom unto the wise and knowledge to them that have understanding. I thank thee and praise thee, O thou God of my fathers, who has given me wisdom and might," vss. 19-23.

III. Daniel went to Arioch and requested a conference with the king immediately. The king listened as Daniel gave, first, his testimony of God, and then the dream and its interpretation. "Your advisors could never have told you the dream or its interpretation, but there is a God in heaven who reveals the secret to Nebuchadnezzar what will happen from now to the latter days," vss. 27-28. "It is not any credit for me (but to my God) that you are receiving this information," vs. 30. "Now here is your dream and what it means: You saw a great image being formed as you watched. The huge image which was formed was immense, glowed brightly and stood [in the general form of a man] before you in awesome splendor. The image had a head of pure gold, his chest and arms were of silver, his abdomen and thighs were of brass, his legs [below the knees] were of iron, but his feet were a mixture of iron and baked clay. You then saw a Stone which was made by other than man's hands strike the huge image at his feet of iron and clay and break the feet into pieces. Following the destruction of the feet, the entire image even through the head of gold was crushed and became like threshing floor chaff, and the wind blew the chaff completely away. The Stone which demolished the image became a huge mountain like the entire earth," vss. 31-35; Matt. 21:42-46; I Pet. 2:4-10.

IV. "The meaning of your dream is this: You, O king, are a king of kings, for the God of heaven has given you a kingdom, power, strength, and glory. You are the head of gold. After you another kingdom (the silver) will rise, but of less importance. Then a third empire will rule over the earth which is the brass portion of the image. The fourth kingdom to arise will represent the iron in the image and will be very strong and influential in the earth. A fifth kingdom representing the feet mixed of iron and clay will be divided and partly strong and partly weak," vss. 36-43. The kingdoms are to be diminutive in their order. [As history of the Middle-East and then the entire earth has developed through the millennia, the kingdoms are in this order: Babylon, Medea-Persia, Graeco-Macedonia, Rome, and finally the clay-iron is to be a world empire of Roman influence (built upon the foundation of Rome), but broken into many nations.] The most revealing information in the entire prophecy is in vss. 44-45, "And in the days of these kings shall the God of heaven set up a kingdom which shall never be destroyed, it shall overcome and supplant all these kingdoms, and it shall stand forever. This dream is absolute and God's interpretation is trustworthy." King Nebuchadnezzar said, "Your God is the God of gods who alone can [know the future]. Daniel asked that he sit in the king's court and his three friends be heads of provinces. Daniel's faith in God served the four very well.



—gold—BABYLON

—silver—MEDIA-PERSIA

—brass—GRAECO-MACEDONIA

—iron—ROME

—clay inserted—LAST FORM
OF ROMAN RULE

Jan. 19, 2003

"Facing A Furnace For Faith"
Dan. 3

Couples Class
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I. If King Nebuchadnezzar had been a modern-day believer in Jesus Christ, he would have felt very humble after Daniel interpreted the king's dream to mean that God had been so generous in putting a world empire under his rule. Instead, the Gentile monarch assumed that he himself had been and was responsible for accomplishing such political power and prestige, Dan. 2:20-21. To prove his "self-worth" he took the dream and used it as a basis for making himself a god, in effect. The mechanics of how he implemented such a high opinion of himself was to gather together enough gold to create and erect a gold image ninety feet high and nine feet wide. He placed the image in the expansive plain of Dura which surrounded the Babylonian area. Such a glorious (materialistically speaking) figure would cost many millions (perhaps billions) today. It stood where it could be seen clearly on a fair day with the bright sun reflecting from the gold for scores of miles. [No doubt, it would have made the Tower of Babel, by comparison, a dunghill. I mention the comparison, because both represented some men's desire to attempt to prove themselves superior to, or at least equal to, Almighty God, Creator of heaven and earth. This same spirit of rebellion against God can be expected on a worldwide basis when time is approaching its end. At that time the person perpetrating such an image of himself will be the one the Bible calls the personification of sin itself, the man of sin, II Thes. 2:1-12. How can such a condition ever come to be? We are seeing in our nation today exactly what brings about such a "strong delusion." Our nation was founded by people who believed in God, most of them Christians. Now we have a growing number of those who are following other religions. Obviously, those religions do not represent our Lord Jesus Christ. Our laws based upon the Constitution guarantee freedom to all, but what happens if some American citizens now believe that their freedom permits them to force, (physically if necessary - what we know as terrorism) other citizens to conform to their own beliefs and actions? (See what Jesus said about such force, Matt. 20:25-28; Lk 22:21-26.) Translate this condition to some future time into a much "smaller" world with a world government in control, and it is therein easy to see that maintaining civil order could require strict enforcement of man's laws.

II. On a much smaller scale we can understand why Nebuchadnezzar made worshiping an image, figuratively himself, the law of the land. He attempted to maintain civil order among his people through promoting a universal religion with himself as a god. To do this consolidating of his people's allegiance to himself, Nebuchadnezzar issued a decree that at the sound of any musical instrument, all who heard were to bow to and worship the gold image which represented him (his authority). To implement this great change among his people, the king first called all of his political leaders together and outlined his plan to them. He expected them to go back among the people and promote his plan in a persuasive way. Among the political principals whom he gathered in the conference were the princes, governors, captains, judges, treasurers, counselors, sheriffs, and

rulers of the provinces. Later, these same leaders were in attendance at the gala dedication of the image representing the king and his pagan god. Hordes of people were gathered around the image, and the orchestra played. People bowed down and worshiped the image. Leaders were scrutinized to see whether they conformed to the king's decree, and, sure enough, Daniel's three friends did not. The observers reported their "criminality" to the king, "There are certain Jews whom you have set over the affairs of Babylon, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego; these men, O king, are disregarding you," vs. 12a. The king in rage and fury commanded that they be brought to him, vs. 13. "Are you guilty of not worshiping the image?" the king asked them. "If you are guilty, you shall be cast into the midst of a fiery furnace. Then we shall see if your God will deliver you for disobeying me," vs. 15b. The three, though respectful, told the king that they had not, nor would they ever, bow down and worship the image. Further, "Our God will deliver us from your fiery furnace." FAITH!

III. The king ordered that the smelting furnace be heated to seven times its normal heat. He was so distraught at this open defiance of his decree that he ordered immediate binding of the three Jews. They were bound and thrown into the overheated furnace by strong men dressed in thick mantles, leggings and turbans. Even so, they were killed by the intense heat. The furious king personally was there with his officials to witness the three faithful Jews turn into ash. What he saw was the three, accompanied by a fourth, walk-around in the fire. He asked the officials, "Did not we cast three men bound into the fire? They answered, 'True, O King,' vs. 24. The king said, 'Lo, I see not three, but four, men loose, walking in the middle of the fire, and they are not hurt and the form of the fourth is like an offspring of the gods (Son of God),' " vs. 25. What the king saw so astonished him that he himself eased as close to the furnace as he dared (remember several had just been killed by the heat), and shouted the names of the faithful Jews. He begged, "Ye servants of the most high God, come forth, and come to me," vs. 26. The three came forth from the midst of the fire. We should note especially the care God takes of those who are truly faithful, beyond any shadow of a doubt, to the promise he makes to those who believe him. [Today, during "the time of the Gentiles," that faith is in the righteousness of his only Son, Christ Jesus.] The king and his princes (three had been in the furnace) and other officials all witnessed what God had done for his faithful: Not a blister was on their skins, not a hair on their bodies was singed, their clothing was not charred, and even the smell of fire was not evident on them! Nebuchadnezzar was so flabbergasted that he testified that the God of the three faithful Jews had sent a Savior (an offspring of God) to save the three who had faith that he would deliver them. Further, he issued another decree: Anyone who spoke against the God of the three men of faith would be cut into pieces and their houses burned. Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego were again promoted. (Where was Daniel, who also had faith in God's promises, during this episode? The Bible does not speak to this question, but he could have been away on business for the king. Even though the Bible does not say, we have no doubt of Daniel's faithfulness.)

I. This chapter includes the Biblical finale of the great King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon. Late in his reign one can justifiably characterize a period of severe deterioration of his mental stability. He loses his emotional control, and, as often happens to some frail human natures, his lost (spiritually speaking) condition brought about his realizing that only the King of heaven could satisfy the profound emptiness of the human spirit, vs. 34-35. No doubt his reaching this conclusion was influenced by his long association with God's dedicated servant, Daniel. Because of the intricacies of the chapter, I thought it wise to relate the conclusion at the outset. However, the chapter begins with the great King Nebuchadnezzar announcing a proclamation recognizing his submission to "the high God" (reference to Daniel's God). His announcement is sent to "all peoples, nations, and languages, that dwell in all the earth," vs. 1. His exaltation is a pronounced contrast to his proud, even haughty, attitude before the furnace experience with the three faithful Jews, Meshach, Shadrach and Abednego who had declared that they would never worship the king's golden image. The king, a Gentile, felt more favorably disposed toward the God of heaven than did the Jewish leaders in Jesus' first coming to earth, Matt. 21:43. "I thought it good to show the signs and wonders that the high God has done toward me. - - his kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and his dominion is from generation to generation," vs. 2-3. King Nebuchadnezzar was favorably impressed with Daniel's ability to interpret his dreams and the actions which only God could accomplish. [When the Jews took up stones to stone Jesus for "blasphemy," the Lord said to them, "If I do not the works of my Father, believe me not. But if I do, though ye believe not me, believe the works: that ye may know and believe that the Father is in me, and I in him," John 10:37-38.]. The king of Babylon believed God's works and was willing to believe that God "has dominion from generation to generation," vs. 3b.

II. Now the king of Babylon again had a troublesome dream which made him afraid. As he put it, "I was at rest in mine house and prospering in my palace. I saw a dream which made me afraid, and the thoughts upon my bed and the visions of my head troubled me," vs. 4-5. He must have been a compulsive person, because, after his previous experience with dream interpretation and Daniel's abilities, the king again went through the long process of ordering all of his magicians, astrologers and soothsayers to his council chamber for an interpretation of his dream. That effort was fruitless. He then called Daniel (whom he had named Belteshazzar meaning in Chaldean: Bel [Baal], protect his life) and told him the dream. By this time Nebuchadnezzar had made Daniel his chief political advisor, because the king said, "I know that the spirit of the holy gods (Spirit of the Holy God) is in thee," vs. 9. The king's dream was of a tree visible to the entire earth. The tree grew to heaven, was strong, had beautiful leaves, had abundant fruit which was food for everyone with need; the animals were refreshed by the shade of the beautiful foliage; and all the birds of the air lived on

its many limbs. The king then saw the watchers who were aware of all the activities related to the tree reaching to heaven. As the sleeping king observed the tree and those watching it, "a holy one came down from heaven and cried aloud, 'Cut the tree down, remove its branches, shake off its leaves, scatter the fruit,' and as this was done, the animals and birds deserted it," vss. 13-14. The holy one from heaven continued, "Nevertheless, leave the stump with its roots and gird it with a band of iron and brass, [because it is to live again.] The grass surrounding the stump will be wet with dew, and the stump will have a beast's heart for seven times (years)." Vs. 17 contains the heart of the message of God in the king's dream, "All of the earth's observers (watchers) can know that future history is to be controlled by the most High God, that he rules the political affairs of mankind and selects rulers whomsoever he will and places them in their respective positions. Those whom he so places are 'the lowest of men.'" [My understanding of "lowest" of men is that world leaders are not concerned with love of humanity but are egotistical and struggle for self-aggrandizement and praise of mankind.] Why does God allow people (watchers) to place such leaders in their positions? Those are the only choices since the one perfect Ruler, Jesus Christ, was rejected by his own kind (humanity). This arrangement, however, is not the final condition of the earth's people. God is now and will always have the final say in mankind's political situations.

III. Daniel was very reluctant to tell the king what the dream meant, but the prophet told him that the tree represented him (the king and his kingdom). The king's enemies will drive him from his position of authority until "seven times (years) pass." That is the message the God of Heaven (most High) has for you. Not only will you be dethroned, but you will become as a beast of the fields. This experience will enable you to realize that God is the real Director of all of mankind's political affairs, even to placing political leaders in their respective positions. Mankind's rulers are ruled by God who, "giveth it to whomsoever he will," vs. 25b. Daniel told the king that he should accept God's sentence and become righteous, break off his sins by showing mercy to the poor. Such a change would prolong Nebuchadnezzar's tranquillity, vs. 27. But the king did not change, and for a year he lived in the palace and kept to himself. One day as he pondered his own greatness, how he was the great self-made leader of the greatest kingdom on earth, Babylon, a voice from heaven said to him, "O king Nebuchadnezzar, to thee it is spoken: The kingdom is departed from thee," vs. 31. At that hour the king was driven out of the palace and became as one of the beasts of the fields. After seven years the king lifted his eyes to heaven, and his sanity returned to him. He was restored to his throne with full acceptance. He then gives a first person account of his changed attitude, vss. 34-36. "No one can say to him (God), 'Why are you doing thus and so?'" (See also Rom. 9:18-24,30-33.) The king's conclusion: "I praise and extol and honor the King of heaven (God), all his works are truth, - - - those who walk in pride he is able to humble," vs. 37. It appears that King Nebuchadnezzar found Daniel's God at last!

Feb. 2, 2003

"The Wall Tells All-
Babylon Falls"
Dan. 5

Couples Class
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I. In Daniel, Chap. 4, we noted the account of Nebuchadnezzar's last contribution to the Word of God in the book of Daniel. Today's chapter begins, many years later, with the activity of Nebuchadnezzar's grandson, Belshazzar (Prince of Bel, Baal), who was the son of Nabonidas, the king. The latter was the husband of one of Nebuchadnezzar's daughters. Nabonidas was actually the last king of Babylon, but Nebuchadnezzar's grandson Belshazzar was serving as co-regent while Nabonidas was away most of the time attempting to keep his subjects loyal to Babylon. Remember that Nebuchadnezzar had established the largest empire of the world up to that time, and the peoples some distance from the city of Babylon were becoming dissatisfied with paying tribute (taxes). The relationship of Nebuchadnezzar and Belshazzar as grandfather and grandson is related in Jeremiah's prophecy at Jer. 27:5-7. Jeremiah was still in Jerusalem while Daniel was in Babylon, and at Jer. 29:1-13 Jeremiah gives the Jewish captives in Babylon a letter outlining God's will for them during their long (seventy years) period of captivity. God, through his prophet Jeremiah, tells us that when Nebuchadnezzar's son-in-law and grandson had sat on Babylon's throne, Babylon would cease to be a kingdom, Jer. 27:7, and the kingdom would be absorbed by others. In Daniel's fifth chapter we will see Jeremiah's prophecy fulfilled. Jeremiah prophesied from c. 626 to 587 BC.

II. One of the dissatisfied nations which was ready to fight rather than pay homage was the people living northeast of Babylon in an area called Media, because it lay between the Caspian and Persian Seas. The people were known as Medes, and later their political and military strengths were overcome by the peoples living along the Persian Sea, Persia. If we recall the dream of Nebuchadnezzar in Chap. 1 when Babylon (gold) was no more, the succeeding empire affecting the Jews would be the Media-Persia forces (silver). We are familiar with the "laws of the Persians and Medes" as exercised during the time of Esther, Est. 1:19. Esther was a beautiful Jewess who was taken as queen by the Persian king, Ahasuerus. Queen Esther and her wise cousin Mordicai influenced the king to thwart Haman's plot to destroy all the Jews throughout the kingdom. The Jewish Feast of Purim is practiced as an annual reminder of God's faithfulness on behalf of his people, the Jews, at that time.

III. So Belshazzar, the co-king of Babylon with his father Nabonidas, decided to have a party (feast) to which he invited his princes and their wives and his own wives and concubines. No doubt Belshazzar as a child had discovered the beautiful and mysterious gold and silver eating and drinking vessels which Nebuchadnezzar had confiscated from the Jewish Temple of God in Jerusalem. No one until now had been sacrilegious and used the sacred vessels, but Belshazzar was less respectful of Daniel's God. Wine flowed freely and the feast continued into the night. As they became drunken from the alcohol from God's holy vessels, they praised their gods of gold, silver, brass, iron, wood and stone. At the height of the immoral and idolatrous occasion, King Belshazzar saw the finger's

of a man's hand which wrote near the lamp stand on the plastered wall. The king could see the fingers as they wrote. He became ashen; his whole appearance changed; his knees shook and his joints became weak. Belshazzar shouted loudly for his soothesayers to come quickly and read and interpret what the writing meant. They could not. Anyone who could satisfy the king's wishes would be amply rewarded with scarlet clothing (royalty), a gold necklace, and become the third ruler of the kingdom, i.e., directly beneath himself and his father, Nabonidas the king, vs. 7. Belshazzar's demeanor was so pronounced that his leaders did not know what to do. The queen mother, Nebuchadnezzar's aged wife, heard Belshazzar's cries from without and came in to speak to him. "There is a man in thy kingdom, in whom is the spirit of the holy gods (Spirit of the Holy God): in the days of your grandfather - - light and understanding and wisdom was found in him - -", vs. 11. She named Daniel as the man and told the king that she was sure that he could read and interpret the "handwriting on the wall." Daniel was brought in, and the king asked whether he were one of the Jewish captives. This gave Daniel an open opportunity to witness to the king about how his grandfather compared religiously to his own worship. Nebuchadnezzar had been Daniel's king for about forty-five years (606-561 BC), and now Daniel stands before his grandson who had not been willing to humble himself as his grandfather had done before the "God in heaven," vs. 22. Young Belshazzar knew the humiliating experience which his grandfather had undergone, seven years living among the beasts of the field, before he was humbled to recognize the God of heaven, vs. 4:37. Daniel accused Belshazzar of knowing better than "to lift himself up against the Lord of heaven by using the sacred vessels from God's house to conduct a feast of debauchery. God gives you the very breath that keeps you alive, and yet that same God you have chosen not to glorify," vs. 23. It is God who has written you this message on the wall: MENE, MENE, TEKEL, UPSHARSIN. The translation follows: "God has numbered your kingdom, and finished it. You are weighed in the balances, and are found wanting. Your kingdom is divided and given to the Medes and the Persians." When Daniel had finished, even though he had refused the king's reward (vs. 17), they gave him the royal garments, the gold necklace and proclaimed him to be third in the kingdom in command. And why did Daniel not want the gifts? Because he knew that Babylon was finished. That very night Belshazzar was slain by the sixty-two year old Median king, Darius. The gold head of the image had fallen, and the silver arms and shoulders had come to reign.

IV. Just a word from secular history: There were two main reasons, in human terms, which made overcoming the Babylonians by the Medes that fateful night so easy. First, all of the political leaders were saturated with alcohol at the time, and, second, the Medes under Darius were aware of Nebuchadnezzar's ingenious tunnel construction which brought Babylon's water supply into the city. Darius had diverted that portion of the Euphrates which came into the city for human consumption back to the main river bed. He left just enough flowing to float his troops under the wall undetected by the guards at the city gates. As believers in Jesus Christ, we know that God's promises are always kept. At the end of the present world order, another Babylon will also be destroyed by our Lord and Savior, Rev. 18.

I. We come now to the last of the first six chapters in Daniel's prophecy which consist of an historical account of Daniel's exilic service as a captive from his home, Judah. The beginning of his prophecy indicates that Daniel was taken in the third year of Jehoi-kim, king of Judah, (c. 606 BC). Chapter six relates that Daniel's service continued until the beginning of Cyrus' reign in c. 536 BC, a total of about seventy years. His service spanned the entire length of the Jews' Babylonian captivity, for Cyrus was the king who permitted the Jews to return to Jerusalem. Daniel was a true representative of Jehovah God in an alien, Gentile world. All the kings under whom he served were made openly aware of Daniel's God, the eternal heavenly Creator. That Daniel's God was the only true and holy God of all was made absolute by the signs and wonders which proves God's protection for those who trust him and his promises. Daniel's uncanny ability to recall and interpret Nebuchadnezzar's dreams that the king would live for seven years among the wild beasts and then recover; and Belshazzar's sudden death and loss of the Babylonian kingdom to the Medes and Persians. All of these miracles wrought by the God of heaven, Daniel's God, left no chance that any other god was real. Now in this last chapter recounting chronological events in history in Daniel's life we see another most miraculous action of God which further added to the reality of Daniel's (and our) God. Following this final historical chapter (Chap. 6), we learn of God's revelation to Daniel of further details of human history beyond Daniel's time and place (Chaps. 7-12).

II. Darius, the Mede, was now Daniel's political boss, and this king decided to restructure the political organization of the entire kingdom. He divided his kingdom into three territories or regions with a president (like our governors perhaps) over each, and within each region a number of princes (satraps or like our sheriffs perhaps). There were a total of an hundred and twenty sheriffs in all. This governmental structure was somewhat looser than Nebuchadnezzar maintained. Nebuchadnezzar was a "hands on" ruler, or, as we would say, he micromanaged the affairs of state. As Darius kept monarchal control, he apparently delegated more authority to his underlings. One reason he could do this was that he kept Daniel as somewhat "more equal" than the other presidents. And it was precisely this deference or special courtesy which the king held for Daniel that caused the Lord's prophet some difficulty. Evidently, when there was a difference in judgment between Daniel and the other two governors or even one or a group of the sheriffs, Darius gave credence to Daniel's opinion over theirs. This arrangement, over time, created jealousy, and the other political leaders began to pool their thinking about how they could make Daniel appear inferior to themselves in the king's eyes. These malcontents in a conference with King Darius suggested (flattery) that the king sign a decree whereby anyone seeking the favor of any god or any person other than the sovereign Darius himself for a period of thirty days would be placed in the den with the lions for punishment. The statute was drawn up and signed by the king as the law of the Medes

and Persians which made it incontrovertibly absolutely indisputable even by the king. When Daniel knew that the decree had been made effective, he was careful to conduct his daily prayers (thrice daily) in his room. His prayers of thanksgiving were habitual, and his routine involved leaving his west windows toward Jerusalem open. His political enemies determined that Daniel's praying routine was in disobedience to the king's decree, and they tattled to Darius about Daniel's defiance of the unchangeable law of the Medes and the Persians. Old Daniel had been breaking the law three times every day! (civil disobedience) The king was convinced of Daniel's guilt, but he was greatly bothered that he had consented to the law, vs. 14. Darius told Daniel that the God whom you have served continually will deliver you from the lions, vs. 16.

III. Daniel was forced into the den with the lions, and a stone was placed before the den entrance with the king's certification so that not even an order by Daniel could change his plight. The king, however, was so upset over the situation that he did not sleep all night. He would not eat nor could he be entertained by his usual custom of enjoying his private, instrumental musical ensemble. Early the next morning the king rushed to the den and weepingly called to Daniel, asking him whether he had been saved by his God, vs. 20. Daniel remained courteous to the king and assured him that, not only had he been spared from the hungry lions, but Jehovah God had sent a messenger (angel) to comfort him, vs. 22. Darius was overjoyed and commanded that God's prophet be removed from danger and that all those who had contrived this plot against Daniel be cast into the den of lions. And so they were, along with their wives and children who were immediately overpowered by the hungry lions and eaten and their bones crushed. Thereafter Darius issued a decree commanding that Daniel's God be held in awe and honor throughout the entire kingdom. Daniel continued to prosper through Darius' reign as well as that of the Persian, King Cyrus.

IV. What is the significance of Daniel's lions-den experience? We, of course, do not face being thrown in with a pride of hungry lions for our faith in our Lord Jesus Christ, but if we are true and faithful in our allegiance to the lordship of our Lord, then we can expect to face humiliation on occasion, II Tim. 3:12. There are at least three reasons for this experience, I believe. **One**, Satan is still alive and well in our day. True, his end is assured by the sacrifice of Jesus on the cross, but, we are, "to be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walks about, seeking whom he may devour," I Pet. 5:8. **Two**, we are assured that God will take care of our every need through every possibility, including physical death itself, if we have placed our faith in God's only Son, Christ Jesus, John 3:16-18. **Three**, when the Jewish remnant is facing annihilation during the Great Tribulation spoken of by Jesus at Matt. 24:1-3, 14-15, 29-31, they can remember Daniel's safety in the den of lions and his three friends coming through the smelting furnace unscathed. Their faith will turn them to Jesus as God's Messiah, and they will be saved from the fire, I Thes. 1:6-8; Jude 22-23. We believers will be taken up to be with the Lord before the Great Tribulation begins, I believe, I Cor. 15:51-52; I Thes. 4:13-18; 5:2, 4, 9-11.

I. Beginning with Chap. 7 Daniel's message (from God) portrays, not the mainly historical narrative of the first six chapters, but the future from Daniel's day to the very culmination of the present world order. In other words, Daniel received God's prophetic view of how he (God) will control mankind's eventual destiny. Chapters 7 through 12 contain visions which God gave to Daniel during the reigns of Belshazzar, Cyrus and Darius over Babylon. For clarity, apparently, Daniel chose to place these visions together at the end of his prophecy rather than integrate them into the historical section, Chapters 1-6. The one prime exception to this pattern of the entire prophecy is the interpretation of Nebuchadnezzar's dream in Chap. 2 concerning the image of gold, silver, brass, iron, and iron-clay. Recall that Daniel was very intelligent and well-trained. He was initially chosen for this very reason to serve King Nebuchadnezzar. As each successive ruler over Babylon and its successors, Persia and Media came to power, Daniel was held in high esteem and served as an upper echelon political officer under each leader. Daniel's long life (over 90), his utter devotion to Jehovah God, and his wisdom (perception) gave him much valuable experience which God used to reveal a unique prophetic message for God's people throughout all the years following his death. The importance of Daniel's message to all humanity is attested to by our Lord Jesus Christ's reference to Daniel's prophecy Matt. 24:1-31; Mark 13:1-27. It is clear from these New Covenant references of our Lord that Daniel is prophesying of all the period from then until Jesus' second return to earth for his believers, John 14:1-7. Daniel's prophecy cannot be overly stressed in its importance for understanding all of Bible prophecy. For example, as we shall see in Chap. 9, Jesus' reference to the "times of the Gentiles be fulfilled" is revealed, Lk 21:24; Rom. 11:11; 25-36.

II. As noted above, Daniel was blessed with an intellectual curiosity and a thirst for knowledge of God's will, Matt 5:6. When Belshazzar succeeded his forefather, Nebuchadnezzar, the first change in Babylonian sovereignty took place in Daniel's experience, and his curiosity about the future burned within his mind. In the first year of Belshazzar's reign, the prophet's yearning to know more of God's plan for humanity became so intense that he had "a dream and visions" as he slept. The dream became the singular thought for Daniel so that he could not get it out of his mind. (The original language [Aramaic] states that he was "trampled or stomped" by the dream.) He was then moved to write this chapter of his prophecy. His vision began when the winds from all directions blew upon "the great sea," (Mediterranean). As the winds blew, there came forth four great beasts from the water, and each beast had its own particularities making each one different. The first beast was like a lion with wings. As Daniel observed this beast, its wings were plucked off, and its heart became a man's heart. If we note the life of Nebuchadnezzar again at Chap. 4:16,34, we now know that the first beast was Nebuchadnezzar and his Babylonian empire. This fact reveals that, therefore, the four beasts beginning

the sequence of rulers in Daniel's visions represent the four metal components of Nebuchadnezzar's dream in Chap. 2, gold (Babylon), silver (Media-Persia), brass (Graeco-Macedonia), and iron (Rome). Noteworthy is the fact that God's revelation of these rulers and kingdoms relate them to savage beasts. Gold was a lion, silver a bear, brass a leopard or panther, and iron made up of several components. The fourth beast (Rome) was different in that it was exceedingly more powerful (had iron teeth) than the first three. History has unfolded the secrets of the truths which God revealed to Daniel, his prophet. Great was the materialistic glory that was Babylon's with its hanging garden which is today considered one of the seven wonders of the ancient world. The city was surrounded by a three hundred foot high wall wide enough for four pairs of horses to pass together side by side. Literacy was high and an expansive library was maintained in Babylon. Indoor plumbing with brass fittings have been discovered by modern archeologists indicating that the Babylonians were people of considerable affluence. The glory of it all was too much for the founder of the wealthy empire, Nebuchadnezzar, and he became mentally deranged and lived like a beast in the woods for seven years. He then became mentally well and was restored to his throne.

III. The second beast was like a bear and represented the silver arms in Nebuchadnezzar's Chap. 2 dream image. This beast represented the Media-Persia empire which Daniel's dream indicated would have "three ribs in its mouth between its teeth." The three ribs were the three kingdoms which would be conquered and controlled by Media-Persia, Babylon, Lydia, and Egypt. The bear is a lumbering, slow-moving but powerful force. One of its leaders, Xerxes, led his army of 300,000 troops accompanied by the soldiers' families! No wonder they were so slow! The third beast was likened to a leopard or panther and was the brass of Nebuchadnezzar's dream. It came as the Graeco-Macedonian empire with the young Alexander the Great as its leader. His forte as a military genius and strategist was his ability to move a huge military force with kinetic speed and agility. Alexander died in his early thirties from alcohol and venereal diseases after having conquered the entire area. The "four heads" in vs. 6 represent the four-way split of Alexander's empire after his death. His period of prominence came in the biblical intertestamental period between the Old and New Covenants. During this period the Jews underwent severe persecution and abuse under the Egyptians and Syrians. The fourth beast, the iron legs (Rome) of Nebuchadnezzar's image was different in that it covers a longer period and a much larger area than all the other beasts combined. This beast is haughty, proud, pompous and blasphemous. However, all four represent "the times of the Gentiles," Lk 21:24. In vss. 9-14 Daniel is told that there would be an introduction of the Ancient of days by the heavenly throne, vs. 9 (Rev. 1:14; 4; 5). At this point Israel is about to undergo a time of ultimately severe persecution, Matt. 24:21. God at this time will deal with the earth's people in judgment. The nations which have grown out of the "glory that was Rome" are the "ten horns," vs. 20. Born from this group of nations will come "another little horn" who will be the "son of perdition," II Thes. 2:3-4. This ultimate evil one will be in charge of world affairs for a "time and times and the dividing of [a] time," vs. 25. "Time" used here equals one year, and, therefore, "times" equals two years, and "dividing of [a] time" equals a portion of a year equally divided, six months, a total of three and one-half years. This evil one will be against Christ by claiming to be (imitate) Christ, and the Jews will accept him as the Messiah, John 5:43; II Thes. 2:3-4,11. We who trust Jesus Christ will not be on earth during that three plus years. We will be with our Lord, I Cor. 15:51-52; I Thes. 4:13-18; 5:9-11.

Mar. 2, 2003

"Trouble Ahead for the Jews"

Dan. 8

Couples Class
Wendell Alford,
Teacher

I. Our review last session of Chap. 7 took place in the first year of Belshazzar's reign, and today in Chap. 8 Daniel sees a vision two years later in the third year of the reign of Belshazzar. All of the events prophesied in this chapter happened after God's vision to Daniel except the prototype of the final appearance of the "man of sin" (II Thes. 2:3) portrayed in this chapter by "the little horn," Antiochus Epiphanes. The explanation of Daniel's vision was told the prophet by none other than God's messenger (angel), Gabriel himself. Here in Daniel's prophecy Gabriel appears for the first time in the Bible. However, he appears twice in the New Covenant, at Lk 1:5-20 to Zacharias to tell him that Elizabeth will bear John the Baptist, and at Lk 1:26-38 to Mary to tell her that she will bear our Lord Jesus. In both of these appearances in the New Testament, the angel Gabriel actually announces the names of the new infants, John and Jesus. I mention these three relatively rare appearances of Gabriel (He comes again later in Daniel.) in God's Word to lend importance to the vision of God to Daniel in this Chap. 8 of his prophecy. Perhaps the main importance of the events involved in this chapter is the general division which they instituted between the "western world" and the "eastern world," the Orient (Asia) and Occident (Europe). As we have witnessed in our lifetimes, this general division still exists. In recent years (decades) Israel has allied with the West, primarily because the United States and Britain were the chief sponsors of Israel's becoming a nation again at the end of WWII after millennia of the lack of nationhood. From a human viewpoint the United States has sustained Israel's economy since the 1940s with billions of dollars per year. Actually, God's will for Israel as a nation is being fulfilled as he promised Abraham, Gen. 12:1-4. We must, in order to understand Daniel's prophecy, not lose sight of the fact that God has never forgotten Israel as a people, as a nation, Rom. 11:25-32. But Israel's people (the Jews) have, are, and will be persecuted horribly before they accept God's Messiah, Jesus the Christ. Jesus said that at the end, "then shall be great tribulation, such as was not since the beginning of the world to this time, no nor ever shall be," Matt. 24:21.

II. We should note that the language of the text of Daniel begins again here to appear in Hebrew. Aramaic was used after 2:3 until the beginning of Chap. 8. Daniel's vision in Belshazzar's third year of power appeared to the prophet at Shushan, Elam along the banks of the Ulai River. In the vision he saw on the river bank a male sheep which had two high horns, but one horn was higher than the other. The ram pushed away from Babylon to the west, north, and south but not to the east where Persia was, the bear of Chap. 7. While Daniel pondered the might of the two-horned ram, a "he goat" came from the west with great strength, vs. 5, and "with a notable horn (power) between his eyes." Not only was this "he goat" powerful, but he moved rapidly with his military forces. So fast did he move that Persia (the slow bear) would not even consider defending herself against him, let alone expanding in that direction,

westward. And who was this powerful, agile military genius? None other than Alexander the Great from Greece. His expansion eastward represented the demise of the silver part of Nebuchadnezzar's image and the rise of the Graeco-Macedonia (brass) empire, the four wings (speed, "touched not the ground") of the panther (leopard), Dan. 7:6. When the he goat (Alexander the Great) came into the Babylonian area, he overcame General Xerxes of Persia at a great battle at Thermopylae and his fleet of three hundred ships at Salamis. Thus, the last effort of the eastern forces to expand westward came to an end. In effect, that division still stands today. The "he goat" was very strong, but the great horn was broken at the very height of his power, vs. 8. Why? Alexander the Great was a dynamic, forceful person who worried about running out of "any world left to conquer," but in 323 BC he engaged in a drinking binge which lasted for some time. He was celebrating his entering the great city of Babylon where that famous builder of the first great world empire lived, the legendary Nebuchadnezzar. Even at the young age of thirty-two, his physical system was weakened by the alcohol and a fever resulting from a sexually related disease (noted in Chap. 7). On June 13, 323 BC, (2,322 years ago) the great Alexander, who had never lost a military battle, died of immorality.

III. After Alexander's death, his empire was divided, or, as Daniel put it, "And for it came up four notable ones toward the four winds of heaven," vs. 8. The four generals to whom the Graeco-Macedonia Empire was divided were Cassander (Alexander's brother-in-law who took Macedonia and Greece (the European portion), Lysimachus who took a large portion of Asia Minor (modern Turkey), Seleucus who took Asia (Near East), and Ptolemy who took Egypt and North Africa. The "little horn" in vs. 9 is not the person with the same designation in Chap. 7, but the "little horn" of Chap. 8 was Antiochus IV, Antiochus Epiphanes, and son of Antiochus the Great. Epiphanes especially hated the Jews, and, as a result, moved into Jerusalem shortly after coming to the throne in 175 BC. He made a deliberate effort to exterminate all Jews (Sound familiar to Hitler?). He could not kill all the Jews, of course, but he humiliated them in such a way that he is likened to the Antichrist who will ally with the Jews surreptitiously at the time of Jesus' return to earth for us believers, John 14:1-3; I Cor. 15:51-52, 58. Epiphanes erected an image of Jupiter in the very Holy Place in the Jewish Temple in Jerusalem and poured gravy made from hog meat all over the sacred vessels in the Temple. (Remember Belshazzar's misuse of the holy vessels.) He forbade circumcision and observance of the Sabbath under penalty of death. Pagan sacrifices were ordered in every town and village in Judaea, and every month a search was made to discover whether any Jew possessed a copy of the Law or had circumcised his children. It was against this sacrosanct persecution that the Maccabean household under Mattathias rebelled against the Seleucid political leader, Epiphanes, and which eventually brought about the release of Judaea from Syrian control. As bad as this tyrant was, he is hardly worth comparing with the Antichrist who is to come at the end time. The only ones who will escape the evil time that will exceed the misery of all other times, according to our Lord Jesus Christ (Matt. 24:21), are those who are trusting the suffering Jesus bore for us, the Good News of his death, burial and resurrection to eternal life.

Mar. 9, 2003
Expanded

"Daniel's Prayer"
Dan. 9:1-19

Couples Class
Wendell Alford,
Teacher

I. The time in history when Daniel had this experience was during the first year of Darius' reign over the Chaldeans, about 538 BC. The prophet was so concerned about what would happen to his people, the Jews, that he gave attention to the information available to him in the writings of the prophets. Daniel is now about ninety years of age, and he wonders how long his people will be without a homeland. He had learned from an earlier vision (in Chap. 8) that the Jews would experience a time of much trouble under "the little horn," Antiochus Epiphanes. How long would the God of heaven permit his people to be humiliated and abused? Daniel did the two things which reveal God's will, he studied God's Word and was thereby led to pray. Of this chapter, the first nineteen verses are given to the prayerful concern of Daniel for him and his people, and the last eight contain the answer for which the prophet prayed. The Word of God which Daniel studied included the prophet Jeremiah. There he learned that the Jews would be exiled for seventy years, vs. 2; Jer. 25:9-13; 29:4-13. This information would indicate to Daniel that the exile period would soon be over. Would God then reestablish Israel as a glorious nation as it was under David and his son Solomon? We should recall, in relation to Daniel's concern about the nation Israel's future, that Jesus' disciples were also concerned about the exact same proposition at Acts 1:28. In the later instance Jesus was about to return to the Father with the promise that he would return for them (and us believers, John 14:1-3) after sending God's Holy Spirit's power to enable them to witness to God's Good News of Jesus Christ throughout the whole world. The disciples asked the Lord then, "Lord, will you at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel?" Jesus told them that their first and immediate priority was to share the Gospel, not to worry about the reestablishment of Israel at that time. We should note, however, that our Lord did not dismiss the possibility that Israel would, in the future, be reestablished. His emphasis was that, at that time, the whole world first receive God's Good News concerning the ecclesia, Matt. 24:14. The "little horn" vision of Dan. 8:9-12 had made Daniel wary of Israel's immediate future. At the end of that vision he "fainted and was sick for days" before he could return to the king's business (Belshazzar's). Even so, none understood the importance of the vision, 8:27. Now he has come under the rule of another king (Darius), and the prophet seeks another message from his God (and ours).

II. After studying God's Word, Daniel, "set my face unto the Lord my God, and made my confession, and said, 'O Lord, the great and awesome God, keeping the covenant and loving kindness to them that love him, and to them that keep his commandments,'" vs. 4, and see John 14:15-16. He confessed that he and the other Jews had sinned, committed iniquity, done wickedly, rebelled, departed from God's precepts, and not heeded God's servants, his prophets. Daniel further confessed that righteousness belonged to God, but that they, the Jews, were confused at that time, including all the Jews of the diaspora as well as those still in Jerusalem. They had been

scattered because of their trespasses against Jehovah God. Daniel appealed to God's mercies and forgiveness even though they had rebelled against him and refused to obey the voice of the Lord their God. The prophet admitted that their current deplorable condition was of their own choosing, because they had not kept their oath written in the Law of Moses, vs. 11; Lev. 26:14-18. Jerusalem, the Jews' holy city and home, had undergone continuous disaster. They, the Jews, knew the right according to God's will, for he had openly declared his desires for the Israelites in the Law of Moses. It had been written down for all to know, but the people had not conversed with their God (prayed) for strength to turn away from their iniquities and embrace the truth of God, vss. 11-13. The nature of God which Daniel confesses in vss. 14 and 16 is that God is the source of righteousness (See also Rom. 9:30-33.) that pleases the Lord, vs. 14, "the Lord our God is righteous," and vs. 16 "according to all thy righteousness." In vs. 11 Daniel states, "Yea, all Israel have transgressed thy law," and in vs. 20, "confessing my sin." [*italics mine-WA*] He said that every Jew had sinned including himself, and agrees with what Paul (God's Word) states at Rom. 3:23, "For all [including Gentiles as well] have sinned and come short of the glory of God." Also, at Gal. 3:22, "But the Scripture hath confirmed all under sin, that faith is needed in Jesus Christ." We shall examine God's response to Daniel's prayer next week.

III. The term "generation" appearing in Mk 13:30-31 can be confusing if not given a proper Scriptural context. Jesus said there, "Truthfully I say to you, that this generation [*my italics-WA*] shall not pass, till all these things be done." (Lk 21:32 provides the same statement.) I bring this to our attention with Dan. 9, because this "generation" is related to "the times of the Gentiles," Lk 21:24. In Psa. 22 which Jesus quoted while paying the sin debts of us believers by hanging and dying on the cross (Mk 15:34), the thirtieth verse states, "A seed shall serve him; it shall be accounted to the Lord (God) for a generation," [*my italics-WA*]. At Gal. 3:16 God's Word states that Jesus Christ is that seed which fulfills God's promise to Abraham, Gen. 22, especially Gen. 22:18. Further, at Acts 2:40, Peter referred to this generation (current) as a period during which those who are to be made right (reconciled) with God will do so by repenting of their sins and confessing that Jesus is Lord with immersion in Jesus' name as a symbol of that confession. This includes "as many as the Lord our God shall call," (the ekklesia), Acts 2:39b. This period of God's New Covenant (Heb. 8:7-13) is accounted (recounted) by God as a "generation" (a block of time) which is to be terminated by a time of sorrow and desolation spoken of by Daniel in his Chap. 9. Isaiah at 53:10 prophesied that, "Yet it pleased the Lord to bruise him [Jesus]; he hath put him to grief; when thou shalt make his soul an offering for sin, he shall see his [God's] seed [offspring, Son], he shall prolong his [God's] days, and the pleasure of the Lord [God] shall prosper in his hand." Our Lord Jesus Christ declared Daniel to be a [true] prophet, and that prophet's proclamation at Dan. 9:24-27 to be valid concerning events which are to happen at the end time when Jesus has promised to return for us believers, Matt. 24:15; Mk 13:14.

Mar. 23, 2003
Expanded

"Daniels Prayer Answered"
Dan. 9:20-27

Couples Class
Wendell Alford.
Teacher

I. Remember that last week God sent Gabriel to enlighten Daniel about the deep, profound concern the prophet had for his people, the Jews. One is reminded of the same earnest desire which Paul had for the same people in his letter to the believers at Rome. In this letter Paul expressed a love for them greater than love of his own life, Rom. 9:1-5. A part of Daniel's inquiry concerned "the holy mountain of my God," the Temple mount in Jerusalem as well as "my people Israel," vs. 20. While praying Daniel was informed by Gabriel, apparently in the form of a man, that he had come to answer the questions he (Daniel) had asked of Almighty God. "O Daniel, I am now come forth to give thee skill [the ability to] and understanding," vs. 22. "When you began to plead for understanding, God sent me to satisfy that understanding, because you are greatly beloved. Therefore, give heed to the information in the following vision," vs. 23. Verses 24-27 communicate a volume of information without which much of the end time prophecy (Theologians call it "eschatology.") would have no scriptural key. Jesus referred to this passage specifically at Matt. 24:15 and at Mk 13:14 which give Dan. 9:27; 11:31; and 12:11 extremely important significance, I believe. Gabriel begins his answer to Daniel's plea by saying that seventy sevens (490 years or 70 weeks) are involved in the future of the Jews and Jerusalem. That is the period through which the Jews must finish the transgression, and to make an end of sins (forgiveness, see Matt. 18:22) and reconciliation. Further, the end of that time of seventy sevens will bring in "everlasting righteousness." Also, that long period of time will be concluded by the ending of the prophecy involved in this vision and the anointing of "the holy place, [holy of holies]." The chief confusion of Daniel appears to have been the problem of reconciling the seventy years of captivity in Babylon (prophesied by Jer. 29:10) and the period to be covered by the kingdoms indicated by Nebuchadnezzar's image of gold, silver, brass, iron, and iron mixed with clay. Daniel was, of course, hoping for a return of the Jews to Jerusalem and the reestablishing of a glorious nation, Israel, as God had promised concerning David, Ezek. 37:1,21-28: 41-46; John 10:16. As we consider the sheer mathematics of the revelation in these four verses (24-27) of Daniel, we must keep in mind that by no means can we manipulate these figures to determine the day or hour of the coming of our Lord Jesus to earth again for us.

II. Many have attempted to calculate the exact date of Jesus' return, but they (Militz, Alsted, Jurieu, Bengel, Ann Lee, William Miller [founder of the modern Adventist sects], Claas Epp, Ellen G. White, etc.) have been misled. Jesus himself said that God the Father would not reveal that date, Mk 13:32; I Thes. 5:2. I believe that the mystery element (unknown) in the total time frame determining Jesus' return has to do with "the times of the Gentiles" referred to by Jesus at Lk 21:24. When John the Baptist gave his message that the kingdom of God was "at hand," the Messiah, Jesus, was on earth to receive the Jews and to establish that kingdom. However, the evidence is that God would not follow through on his

promise at that time unless Israel as a nation would willingly accept the Messiah, Jesus, Matt. 11:10-19. Nor will he ever, I believe. But during the great tribulation, the Jews can only trust, because complete annihilation will be the only other option, Matt. 24:15-22. The seventy sevens period, then, has been interrupted by the taking out from among the Gentiles a people of God through Jesus Christ and any Jews who will accept Jesus as God's Messiah, Savior, during that time. Peter and Paul are examples of the latter, and the Couples Class are some examples of the former. The interruption of the seventy sevens period in Dan. 9:24 will include the Messiah's coming and a hesitation of the Messiah's reign on earth, vs. 26. Also, Jerusalem will be destroyed, vs. 26. (That happened in 70 AD.)

III. There is one week left of the seventy sevens which were interrupted by the Messiah's being "cut off." That week (seven years) is to take place at the time of Jesus' return to earth. At that time an impostor of Christ will appear who will be the one to whom Paul referred at II Thes. 2:3 as "the man of sin," "the son of perdition." He is the "little horn" of Dan. 7:24-28, the beast of Rev. 13:11-18, and a Roman of Nebuchadnezzar's image of iron and clay, part religious and part political. His title at Dan. 9:26-27 is "the prince" of the people (all unbelievers). This man of sin will make an alliance (covenant) with the Jews at the beginning of the seventieth week (seven years) of Daniel's seventy sevens, vs. 27; John 5:43-47, and immediately after God has removed his ekklesia (all believers) from the earth. In the middle of the seven year covenant ("in the midst of the week", three and one-half years), the "prince," the Antichrist, will break his seven year covenant with the Jews by placing an idol image in the Holy Place in Jerusalem, vs. 27. At that time God's Holy Spirit will not be residing in any of the earth's inhabitants. The lack of God's Spirit and the abominable desecration of the Holy Place will then create the awful period of the "abomination of desolation" referred to at Dan. 9:27, Matt. 24:15-26; [Jer. 30:7]; Mk 13:14-23; II Thes. 2:7. At the end of the tribulation, there will be a dark sun, and an invisible moon, and the stars will be in different motions than usual for them. Then will all be made right by Jesus' return to earth with all his ekklesia including the Jews who have come to rely upon the righteousness and lordship of Jesus Christ, Mk 13:24-27; Acts 2:19-21,36; Rom. 9:30-33. The kingdom of God under the lordship of Jesus, his Son, will then be "at hand" again, and, this time, it will be accepted by all of God's people, Rom. 10:13; 11:25-36. We believers cannot know the day or hour when Jesus will come for us, but we can recognize the season or nearness of his appearance, Mk 13:28-31; Lk 21:28; I Thes. 5:4.

IV. In summary, three concepts should be remembered: 1) The seventieth of the seventy weeks is to come after the Messiah, Jesus, is "cut off," crucified, 2) The "times of the Gentiles" will follow when God will select a bride for his only Son's wife, the ecclesia, and, 3) "The prince" (the Antichrist) will, at first, be accepted by the Jews as the Messiah. He will be a Roman, another "little horn" (Dan. 7:8), not the first "little horn," Antiochus, Dan. 8:9.

Mar. 30, 2003

"The Jews in the Latter Days"
Dan. 10

Couples Class
Wendell Alford,
Teacher

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

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

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

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

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

Apr. 6, 2003

"Prophetic Stirrings"
Dan. 11

Couples Class
Wendell Alford,
Teacher

I. The general vision which began in Chap. 10 continues through the remainder of Daniel's prophecy. It is very important that the predictions in this prophecy be associated with the Jews, for at the beginning of the vision the one imparting the vision to Daniel said to the prophet, "Now I am come to make thee understand what shall happen to thy people, [the Jews] in the latter days: for yet the vision is for many days [yet to come]," Dan. 10:14. [My italics-WA] Note also that the angel Gabriel was God's messenger who revealed the vision regarding the fulfillment of the long period of "the times of the Gentiles," Dan. 9:21-27; Lk 21:24. In contrast, the angel Michael is the messenger directly involved in Dan. 10:13, 21 and 12:1. At Dan. 10:21 and 12:1 Michael is mentioned as "Michael your prince," and, "- - at that time shall Michael stand up, the great prince which standeth for [watches over] the children of thy people [the Jews]." Michael is also named in Jude 9 as the messenger of God who withstood the Devil regarding the body of Moses, and at Rev. 12:7 he also is the angel who leads God's forces (God's angels) to war with Satan and his angels. The results of that angelic war is to be the expulsion of Satan and his cohorts from heaven. Driven from heaven, Satan comes to earth with his angels to direct the Antichrist in the great end-time tribulation, Rev. 12:9-12. While we understand that this vision of Dan. 10-12 relates specifically to the Jews, there is an ideological bridge between this portion of Daniel's prophecy and the New Covenant. One of the main promises of the New Covenant is related to the resurrection of God's only begotten Son, Jesus Christ, I Cor. 6:14; II Cor. 4:14. At Dan. 12:1-2 Daniel is told that there will be a resurrection of all "thy people" [the Jews], both those who are righteous to everlasting life and those who are not righteous to "shame and everlasting contempt." Resurrection, as such, is not stressed in the Old Covenant. However, the concept is noted elsewhere at Job 14:13-15; Psa. 16:9-10; [Acts 2:25-28]; II Sam. 12:24. And, as we shall see, there are other parallels such as the appearance of Antiochus Epiphanes (Dan. 8:9-12) who persecuted the Jews between and Old and New Covenants and the final persecutor of the Jews [and the entire earth], the Antichrist of II Thes. 2:3-4.

II. Note that this Chap. 11 begins with "also" which indicates that the vision begun in Chap. 10 is being continued. An angel (not named specifically) came to Darius the Mede to encourage and strengthen the king. The angel then told Daniel that four Persian kings would follow Cyrus. The four began with Cambyses in about 529 BC and ended with Xerxes who invaded Greece in about 480 BC. When the latter was defeated, Media-Persia ceased being a world empire. The mighty king of vs. 11:3 is the military genius who established his western world dominion beginning in 323 BC, the "he-goat" of Dan. 8:5, Alexander the Great. The "king of the south" is the successor of another of Alexander's generals, Seleucid, vs. 11:6. Vs. 11:7 speaks of another Ptolemy ruler who carried large supplies of gold and silver to Egypt from Syria. His sons were

infighters who practiced incest, greed, and unimaginable intrigue. [I read in our edition (1964) of Britannica Encyclopaedia an article about the fourteen Ptolemys. Truthfully, the information there is far more pathetic (sick) than the worst of our "soap operas." Ptolemy II (Philadelphus) married his own full sister, Arsinoe. We examined Antiochus Epiphanes of the Ptolemy Dynasty in Dan. 8, III, and his attempt to decimate or abolish all the Jews.] To form an alliance between two of the warring families, Ptolemy Philadelphus of Egypt gave his daughter Berenice in marriage to Antiochus Theos of Syria. Antiochus was already married to Laodice whom he divorced. After two years Ptolemy Philadelphus died, and Antiochus Theos put away Berenice with her son and took back his first wife, Laodice. She, then, poisoned Antiochus Theos and ordered the death of Berenice and her son, and afterwards Laodice put her own son, Seleucus Callinicus, on the throne. This complicated interplay between Alexander's successors continues from Dan. 11:3:18 where Daniel is told about "a prince for his own behalf shall cause the reproach offered by him to cease." This "prince" is the rise of the Roman Empire.

III. In about 195 BC Antiochus the Great made a treaty with Egypt and gave his daughter Cleopatra to Ptolemy Epiphanes in marriage. In 170 BC Epiphanes entered Jerusalem, slew 100,000 Jews, took away the daily sacrifice at the Temple, and placed an image of Jupiter on the Holy Mount, vs. 31. Daniel relates this Epiphanes to a like figure who will appear, "even to the time of the end: because it is for a time appointed," vs. 35. Daniel's prophecy now gives full attention to the "man of sin," "the son of perdition," who is also described by God's Word at II Thes. 2:14, 8-12. Daniel's and Paul's accounts can be seen as the same, because of the similitude of their descriptions. This person will feel no obligation to anyone else, "the king will do according to his [own] will," vs. 36, and, "Who opposeth and exalteth himself above all that is called God, or that is worshipped; so that he is as God sitteth in the temple of God, showing himself that he is God," II Thes. 2:4. He will enter into "the glorious land" [Israel], and overcome many countries in the area. At last he will establish his headquarters between "the seas" [Mediterranean] and the "glorious holy mountain" [Jerusalem], but, "he shall come to his end, and none shall help him," vs. 11:45.

April 13, 2003

"Summary And Seal"
Dan. 12

Couples Class
Wendell Alford,
Teacher

I. Chap. 12 begins with the assertion of "a time of trouble, such as never was since there was a nation even to that same time," vs. 1. This reference can only be that same time to which Jesus referred at Matt. 24:21, and see also at Jer. 30:7. Now, note the last part of Dan. 12:1, "at that time thy [Daniel's] people [the Jews] shall be delivered, every one that shall be found written in the book [elected or chosen]." The last clause of Jer. 30:7 (cited above) is, "but he (Jacob's people, the Jews) shall be saved out of it." This salvation of the Jews agrees with Rom. 11:25-32 where Paul (God's Word) quotes Isa. 59:20-21. Note especially Rom. 11:28 and relate it to Dan. 12:1b, "every one that shall be found written in the book," i.e., elected. Among those "elected" will be, I believe, all those who have exercised faith in Almighty God including such notables as Abraham, Moses, David, Samuel, etc., listed in Heb. 11. They will join us trusters in Jesus Christ with Jesus, God's Messiah, after Jesus comes for us, Heb. 11:39-40. Daniel wanted to know more details (vs. 12:8), but the Lord said to him, "Go thy way, Daniel: for the words are closed up and sealed till the time of the end," Dan. 12:9,13. We know, through our faith, that Jesus is coming for us and that we are already in God's kingdom because of our acceptance of the lordship of our Lord, Jesus the Christ, Savior!

II. We noted the concept of a resurrection at the end of the age in Dan. 11. Above we stated that the Lord would not reveal to Daniel everything the prophet wanted to know about the final destiny of mankind. Now that the Lord has revealed his spiritual salvation to anyone who will trust his Son, Jesus Christ, and the events at the end of the age through John on the Isle of Patmos, we can understand more of God's will for people of the world. But how will God treat his Old Covenant saints at the end time? To begin such an understanding we should remember the Word at Dan. 12:1 where God promises Daniel that "thy people, (the Jews) shall be delivered," i.e., "many of them that sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to everlasting contempt," Dan. 12:2-3. There were many Jews who accepted Jesus as the Messiah during his earthly ministry, but God's plan of salvation through Christ was not complete until Jesus said on the cross at his death, "It is finished: and he bowed his head and gave up the ghost," John 19:30. Following Jesus' death and resurrection "the graves were opened, and many bodies of the [Old Covenant] saints who slept [had died] arose," Matt. 27:52-53. In I Pet. 3:18-21 God's Word tells us that Jesus "went and preached (proclaimed God's truth in Christ) unto the spirits in prison (Old Covenant Jews)." Further, God's Word tells us through Ezekiel that, "the whole house of Israel - - - O my people, I will open your graves and order you to come out. And ye shall know that I am the Lord when I have brought you out of your graves," Ezek. 37:10-14. The only impossible thing for God to do is to tell an untruth! (Numb. 23:19; Heb. 6:18) God said, "For God so loved the world that whosoever believes in him shall have everlasting [spiritual] life [with God]!" (John 3:16)

III. Rev.1-20: What was hidden from Daniel at Dan. 12:9, about 600 years before Jesus revealed the information in the last book of God's total recorded communication to mankind, is uncovered in the Revelation of Jesus through John, the Lord's servant. More and more attention has been given to end-time events since WWII, especially in the last two or three decades. Between the two World Wars many Bible students believed that WWI, which was hailed as "the war to end all wars," would bring in a period of peace. That period of peace would create a world situation in which the Messiah would come and set up his promised Kingdom of God on earth. This possibility of Bible interpretation was, in part, in keeping with the early period of church history in the minds of some. However, Origen (AD 185-254), in contrast, spoke against Chiliasm which doctrine involves a literal exposition of the eschatological pictures of the New Covenant. It includes the teaching of the millennium, the period of one thousand years given in Rev. 20. Later, Augustine (AD 354-430) made his contribution to Christian philosophy after the Roman Empire had high-handedly taken over the Christian Religion as its own under Constantine I in c. AD 323. Augustine essentially made the Christian Church synonymous with the Kingdom of God. In other words, the Roman Church disallowed God's ever maintaining the Jews as a nation and dealing with them as a congregate people again. Further, the Roman Church in 1870 determined the head of that group to be infallible in matters of religious faith and morals. The Roman Church still forbids its members to believe in the millennial period as a kingdom period in which God's early Covenant with the Jews will be fulfilled. (Catechism of the [Roman] Catholic Church, 1994, p. 177, Paragraph 676, "The [Roman] Church has rejected even modified forms of this falsification of the kingdom to come under the name of millenarianism, especially the 'intrinsically perverse' political form of a secular messianism.") They take this position because they presume the Roman Church to be the same as the Kingdom of God. I make this point to say that Christendom is far from unified in its understanding of what the Revelation of Jesus Christ involves, Matt. 20:24-28.

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

April 27, 2003

"God's Final Messenger"
Hebrews 1

Couples Class
Wendell Alford,
Teacher

I. Introduction: The usual data (where, when, authorship, and circumstance) regarding the Book of Hebrews (in sermonic form rather than as an epistle, letter) are not as obvious as some epistles which form God's New Covenant. The author, for instance, is not explicit within the Book itself. Different Bible scholars believe the author to have been Paul, Luke, Barnabas, Apollos, Silas, Philip, or Priscilla, wife of Aquila. [My choice is Paul and is best discussed at Chap. 13 - WA.] From the burden of the message of Hebrews, one must conclude that the writer diligently developed a critique of choosing Judaism (based upon the Law and legal rites) as an appropriate faith when compared to faith in Jesus Christ and the personal, individual leading of God's Holy Spirit. The extensive quotations from the Old Covenant writings indicate a person well versed in them. Also, he or she apparently had been an ardent believer in the Old Covenant before accepting Jesus as the Messiah. At the first Pentecost after Jesus' resurrection, practically every believer in Jesus Christ had been Jewish in faith. These early Jewish Christians were probably undergoing fierce persecution, socially and physically, both from Jews and Romans. Christ had not returned immediately to establish his kingdom, and the people needed to be reassured that Jesus was indeed the Messiah whom the Jews were and had been expecting for centuries. The Temple was still standing which Jesus had said would be destroyed. This fact leads one to believe, therefore, that Hebrews was written shortly before 70 AD, probably about 60-62 AD.

II. That God has communicated with the human beings whom he has created from Adam and Eve to the present, there can be no doubt. The Holy Bible contains that testimony from Genesis through Revelation. That account conveys two distinct methods which God has used to converse with humankind. In the first instance, God chose certain individuals who either by birth (fathers, progenitors of the lineage of Jesus Christ and/or holders and revealers of faith in Jehovah God, Creator of all, and the only true God) or by special selections of God and who were and are known as prophets, forthtellers of God's will to people. During this period when God communicated thusly, is designated as the Old Covenant era. God used a variety of methods to reveal his will at that time. On one occasion, for example, he put into Cyrus, king of Persia and a Gentile, the desire to write a decree that Jews who had been captives in Persia be allowed to return and rebuild the Temple in Jerusalem for centralized worship there, II Chron. 36:22-23. Cyrus' successor, Darius, even supported financially the completion of the Temple, Ezra 6:1-15. Another example of the variety of ways God communicated with his people is found in Numbers 22 when God through a donkey spoke to Balaam and rebuked him for his intention to curse God's people and honor Balak instead. God spoke through dreams and visions, and, of course, actually visited personally with Adam and Eve in the beginning before they elected through sin to break the personal relationship.

III. In our period, the New Covenant era, God chose a new way to

communicate with his human creation. Rather than leave the crucial matter to others, he came himself in the person of his Son, Jesus Christ. This arrangement puts God in the very heart of mankind's spiritual condition, being separated from God spiritually. Jesus is heir of all of creation, because through Jesus God made his creation (KJV - worlds). Jesus is the epitome of God's glory, much higher than God's messengers, the angels. The universe is actually held together and kept in natural motion through the power of Jesus Christ. Through that same power he also makes available a completely perfect human spirit for those persons who trust Jesus for spiritual salvation. To prove Jesus' superiority over angels, Hebrews declares that he sits at God's right hand (a metaphor indicating that Jesus' authority is equal to God's himself), and that Jesus' inheritance is above all others, because Jesus is God's firstborn Son, Heb. 1:4-6. The text here quotes Psa. 2:7; II Sam. 7:14, and the Hebrew original (LXX) of Deut. 32:43 which states that all the angels will worship God's only begotten Son. Believers are not to worship angels Col. 2:18, for we outrank angels in that we are, by adoption, God's children and joint heirs with Jesus, Rom. 8:14-17,29. (Please note in this connection Lk 10:18-20; II Cor. 11:14-15; Gal. 1:6-9.)

IV. After relegating angels to an inferior position to Jesus and his fellow heirs (believers in Jesus as Savior), the word now further elaborates Jesus' superiority. In vs. 8 it states that God's Son, Jesus, (quoting Psa. 45:6-7) now holds God's scepter which indicates supreme authority as God, forever and ever. This scepter (authority) is based upon the righteousness of Jesus Christ. That perfection of rightness is attributed by God to every person who trusts Jesus for eternal at oneness with God (spiritual eternal life). However, those who do not make Jesus' righteousness their own through faith in him, will perish as garments wear out, vss. 8-12. Returning again to comparing the angels with the Savior in vs. 13, the writer states that no angel has ever been told by God (quoting Psa. 110:1; see also Matt. 22:41-46) to sit at God's right hand until God's enemies are all subdued, I Cor. 15:24-28. All angels are God's servants who are at God's bidding to serve all who have accepted God's Son, Jesus Christ. Those who are heirs (recipients of God's spiritual salvation through faith in his only begotten Son) of God with Jesus are to share in God's glory for ever and ever, John 17:5, 22-23. We should live in the hope of that coming glory, Col. 1:27. [For a conclusion for today's lesson, I quote from Peter's second letter, 3:3/18. "Knowing this first, that there shall come in the last days mockers, walking according to their own lusts, and saying, 'Where is the promise of his coming, for since the fathers died, all things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation.' For this they willingly forget that by the word of God the heavens were of old, and the earth standing out of the water and in the water; whereby the world that then was, being overflowed with water, perished. - - - Seeing that all these things shall be dissolved, what manner of persons ought ye to be in all holy conduct and godliness, looking for and hastening toward the day of God. - - - seeing ye know these things before, beware lest ye lose your own sense of steadfastness, but grow in grace and knowledge of Jesus Christ."]

May 04, 2003

"Heeding God's Final Messenger"
Hebrews 2

Couples Class
Wendell Alford,
Teacher

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

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

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

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

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

May 11, 2003

"The Servant vs. the Son"
Hebrews 3

Couples Class
Wendell Alford,
Teacher

I. The author of Hebrews makes his position very clear as to the spiritual status of the Jewish Christians to whom the message was addressed. Note carefully the way the author refers to them. Because of the writer's having established in Chap. 2 the relationships of Jesus and those who trust him as Savior, he calls the readers sanctified (holy, set aside) siblings of Jesus. Those siblings are called out by God's calling from heaven (entered into the Lamb's Book of Life). No person can accept Jesus as God's Son and Savior unless the Holy Spirit makes that known and takes the initiative, John 6:41-45. The writer calls his readers again to give complete attention to the offices of Jesus, God's Messiah. He was/is God's Apostle (one sent with a special commission) and High Priest (communication and grace channel between God the Father and his children). God's Holy Spirit is the corroborating (makes certain) agent in the salvation experience. [At this point I want to make a part of this lesson the two contributions made last week concerning ways of better understanding how the three persons of the triune God (our Spiritual Father, Savior Son, and Comforter Paraclete) relate to each other: First, they are like the three facets of a man who can be, at the same time, a father, a husband, and an employee of a firm. Secondly, the triune nature of God is like water which can be, while water in each instance, a liquid, a solid (ice), and a gas (steam or atmospheric humidity). Bill Norman related the former and Charles Barrier the latter. Recall also that Jesus himself when talking to Nicodemus likened the Holy Spirit to the wind which cannot be seen, but his effects can be seen and heard, John 3:8.]

II. In vs. 2 it is declared that Jesus was faithful to God the Father who appointed him to come to earth and reconcile all who would trust him for eternal, spiritual life. Here Jesus' faithfulness is compared to the faithfulness of Moses in his time and place. However, in vss. 3-4 in continuing the comparison, Jesus is more worthy of more glory than Moses, because the Law came through Moses and was not made, initiated by him. In other words, the Jewish nation and the correct, acceptable rules of life (house) were built (created) by Jesus (God), and Moses simply received the house from Jesus. And truly, the one who created the house is more honorable than the nation (Israel) and the Law themselves which were created by God (Jesus). Everything that exists was created by Jesus, John 1:3,10,14. In vss. 5-6 Moses' faithfulness is reiterated concerning Moses' leadership of God's people, Israel, but note that his leadership was as a servant (slave) of Jesus and only symbolic of what would take place later when Jesus, God's Son, would himself come as the rightful heir of all God's people. But now the house (the people of God through trusting Jesus as Savior and following the leading of God's Holy Spirit) includes not only the flesh-and-blood descendants of Abraham, but also those and all others who relate to God through faith in his Son, Jesus.

III. The Hebrews writer, beginning in vs. 7, announces the second

warning which relates to a people keeping a living faith in God's Son, Jesus. That warning has to do with the "hardening of the heart" and the possible effects of such "hardening" on the future of believers. The author gives direct credit to God's Spirit as the one who told David in Psa. 95:7-11 that only those who remain faithful to God (Jesus) are the ones who will be given the opportunity to be a part of and enjoy God's "Day of Rest." Jesus came to establish the Kingdom of God on earth, and I believe that if the Jewish people had accepted him as king, the kingdom would have been established, literally and immediately. But the Jews, as a nation, rejected Jesus, and therefore Jesus' personal reign on earth was postponed. He now reigns on earth in the hearts of believers through the agency of his Holy Spirit. When on earth in human flesh, Jesus promised to return to earth, and at that time there will be no denying God's immediate establishing of Jesus personal reign over God's people who trust Jesus as God's only begotten Son. That will be God's "Day of Rest" for his people, Matt. 10:22; 24:13; Mk 13:13. The author is bringing to minds of the Jewish Christians their knowledge of how Moses led the children of Israel out of their slavery under the Egyptians, and how they rebelled against God's will for them in the Sinai Peninsula while Moses was on Mt. Sinai receiving the commandments of God. The Israelites' corporate spirit in the rebellion is characterized as one of provocation, i.e., they provoked God to anger by "hardening their hearts" against his will for them. They not only refused to go immediately to the land promised to them by God, but also worshiped an idol whom they gave credit for freeing them from slavery, Exod. 32:4. Because of this rebellion, all males who exercised the rebellious spirit died before reaching the promised land, Numb. 14:26-35. Moses himself was permitted to see the promised land but not to enter it, Deut. 34:4.

IV. The author beginning in vs. 12 again stresses that trusters in Jesus (brothers) should be heedful that their faith in Jesus inspires them to continue to practice following Jesus' (the Holy Spirit's) leadership. To deny that leadership will discredit ones qualification to "enter into" God's special period, the "Day of Rest." We should daily encourage one another in our faith, vs. 13. Today, during the New Covenant period, we believers can lose the joy of our salvation by not looking forward daily to the promised joy of God through our faith in Jesus Christ. We are to love God and believe his promise to us in Jesus and patiently wait for the fruition of that promise. Just as the Israelites were promised a physical reward (a land flowing with milk and honey) for acting on God's promise, so are we promised by God a glorious future for living in faith through our experience of physical death. Our faith is to endure continuously until Jesus has our mansions prepared, and then we will live by sight rather than faith! We will then be living in the very presence of God himself! As God's Word promises, "And I saw a new heaven and a new earth: for the first heaven and the first earth were passed away; - - - and I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, - - - I heard a great voice out of heaven saying, 'Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and he will dwell with them; they shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them, and be their God. There shall be no more tears, death, sorrow, crying, nor pain, Rev.21:1/4.'"

May 18, 2003

"The Day of Rest"
Hebrews 4

Couples Class
Wendell Alford,
Teacher

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

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

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

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

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

Remember our context in Hebrews
Read Acts 15:1-5, 13-19 P.921

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May 18, 2003

"The Day of Rest"
Hebrews 4

Couples Class
Wendell Alford,
Teacher

Paul, believe

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

P.979
Vss. 17-22

P.972
Gal. 2:
Fact vs
proof
Matt.
7:21-2
P.973
Matt.
7:1-2
↑
final
judge
is Jesus

II. An obvious assertion is assumed at the outset of Chap. 4: God's promise of rest still stands, and that promise involves ones entering into eternal life and during that eternal life shedding the temporary, flesh-and-blood housing in which every person begins and ends physical life. Each truster in Jesus Christ should be careful to maintain that belief and make it a choice-basis for the way one lives daily, Jam. 2:18-20. * There was good news made known to the wandering Israelites for temporary rest just as the good news (Gospel) has been brought to the world in and through Jesus Christ for God's one-time spiritual day of rest. God's message does not produce the potential, desirable result unless an individual receives, appropriates, and makes the message to permeate ones life, (Rom. 6:11) a willingness to follow the leading of God's Holy Spirit, Eph. 4:30. * The promise of God to the Israelites during the forty years wandering in the wilderness (desert) was not received with faith that the promise would be fulfilled! In the first covenant period God did not embody (pour out) his Holy Spirit in each individual Israelite, but in response to God's Son's request (John 14:16) God has made his Spirit a part of the life of every believer (Acts 2:38) * in God's promise through Jesus, i.e., that that believer is a citizen of God's Kingdom, Mk 1:15; 4:11; Lk 12:31; 14:15; 16:16; 17:21; John 3:5. * God had in mind firmly from the beginning of mankind's history (when he created the world) what the end result would be of his creation, including mankind. Here the author quotes Psa. 95:11 in which God said that he was swearing under oath that those who will not believe him (trust his promise) will not be invited to enter the period to which he refers here as "my rest." We who trust Jesus are to remember with diligence that God's word (promise) is true and that there is no appeal from his position. * Eph. 1:1-2, 7-14

P.978

P.896

* Acts
P.906
Read
vss. 36-41
Peter's int
witness
after being
arrested by
Jewish
spirit

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

P.976

MA

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P. 947

P. 802 12:12-14 why? Gen.

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

Gen. 1:26; 2:1-3;

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Jesus told
moderns
that a
person
must be
born of
flesh
with
God's
image
physical
& of
spirit
born
above
to be
right
with
God,
saved
spiritually

But, of course, we believers began "resting" spiritually the moment we entered the Kingdom of God through faith in Jesus as our Savior.
+ Paul 1:10

He 24:40-43

June 01, 2003

"The Priesthood Concept"
Hebrews 5

Couples Class
Wendell Alford,
Teacher

I. Please recall that we stated last week that we would discuss Chap. 5 by beginning with Chap. 4, vss. 14-16, because the priesthood of Jesus is introduced at 4:14. In this sermon to the Hebrew Christians we have learned that Jesus has been chosen by God, the Spiritual Father of all those who trust Jesus, as sole communicator of God's truth to mankind, because Jesus is God by inheritance (sired by the Holy Spirit of God) and at the same time human (as the physical son of Mary who was in the lineage of Abraham, David, etc.). The author established as fact that Jesus is superior to Moses, the founder of Israel as a nation. Moses was a great leader for temporal accomplishments, but Jesus as God-man established the potential for every individual to become spiritually alive and to live spiritually (together with God) beyond the deserved wages of sin, death (being separated from God.) In fact, believers will reign with Jesus during a day of rest for God's people, II Tim. 2:12; Rev. 20:6. However, the author admonishes the believing former Jews that their faith in God's promise through Jesus must endure throughout mortal life, not as their Jewish forefathers who refused the temporal promise during Moses' and Joshua's day by disobeying their Creator through idol worship.

II. Some Jewish Christians appeared to be reluctant to continue faith in God's leadership through his agent, the Holy Spirit. Before Jesus came and imparted the Spirit to every believer in Jesus, the faithful could have questions about religious matters answered by a fellow human being, a member of the Jewish priesthood. Now the Jewish (by race) believers (in Jesus as their Savior) were considering whether to become like their forefathers who longed to go back to Egypt even if again to slavery, because there, at least, they had food and were assigned work, Exod. 16::2; I Cor. 10:10-11. [In other words, they were much like the present day "hard line" Russians who want to go back under a Communist regime, for then they had someone to make every major decision in life for them. All they had to do was to obey orders.] These Jewish Christians wanted to return to obeying the priests who controlled all religious affairs of their lives by interpreting the Law of Moses and tradition based upon that Law. If the lower ranked priests could not decide a particular issue in doubt, consultation was made with the chief or high priest for a solution. The high priest would regularly convene a council (the Sanhedrin, who had religious, civil, and criminal jurisdiction) for more complicated matters. Remember that final decisions were considered to be God's will in each instance, i.e., the priests spoke for God to people. God's will for individuals came only through a priest with the high priest having the final say. (Rare exceptions came through angels (messengers) sent directly by God.) In the period during which the New Testament was being established and codified by God's Holy Spirit, the High Priest of Israel was primarily a political (from Rome) appointment.

III. The author in 4:14 reminds the Hebrew Christians that New Covenant believers have a new High Priest [who is not appointed

by Rome]. The new high priest has returned to God (through the heavens) and is none other than Jesus, the very Son of God himself. In light of that knowledge, we should hold on to the accompanying promise of God concerning those who trust Jesus. With the only high priest (who communicated and communicates through the Spirit) being Jesus, we should profess faith in no other for eternal and temporal help, Matt. 10:32; John 3:16; Acts 4:12; I Tim. 2:5; Rev. 3:5. And why are we to be so sure that Jesus is the genuine and only high priest who can be trusted without hesitation or reservation? Because he came as a human who, without any exception, was tempted to contradict and disobey God's will as every other human is tempted, and yet, not once did he displease God, Isa. 53:6,9; II Cor. 5:21. As individuals whose faith is in Jesus, we can be sure that we trust a high priest who is able to sympathize with us, because he can with firsthand knowledge understand our weaknesses. The author encourages believers to approach God's seat of power confidently; because there sits the God of grace who dispenses forgiveness for sin; because he is a merciful God who will deliver help at any time at any place to anyone who calls upon the name of Jesus, Rom. 10:12.

IV. The priesthood established in the Pentateuch with Aaron (Moses' brother, a Levite) as the first priest, as such, (Lev. 8:2,6,13,31,36) along with his sons illustrates the problem with human priests other than Jesus. While Moses was on Mt. Sinai receiving God's Law, Aaron yielded to the peoples' demands and made an idol which the Hebrews worshiped, Exod. 32:1-4,35; Acts 7:37-42. What the author is stating, in effect, is that Hebrew priests were appointed from among themselves (Levites) until such time as God would send his own son, Deut. 18:15,18-19; Matt. 21:33-46; Acts 3:22-26. God selected Aaron and his descendants as priests for the Hebrews, but he later chose Jesus to replace the entire priesthood. Jesus was referred to in Psa. 110:1-5 and Matt. 22:41-46 as one who would come and assume the high priest role and would at the same time be David's Lord. The priestly position which Jesus was chosen by God to fill was to be and now is like the priesthood of Melchisedec, i.e., as indefinite in time and place as was Melchisedec. [We will be discussing this ancient priest later in Chap. 7.] Jesus as God's Son, through obedience and suffering, was made completely adequate (perfect, complete) and qualified to become the author (creator) of eternal life for all who accept him as God's promised Savior.

V. At this point, vs. 11, the message to the Hebrew Christians questions the hearers' willingness to perceive what is being told them regarding the change in God's Covenant with mankind. With their knowledge of Jewish history, they should have been in a position to teach young believers in Jesus about God's plan for them. They should have understood God's love and mercy, but they still wanted to mix his love with legal rites and priestly authority apart from the leadership of God's Holy Spirit. The author likens spiritual maturity to certain chronological ages and a person's ability to receive body nourishment. Growing spiritually in Jesus Christ is a process in which one must apply oneself. A new believer can take only baby food, milk, while one who is spiritually mature can be nourished by adult spiritual food, meat or solid food.

June 08, 2003

"Spiritual Maturity"
Hebrews 6

Couples Class
Wendell Alford,
Teacher

I. We mentioned earlier that there are five distinct warnings in the Book of Hebrews. Through Chap. 6 three are covered: "neglect" in 2:1-4, "unbelief" in 3:7-4:13, and "not growing (maturing) in God's grace" in 5:11-6:20. For the latter see also Eph. 4:14-16; I Pet. 2:1-2; II Pet. 3:13-18. This third warning has, in my opinion, been as widely misinterpreted as practically any other portion of Scripture. Perhaps the reason for the false understanding of Chap. 6 is due in large measure to "proof texting" small sections of the chapter without relating the subideas to their context within the rest of the chapter, or the entire New Covenant account. Take, for example, vss. 4-6 which, if considered alone, could be made to convey that a child of God (truster in Jesus) does not have God's promise of eternal life assured, but must have such status renewed every time the truster makes a mistake by doing something displeasing to God or "not living the life" according to how one "feels" about the actions. [Talking the talk but not walking the walk] Let us now examine all of Chap. 6.

II. A believer is to build but not dwell upon some of the elementary teachings (facts) of ones initial experiences while becoming a child of God (truster in Jesus for spiritual salvation). Maturing is to be the goal of every believer in Jesus just as a child wants desperately to be older than he or she is at any given time, say, before age twenty or twenty-one. The author of Hebrews is revealing that not growing ones faith toward maturity could be similar to a graduate student in a university doing a doctorate in shoe-tying, coat hanging, or napping. The Holy Spirit leads a willing person to repent (recognize and express sorrow) for his or her lost spiritual condition (being separated from God's purpose for his or her existence or life), and then that willing person accepts God's only plan for a reconciliation to himself (becoming a truster of Jesus, God's only begotten Son). At that moment one becomes a child of the living God, a new citizen of the Kingdom of God, and that relationship is sealed forever by God's Holy Spirit, John 3:15-17; 10:27-30; Eph. 1:13-14. In today's vernacular we can safely say that we who are trusting Jesus as Savior are united to God as Father forever, and that is the "bottom line" or irrefutable eternal word of God himself. We are therefore to serve God as his children, demonstrating faith in God with our attitude and actions (not performing "dead" works or works not enhancing the King whose subjects we are, or reflecting wrongly our Spiritual Father whose children we are.) The wrong habit of many immature believers is to mull over or worry about infractions of God's will that were committed even before they became God's children, Psa. 103:12; Isa. 1:18; 38:17; 43:25; Eph. 1:7, or, infractions committed as God's children, Eph. 4:30-32; I John 1:8-9. A child's view of reality is considerably different from that of a mature adult, I Cor. 13:11.

III. The author of Hebrews in vss. 2-3 lists several events relating to becoming a believer in Jesus as Savior. They are: original repentance of sin for salvation, childlike faith in God, baptism,

laying on of hands, the resurrection from physical death, and the eternal judgment of God. These teachings are a necessary part of becoming a believer, but one cannot live in a house foundation. Nor can one say truthfully that the original intent of building a home is fulfilled when the base foundation is completed, as important as the foundation is. As the Kingdom of God is expanded, these basics are necessarily repeated, and the author commits to repeating them as often as unbelievers are encountered in mission outreach (as God permits). The author here, however, is communicating to believers who are, or should have been, well beyond recently accepting Jesus as the Messiah (Savior). It is not necessary or even possible for one to hear the Good News of God in Jesus, accept that divine message, begin following the Holy Spirit's leadership, become a citizen of the Kingdom of God and the kingdom age to come, and then believe that God will not be faithful to his Covenant made with such a believer. The author compares such a supposed break in relationship to God's bringing a rain on a farmer's crop to nourish the plants and then withdrawing the natural blessing which follows from his natural law. No, the sacrifice of God for a believer's sin is a one-time seal for eternity. The New Covenant is not like the Old Covenant when sinful priests were required first to sacrifice for their own sins and then likewise over and over offer blood (of animals) sacrifices for the members of the Hebrew congregation (nation). Such a view of God's sacrifice of his Son Jesus would be a shameful requirement. In other words, applying Jesus' death on the cross for the same person's eternal salvation a second time would be, in effect, denying that the perfect Jesus could not (is unable) to provide eternal life once and for all time, Rom. 6:7-14. Just Suppose that such a break with God for everlasting life were possible for an individual believer, vs. 6. Such a thought would perhaps be appropriate for those immature (baby) believers who are not bearing fruit for God's Kingdom, John 15:4-8. Their lives would be like thorny briars worthy of being burned, but they still have eternal life. However, their being selected for the Day of Rest could be in jeopardy, I Cor. 3:11-17; 4:4-5; Heb. 4:1.

IV. Beginning with vs. 9 the author (God) gives the preceding vss. 1-8 a proper perspective. He is confident concerning these who are believers about their spiritual lives after he has just questioned the quality of their service in God's Kingdom. Even though some believers contribute immature service, God is not unfaithful to them who are trusting Jesus, I Cor. 1:9. Again, the author admonishes the Hebrew Christians to be strong in their faith and hope right up until they experience death (the end). They are not to be lazy (ineffective) but diligent and patient. God's promise is as sure as God's eternal nature. Abraham is cited as one who received God's promise, but it was necessary for the patriarch to exercise much patience. During this time of God's New Covenant, God's promise to trusters of their spiritual welfare into the hands of his only Son Jesus is immutable (impossible of ever being changed). That very immutability has two bases for being true: It is impossible for God to lie, and the resurrection of Jesus from physical death. We need not fear that God will ever nullify his promise to us through Jesus. That promise is the ANCHOR OF OUR SOULS.

June 15, 2003

"Melchisedec, Aaron, and Jesus"
Hebrews 7

Couples Class
Wendell Alford,
Teacher

I. The author of the Message to the Hebrews returns to the subject of the priesthood in Chap. 7, a subject which he considered somewhat briefly in Chap. 5. It appears that he deemed it necessary to interrupt his thoughts on the priesthood in order to emphasize a need for mature thinking before being able to understand the priesthood of Jesus. Having implored the readers, Hebrew Christians, to think as spiritual adults, he now examines the priesthood from its very earliest introduction in God's relating to humanity. He starts with Melchisedec in Gen. 14 and ends with God's last and final priest, Jesus the Messiah. Before Melchisedec the Lord communicated directly with his people. In Gen. 12:1 the Word states, "- - the Lord had said unto Abram, 'Get thee out of thy country - - - unto a land that I will shew thee.'" In order to meet the priest through whom Abram was to honor God, Abram needed to make a change in his life, a phenomenal change. In Hebrews 6 the author (God) said that in order to understand God's will for them, the Hebrew Christians needed to make a change in their lives, a phenomenal change. The priesthood had completely changed. The New Covenant which God had instituted in Jesus required trusting Jesus as God and living a life led by God's Holy Spirit, the same Spirit who led Jesus as the God-man, an awesome but completely satisfying life.

II. At Chap. 6:19-20 Jesus is announced as the hope of the believer whose hope is sure, steadfast, and an anchor of the truster's soul, because Jesus has entered into God's presence as an eternal high priest in the order of Melchisedec. He is forever behind the veil (of the Temple) where Hebrews under the Law could not pass except the high priest. Even the Aaronic high priest was allowed to enter beyond the veil into the Holy of Holies but once each year, on the great Day of Atonement. At that time he sprinkled the blood of the sin offering on the mercy seat, first for himself, and then for the sins of all of the Israelites, Lev. 16:11, 15-16. [The English word "priest" is derived from the Greek word "presbyter" which signifies "elder" (Heb. "cohen").] The need for a priest through whom a person could approach God grew from humanity's consciousness of being unworthy before a perfect, holy God, i.e., sin. Mankind has an innerconsciousness of having done acts or thought thoughts which displease the God who made them. Related to this belief in having done things contrary to God's pleasure created a need to proclaim laws or regulations codifying the acts contrary to God's position, John 1:9; Rom. 1:18-23 (teleological knowledge of God).

III. The author in 7:1 tells us more about Melchisedec to whom he has related our Lord Jesus in the last vs. of Chap. 6. In comparing Jesus to the ancient priest, he states that the latter was of another order, i.e., not of a Levitical priestly order. In fact, Melchisedec was declared to be a priest of the Lord God before the Aaronic priesthood was established by some 600 years. Melchisedec was greater even than was the founder of the Hebrew people, Abraham. Melchisedec was the king of Salem (peace) which later became Jerusalem, "the dwelling place of peace," where Jesus was crucified to

bring spiritual peace to all who will entrust their spirits to his welfare. Melchisedec was not only a king, but the Hebrew author proclaims him to be the priest of "the most high God," Jehovah. His position as priest is indicated by the fact that Abram paid to him a tithe (one tenth) of all the spoils of war received after killing the five kings who had captured Lot, Abram's nephew and son of Haran, Gen. 14:18-20. Vss. 2-3 states that Salem was at first known as "righteousness" and then as "peace." As was later discovered in Gen. 19:4-8 (Rom. 1:26-28), the Sodomites were a wicked people, and, in contrast, the Salemites were a righteous people. Scripture does not mention the parents, birth, or death of Melchisedec as it does of the Levitical priests beginning with Aaron. Melchisedec was so great that father Abraham honored him as God's priest (representative of God), and it is an established fact that one who blesses (Melchisedec) is greater than the one who is blessed, (Abram). Therefore, as great as Abraham was considered to be by the Jews, God's Word states that Melchisedec was greater. The Law given to Moses later, required that the Levites as God's priests should be supported by tithes from all the other descendants of Jacob. In fact, when the Israelites paid tithes to the Levitical priests (Aaronic), they were, in effect, paying tithes to Melchisedec since Melchisedec had received tithes from Abram and the Levites were descendants of Abraham, the Levites' forefather, vss. 9-10.

IV. The Levitical priesthood was active at the time the Law was given to the Israelites and prevailed until Jesus was sent by God to establish the New Covenant, John 1:17. When God changed the plan through which people could be reconciled to himself, he chose the human component of the new High Priest's (Jesus) heritage to be of the tribe of Judah (Mary, Jesus' Mother, Rom. 1:3). In the Law given to Moses, nothing allows for one from the tribe of Judah to be a priest. They were the tribe of royalty and kings. One could say therefore that Jesus could not be a priest, but King David in the Spirit (Psa. 110:4-6) declared that such a priest would come who would also be king, a priest and king as Melchisedec had been! God never changes, but as people changed he did change the person through whom they are to be made right (righteous) in his sight. The Law was never meant to be the ultimate means of making people right with their Creator, vss. 16-19, but the Law did promise the coming of a priest who was not subject to the permanent effects of physical death (Psa. 16:8-10; Acts 2:29-36) who would be Ruler and Priest, King and Mediator. The Jewish priests served in the priesthood and then died, but Jesus served God without one infraction of God's pleasure and then was resurrected to life forevermore. Because there is no end of Jesus' priesthood, anyone whoever and whenever approaches Jesus for the forgiveness of God, that forgiveness shall be granted. Jesus is within the veil where God is, for Jesus is God. The Law always makes men priests who are fallible, Rom. 3:21-31, but God made Jesus high priest who is holy, innocent, undefiled, separate from sinners, and has become a citizen of God's heaven. Jesus is the only priest today through whom a person can be reconciled to God by having his or her sins forgiven once and forever. (If time permits, we will review John 8:25,27,33-39,41,44, 47-59.)

June 22, 2003

"A Better Covenant"
Hebrews 8

Couples Class
Wendell Alford,
Teacher

I. The English word covenant came from the Latin convenire meaning to agree. It means to pledge an agreement by contract between two or more persons. As a noun convenant means a formal, solemn (usually written) agreement or compact. A covenant can be broken by further action of one of the persons unless its conditions are in effect at the time of the physical death of one or both of the parties. If a person codified a covenant (will), he or she can change the provisions while still living, but upon death of the testator the will stands firm as last stated. However, a covenant can be made to apply not only to a given individual but to his or her heirs (descendants) as well. Some of the covenants made by God with people he chose contained such a provision. A number of covenants made by God with his people are as follows: (1) In Gen. 3:15 God promised that through the female of the human species he would create a person who would counteract the satanic, evil effect of mankind's separation from himself (God), I Cor. 15:22. (2) In Gen. 9:9,11 God covenanted with Noah that humanity would never again have the earth flooded with water. (3) In Gen. 15:18 God covenanted with Abraham that the land between Egypt and the River Euphrates would belong to Abraham's descendants. To understand this agreement one must look further into the Scriptures, because confusion could result in determining which descendants were meant. Those descendants included (at the time of Gen. 15:18) both the Jews (Isaac) and the Arabs (Ishmael). At Gen. 17:18-21; 24:7 and 25:5 God makes it clear that his covenant with Abraham was to continue only through Isaac, not Ishmael or the children of Keturah. (4) In Exod. 19:5-6 God covenanted with all Israel that if they would keep the Law he was about to give to them through Moses, he would make them a holy (sanctified) nation of priests to convey his will to all the earth's people. The Israelites agreed to the covenant, Exod. 19:7-8. (5) At Numb. 25:11-12 God covenanted with the Israelites through Moses that the descendants of Aaron would be the priests of God to make atonement for Israel. (6) In II Sam. 23:5 God covenanted with David that Messianic salvation would come through his dynasty (seed).

II. Now the author of Hebrews at 8:1 begins a summary of what he has been discussing. God has made a New Covenant. We believers (trusters) in Jesus as God's Messiah (Savior) have a high priest who speaks to and is God. He can speak to God on our behalf concerning any and all matters of our concern. He is now and will always be in the very presence of God the Father. He serves us not as an angel but as one of us, i.e., he lived as a human among us. A priest by definition is one who necessarily must have an acceptable offering to satisfy the only holy and just Creator, a God who cannot be approached by anyone who has willingly participated in evil (sinful) actions. Jesus as high priest (mediator) dwells not in a place (even though designed by God) made by mankind as was the Tabernacle (tent) in the wilderness or even God's houses (Temples) made by Solomon, Zerubbabel, Ezekiel, or Herod the Great, but one built by God himself, in Heaven with God. At the time when Hebrews was written there were still Jewish priests offering animal sacrifices

to God. These temporary priests served (and still do) as an example of what God promised was to come. The priestly order was strictly maintained as God had instructed Moses under the covenant given at Mt. Sinai. But now (when Jesus was sacrificed on Golgotha) God has instituted a better covenant in which Jesus received a more excellent service. He is mediating a different and better agreement (covenant), and that covenant was established upon better promises than the former covenant.

III. If the first covenant [referred to in #4 above, I believe, based upon keeping the Law - WA] had had no weakness or fault (people's ability to keep the Law, Rom. 8:3), there would have been no reason for God to have instituted another covenant. It is obvious in retrospect that people did not do God's bidding under the Old Covenant, but God through the prophet Jeremiah (31:31-34) promised a New Covenant. Jeremiah made it clear that a New Covenant would not be like the Old Covenant under the Law. The principle difference would be that God would not treat people as immature children, i.e., lead them around by the hand. They assumed no responsibility under this arrangement and refused to keep God's covenant. The New Covenant promised to the people through Jeremiah would include placing God's Holy Spirit himself in each and every individual believer to instruct and empower him or her in doing God's will. In this way God would put his way (law) in each believer's mind (intellect) and heart (emotion), and then they (the trusters of Jesus) will indeed be God's people. Likewise, God will be their Lord. There will be no need for priests to tell each believer what God wants him or her to think or do. A believer will not be in position to judge another believer, because God is, through his Spirit, leading each one directly. Through faith in Jesus as Savior, all believers will know God from those considered to be least to those who are considered to be the greatest, for God will be merciful in considering their unrighteousness and remembering those confessed unrighteousnesses never again. Only God has the ability to block our from his consciousness the sins against him committed by his creatures. When God promised such a New Covenant during the time of the prophets, he was promising that the Old Covenant would be replaced. Now that God has relegated the Old Covenant to obsolescence, it is time for those who have faith in God through Jesus to consider that Old Covenant to have vanished away. [Jesus was asked by Peter at Capernaum on one occasion whether a brother who had sinned against him should be forgiven as many as seven times. Jesus, who always expressed God's position, told Peter that a person who is a subject of God's kingdom should forgive seventy times seven which is to say that there is no limit to how many times one should forgive a brother. I believe that the 70 X 7 is figurative speech for an infinite amount - WA.] A believer in Jesus is eternally safe. The hymn writer Edward Mote put it this way:

"When he shall come with trumpet sound,
Oh may I then in him be found;
Dressed in his righteousness alone;
Faultless to stand before the throne.
On Christ the solid rock I stand;
All other ground is sinking sand."

Jan. 26, 2003

Mental Disease Supp. - Wendell Alford, Teacher

I. Mental Disease: All illnesses whose manifestations are primarily behavioral disturbances, whether the primary cause be physical or psychological, and also those diseases, often called "psychosomatic," in which there is a mixture of emotional cause and physical effect. A. Mental retardation - due to congenital or hereditary defects and can be contracted through illness or abnormal conditions of the mother during pregnancy. B. Dementia: loss of mental/emotional capacity through physical changes in the brain which can be due to brain destruction through accident, cancer, infection (can be sexually or intimately transmitted), or hardening of the arteries through diet/age. C. Psychoneuroses: disorders so designated are illnesses when the problem progresses beyond a certain degree and thereby impairs ones capacity to carry on satisfactorily the personal business of living. Basic to neuroses is a sense of anxiety and ways to overcome the causes of that anxiety. These causes can be real or imagined. Fear or real danger to ones well-being is normal as is actions to relieve the danger. However, there are obsessive fears (phobias) such as fears of closed spaces, high places, crossing the street, certain animals, crowds, public speaking, etc., which can be real or mental fabrications. Mild depression caused by certain neuroses can be normal such as grief caused by natural events, e.g., loss of a loved one, loss of ones livelihood. Everyone experiences mild neuroses from such events beyond ones control, and such experience is normal. Prolonged neuroses which are intense enough to effect normal activities should have professional attention. D. Psychoses: major, serious mental diseases which should be referred to a professional. A person so inflicted can suffer serious confusion of facts with fiction (unreality), hallucinatory, or delusionary ideas. Prolonged, intense negative feelings of ones own self worth or the opposite, elated feelings of self, and especially such feelings (positive and negative) following each other reveal psychotic illness. Prolonged (weeks) of intense feelings of depression (inability to overcome profound anxiety) also constitutes psychotic illness. Sometimes suicidal impulses occur during deep depression. Pronounced suspicion of others intentions of harm to oneself (paranoia) can fall into this illness. One who is psychotic is a danger to him or herself and/or others also. II. Treatments for mental illness: A. Psychotherapy - most commonly administered. Social (one to one or group) context for awareness of normality. B. Drugs - establishing chemical balance to achieve normal mental processes, e.g., lithium, prozac, sedatives, MD prescription only. C. Hypnosis - by specialists exclusively. D. Hospitalization for dietary, laboratory checks, and controlled treatment by specialists for either short or long-term care, usually for special or more serious cases. III. Character disorders - some people find it difficult to accept as illness: certain sexual practices, e.g., paraphilias: homosexuality, pedophilia, masochism, sadism, exhibitionism, bestiality, and other deviant behaviors; certain social activities, e.g., criminal and other antisocial behavior; certain individual behavior such as substance abuse (including alcohol), and mental or physical self abuse.

June 29, 2003

"The Necessity of Blood"
Hebrews 9

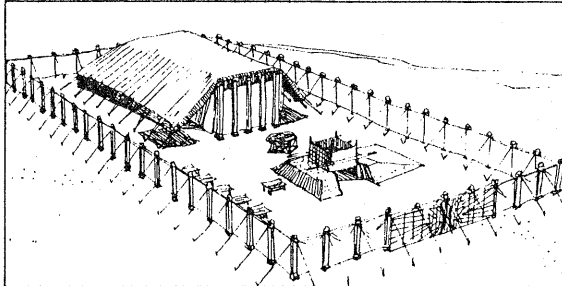
Couples Class
Wendell Alford,
Teacher

I. Understanding the message of God in the Book of Hebrews apart from the time of its writing is practically impossible. Those who heard and believed what Jesus told them in Lk 19:35-48 were not wondering whether the great Herod Temple would be destroyed, but when. The Hebrews writer (as God spoke through him) knew that soon the great facility which was such a necessary part in maintaining the Jewish religious customs of that time would no longer exist. Soon the Temple as the place where the Jewish priesthood could continue month after month and year after year to practice their interpretation of what God had told their forefathers through the Law and Prophets would be gone. Soon there would be no center or core where all Jews could look to as a place where they could focus on the presence and will of the God of their fathers. Without the priesthood how could their sins be purged? Without the Temple where would the high priest go every year on the Day of Atonement to absolve through the prescribed rituals his own sins and the sins of the people? The Jewish Christians for whom Hebrews was written had been Jews in their religious persuasion but now had placed their faith in Jesus as God's Messiah (Savior) and without need for the Old Covenant's provisions. However, they were thinking about whether they should revert to the Jewish faith, at least in part. In Judaism they had at least entities which implemented their faith in a physical way. The Temple was real, and the priests were visible as they performed the religious activities.

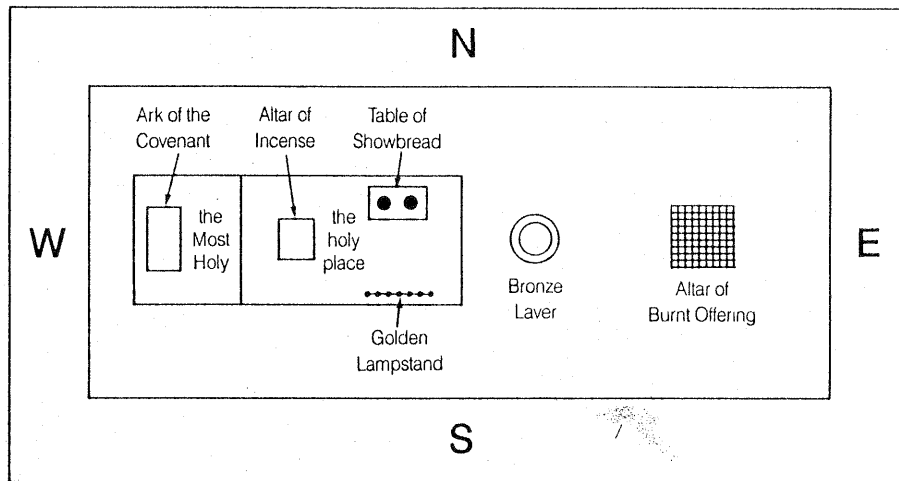
II. The Jewish Christians needed a mature view of their relation to God through Jesus Christ. In this Chap. 9 the author compares the Old and New Covenants as concerns the part blood and the sanctuary play in both Covenants. He relates at the outset that it was true that the first Covenant did indeed have activities dedicated to serving God (divine service). Also, an earthly place was designated where the people could know God's presence, for God had promised to meet with the High Priest in the sanctuary after the High Priest had properly cleansed himself with the blood of sacrificed, properly chosen animals, Exod. 25:22. The author describes in considerable detail the appointments of the Tabernacle. There was a large fenced area within which was a specially designed tent, the Tabernacle. In the Tabernacle were located both the holy place and the Most Holy Place. The High Priest and his chosen helper priests serviced the holy place every day. There the table of shewbread stood to the right as one entered the holy place. On the left was a golden, seven-light lamp stand which burned perpetually and furnished the only light within the holy place. Apart from these lights absolutely no light could enter the area. Beyond the table and lamp stand was an altar whereon incense was burned. The aroma of delightful incense within the holy place presented a stark, but pleasant, contrast with the odor just outside the inner sanctary where the altar stood on which raw animal flesh was burned to ash for sacrifice. Between the altar for burning flesh and the entrance to the holy place was a basin referred to as a bronze laver in which they washed themselves before entering the holy place. The entry to the Taberna-

cle was considered the first or entry veil into the holy place, Exod. 26:36. A closely woven veil divided the holy place from the Most Holy Place, Exod. 26:33. Beyond that second veil was the Most Holy Place in all of Israel, because there was kept the Ark of the Covenant in which was concrete evidence of God's deliverance from bondage. No one was ever permitted within that second veil except the High Priest once per year on the annual Day of Atonement. At that time he took the blood of an animal and purified himself and afterward took the blood of another animal and offered a sacrifice for the sins of all the Israelites. This sacrificing was "open-ended" in that it was required over and over again. The author of Hebrews states explicitly clearly that this system of sacrifice could not satisfy the inner feelings of guilt for the participants, vs. 9. The fallibility of the High Priest was evidence that the ultimate holiest of all sacrifices was not present during this period of a temporal dwelling place for God, and ordinances conducted with such temporary elements, vss. 8, 10.

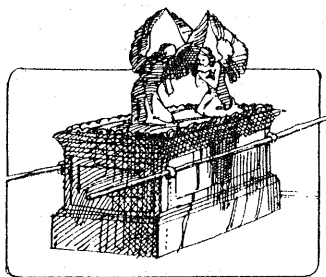
III. In vs. 11 the author turns to Christ and God's New Covenant through and by Jesus and contrasts the New Covenant with the Old. The contrast at the outset refers to a "more perfect tabernacle" not made with human hands and which is not of this creation, i.e., earthly. The new Tabernacle is not to be served by human fallible priests and with animal blood over and over again but by Jesus' blood which need only be applied once for the eternal spirit of the individual believer (truster) of Jesus. The unblemished animals chosen for sacrifice in the Old Testament are completely inferior to God's holy sacrifice, himself in the person of his Son, Jesus the Christ. If the blood of animals could symbolize the cleansing of the flesh (temporarily), how much better is the shedding of Jesus' blood (in terminating his fleshly life) to bridge the sinful gap between the only holy and righteous Creator and his sinful (willfully so) creatures, people! (Mk 14:24) To free peoples' fearful consciences, God selects individuals through his Holy Spirit to receive an eternal inheritance (life), vs. 15. In order for this New Covenant to become effective the Testator (Jesus) had to die, vs. 16. While Jesus lived in the flesh as a human (and God), God's New Covenant could not be effective, vs. 17. Such was true for the first covenant to be effective, i.e., death had to occur, blood had to be shed (signifying cessation of life). That death has to precede forgiveness is a mystery, but such is truly a requirement of the God who does the forgiving, vs. 20. Without the shedding of blood (death) there can be no forgiveness by God for a person's sin (spiritual separation from God). The truth revealed in vs. 23-24 appears to be that Jesus' death on the cross not only made a way for people on earth to become right with God, but there were (and are) purifying effects in the heavens as well, Eph. 6:12; Col. 1:20; II Pet. 2:4; Jude 6. Note what the author (God) states in vs. 26 where he makes Jesus' sacrifice retroactive throughout history (foundation of the world). Every person whoever had faith in God's promises will be saved (made spiritually alive) by means of the same factor that makes us right with God today, the death (blood) of Jesus. (For further evidence see Matt. 22:32; 27:50-53.) Every person must experience physical death, and following that experience must give an account of their sins before God, vs. 27. However, those who have exercised faith in Jesus' sacrificed blood are waiting eagerly for his return and the culmination of their salvation. They will be presented to God separated from their sins, vs. 28. We owe it all to Jesus.



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

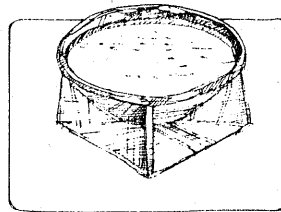


This illustration shows the relative positions of the tabernacle furniture used in Israelite worship. The tabernacle is enlarged for clarity.



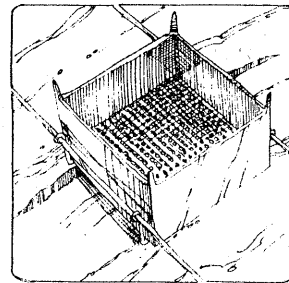
Ark of the Covenant
(Ex. 25:10-22)

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



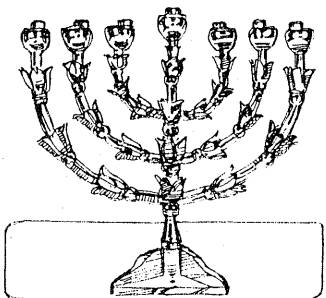
Bronze Laver
(Ex. 30:17-21)

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



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

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



Golden Lampstand
(Ex. 25:31-40)

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

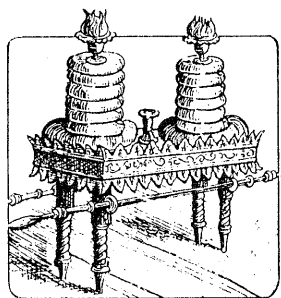
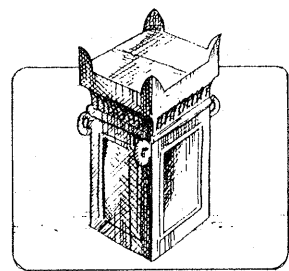


Table of Showbread
(Ex. 25:23-30)

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



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

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

Solomon's Temple

Solomon constructed the temple on Mt. Moriah, north of the ancient City of David. The temple was built according to plans that David received from the Lord and passed on to Solomon (1 Chr. 28:11-13, 19). The division into a sanctuary and inner sanctuary corresponds to the division of the tabernacle into the holy place and Most Holy Place.

