

# KINGDOM SPIRIT



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**“SEEK YE FIRST THE KINGDOM OF GOD”**

Matthew 6:33



Issue 1010

## GENESIS:29-32

We continue our Genesis study this issue with Jacob arriving in Padanaram, the home of his uncle, Laban. (Read Gen. 29:1-14) When Jacob met Rachel at the well with her father's sheep, it may have been love at first sight, but this was not the reason he kissed her, but rather this was the standard form of greeting at that time. This is evidenced by Laban kissing Jacob when he first met him. The reason that Jacob wept upon meeting Rachel is probably because he had nothing to give her, having been robbed by Eliphaz, Esau's son, as he traveled to Padanaram as we mentioned in our last issue.

Jacob stayed with Laban for about a month helping with the work that was done. Laban apparently felt guilty and offered to pay him. (Read Gen. 29:15-20) Notice that Jacob set his own compensation for serving Laban. The compensation was Rachel for his wife, but Jacob put the value at seven years of service.

(Read Gen. 29:21-30) The way the King James and other translations read, it is often assumed that Jacob worked seven years, then he was given first Leah for a wife, and then seven days later he was given Rachel for a wife for which he served Laban another seven years. Some believe that Jacob did not marry Rachel until the end of the second seven year period. Dr. Bullinger, in his Companion Bible indicates that once the deal was made between Jacob and Laban for the first seven years, Laban gave Leah to Ja-

cob and then a week later, he gave Rachel to him so that he was married for all of those fourteen years. The fact that eleven sons and one daughter were born during these fourteen years seems to bear this out, even though these births were by four different women.

I found it a bit humorous in the Book of Jasher that on Jacob's first wedding night, Laban had all of the lights in the house extinguished. When Jacob asked why, Laban told him that is was customary in that country to do this. Laban may have also invented another custom, that of the oldest daughter had to be married first before the younger daughter could be married. There is no record that this was ever a custom in that area. Jacob is kind of getting back some of what he did when he deceived his father into giving him the blessing.

(Read Gen. 29:31-35) Leah bears Jacob's first four sons, Reuben, Simeon, Levi and Judah

(Read Gen. 30:1-13) Unable to have children, Rachel gave Jacob her handmaid, Bilhah, for a wife, saying that she would claim any children born to Bilhah as her own.

The law of the land at that time was known as the Law, or Code of Khammurabi. These laws governed the peoples from the Persian Gulf to the Caspian Sea, and from Persia to the Mediterranean Sea some eight hundred years before Moses. They were the law of the land throughout Canaan. Some of these laws are similar to the Mosaic law, but some are drastically different and drastically unjust. However, this law allowed women to give their handmaids to their husband and then claim the handmaid's children

as their own as both Leah and Rachel did here.

Bilhah bears two more sons for Jacob, Dan and Naphtali. Zilpah, Leah's handmaid then bore two more sons to Jacob, Gad and Asher.

(Read Gen. 30:14-21) Mandrakes, sometimes referred to as "love-apple," is a stemless perennial of the nightshade family, having emetic, purgative, and narcotic qualities. The forked, torso-like shape of the tap-root gave rise to many superstitions. Aphrodisiac properties were ascribed to it at an early period. Down through the centuries eastern women have made use of mandrakes to ensure conception. Song of Solomon 7:13 alludes to the fragrance of mandrakes. (The New Bible Dictionary)

Leah bears two more sons for Jacob, Issachar and Zebulun. It is also mentioned that she bore a daughter, Dinah. There may have been more daughters born but not named, but Dinah is to play a special role in the life of Jacob that we will study later, so she is here named.

(Read Gen. 30:22-24) Rachel is remembered by God and God opened her womb and she bears a son, Joseph. This gives Leah six sons, Bilhah two sons, Zilpah two sons and Rachel one son at this point. These are grouped in Scripture by their mothers, not necessarily, the order in which they were born. Dr. Bullinger tells us that Joseph was born after Naphtali, not after Dinah. All of these children were born during Jacob's fourteen year service to Laban in payment for his wives.

(Read Gen. 30:25-36) Jacob, having finished his fourteen year obligation, wants to return home to the land of Canaan. But when he approached Laban about doing so, Laban, having recognized that God was with Jacob and having Jacob with him had made Laban very rich, asked Jacob to stay and to name his wages. Jacob struck a deal with Laban in which he would take the spotted, the ringstraked (streaked), and the brown sheep and goats from among Laban's flocks as his payment and that he would continue to take care of Laban's flocks. Laban agreed to this, so Jacob took the spotted, the ringstraked and the brown from the flocks and put three days journey between his flocks and Laban's. He continued to

take care of Laban's flocks while his sons took care of his.

(Read Gen. 30:37-43) The New Bible Dictionary has the following to say about the practice that Jacob apparently engaged in to get the sheep and goats to produce more of the spotted, ringstraked and brown that Jacob took for his wages, *Jacob was probably influenced by primitive ideas of the effect of seen objects upon the unborn young. But verse 40 indicates that the results really came about through selective breeding.*

The book of Jasher indicates that Jacob's reputation for having very good animals spread far and wide and people came to him to buy breeding stock and traded to him men and maid servants, asses, camels and whatever Jacob needed, so that not only did he have large flocks, but he became quite rich in all other possessions as well.

(Read Gen. 31:1-16) God blessed Jacob greatly while taking away from Laban. Laban was obviously a greedy man and when he saw that Jacob was getting the better end of their deal, he changed the wages of Jacob. This happened ten times, but God continued to bless Jacob no matter what agreement Laban made with Jacob.

The Scripture seems to indicate that Laban had no sons at the time that Jacob married his two daughters. By marrying Rachel and Leah, Jacob became Laban's heir, however in accordance with the law of the land at that time, if Laban subsequently had sons, the estate would be divided between the sons and the son-in-law. Laban did have sons then and as they grew older and realized that Jacob was gaining wealth at the expense of their father, they became very jealous. Laban too realized what was happening and he became jealous of Jacob. So after serving Laban another six years (twenty years in all) Jacob was told by God in a dream to go back to his father's house in the land of Canaan. Both Leah and Rachel agreed to this as they realized that their inheritance, in effect, had already been given to them by God and that would be nothing left if they stayed.

(Read Gen. 31:17-24) Jacob waited until Laban was going to be gone from home shearing his sheep, then Jacob took all that he had and left

going toward Canaan. Laban did not find out Jacob had gone until three days after he left. He then took his sons and others with him and pursued after Jacob.

We're told that Rachel stole her father's images and took them with her. There is considerable speculation as to what these images were and why she took them. The Hebrew word translated "images" is *teraphim*. Jasher says that these were mummified human heads. The New Bible Dictionary says that it is not really known just what these images were, but when mentioned in the Israelite context, they are almost always condemned, either directly or indirectly. Apparently they were associated with divination, but it is not known just how they were consulted or how results were determined. Speculation varies from Rachel taking the images so that her father could not consult them to find out where Jacob and his family had gone, to it being a law that if a woman's husband possessed these images, it ensured for him the succession to the father-in-law's property. The latter may be the case here as we'll see that when Laban could not find these images among Jacob's stuff, he was quick to make an agreement with Jacob that would keep Jacob from ever coming back to Laban's home again.

As Laban caught up with Jacob, it was apparently his intent to take back Jacob's wives, children and possessions, but God appeared to him in a dream and warned him not try anything.

(Read Gen. 31:25-35) By Khammurabi's law, the punishment for stealing was death. Jacob was familiar with this law I'm sure, so the sentence he pronounced on whoever stole the images of Laban's was not out of the ordinary. Of course he did not know that Rachel was the thief. Laban is being very hypocritical here for what he is saying to Jacob is the very opposite of what he would have done had he known that Jacob was about to leave. Having God speak to him in a dream and not having his gods both have the effect of stopping him from doing what he would really like to do and what he reminds Jacob that he is capable of doing. Jacob is well aware of the fact that Laban has the upper hand at the moment, but tells him that he knows well what he would have done

had he known what Jacob was planning to do.

(Read Gen. 31:36-42) The fact that Laban can't find his gods turns the tables, so to speak, and Jacob now has the upper hand. Laban, thinking that Jacob had his gods and thinking that he was sure to find them in Jacob's goods gave Laban confidence that he would still be able to punish Jacob, but when he couldn't find them, Jacob gained the psychological advantage, so he proceeds to tell Laban off.

(Read Gen. 31:43-55) Now, Laban is ready to talk, to make a covenant. Setting up a pillar and then a heap of stones, they each swore that neither would cross over the heap or the pillar to do harm to the other. Laban then departed and went back to Haran.

(Read Gen. 32:1-5) Jacob isn't quite sure what Esau's reaction is going to be to him when he returns, so he sends messengers ahead to tell Esau that he is returning and to try to get some idea how he will be received. Angels of God met Jacob, so he would know that God was with him, yet Jacob is still somewhat skeptical.

(Read Gen. 32:6-8) The news that the messengers brought back to him is not necessarily good in that they told Jacob that Esau was coming to meet them and has four hundred men with him. Jacob first does as men usually do—trust in their own ability. He divided the men and animals into two groups with the idea that if Esau came upon one group and destroyed it, the other group would be able to get away.

(Read Gen. 32:9-23) Jacob then turned to God in prayer. He first humbles himself before God telling Him that he is not worthy of all that God has done for him. Then he reminds God of what He has told him in the past, that He would make Jacob's seed as the sand of the sea shore in number, as if to say, save me, You haven't done all that You said You would do for and with me.

He then prepared a number of gifts for Esau with the hope of softening him up little by little so that by the time they met, Esau might not be so hostile to him. Jacob is not blaming Esau as he knows that he has deceived and cheated Esau. He is just hoping that Esau will be merciful to him. He then sent his wives and children

ahead of him and he remained at the ford Jabok alone.

(Read Gen. 32:24-32) This story of Jacob wrestling with the angel has special significance, not only to Jacob and his descendants of that day, but of ours as well. If we don't read this story carefully, we might get the impression that Jacob won this wrestling match. Actually he won by losing. First note that when the match was over, Jacob said in verse 30, **"I have seen God face to face, and my life is preserved."** Jacob felt that he had been dealing with God in person rather than a man.

The name "Jacob" literally means "heel catcher, or supplanter, or deceiver." He earned this name by struggling with Esau in the womb. The name "Israel" means "God rules or God commands."

Following are some quotes from Dr. Bullinger's notes on words in verse 28 that I believe will help us to understand better what happened here.

**Israel**—*"God commands, orders or rules". Man attempts it but always, in the end, fails. Out of some forty Hebrew names compounded with "El" or "Jah", God is always the doer of what the verb means (cp. Dani-el, God judges).*

**hast thou power**—*hast thou contended. Jacob had contended with Esau in the womb, and thus got his name Jacob, which is referred to here in reproach, not in eulogy.*

**prevailed**—*succeeded. He had contended for the birthright and succeeded (25:29-34). He had contended for the blessing and succeeded (27). He had contended with Laban and succeeded (31) He had contended with "men" and succeeded. Now he contends with God—and fails. Hence his name was changed to Isra-el, God commands, to teach him the greatly needed lesson of dependence upon God.*

The significance that we need to know is well stated in a booklet titled "Who is an Israelite" by Dr. Stephen Jones:

*Like Jacob, we become Israelites by a change in our character. We must all learn the same lesson that Jacob learned. It is the lesson that we are not more powerful than God. It is the*

*lesson that we should have faith in the sovereignty of God and not try to help Him fulfill His promises with a little help from the flesh. God does not need us to lie or defraud others, for whoever does these things is only a Jacobite and not an Israelite.*

*We see, then, that Jacob was not born an Israelite. He became an Israelite later in life after learning a very important lesson in the sovereignty of God. Hence, the term "Israel" was not a matter of genealogy, but a testimony of character. It was only later that Jacob-Israel's descendants were called "Israelites," to denote that they were physically descended from the man renamed Israel.*

We will continue with chapter 33 next issue. JRL

## PAUL'S EPISTLE TO THE ROMANS

As we begin our study in Romans 4, we need to keep in mind the discussion that Paul has been having in the previous chapters, as this is a continuation of that discussion. Paul is presenting both sides of the argument as if someone was arguing with him. Basically the discussion is centered around what part circumcision plays in ones justification. In Romans 3:21 Paul says, **"But now the righteousness of God without the law is manifested, being witnessed by the law and the prophets;"**. Keep in mind that when he says "righteousness of God" he is not talking about an attribute of God, but rather the standard of righteousness that is acceptable to God, a standard that man simply cannot meet. Here he is saying that this standard of righteousness is manifested in those who do not have the law and do not practice circumcision, i.e. the non-Jew. This leaves hanging the question as to what value then is circumcision and the law which we discussed fairly thoroughly in our study of chapter 3. But now Paul, to make sure we understand the subject, asks another question as if he were a Jew who was arguing with Paul. (Read Romans 4:1-3) Remember the question in Romans 3:1, **"What advantage**

**then hath the Jew? Or what profit is there of circumcision?"** Paul has answered that question, but now as if he were a Jew arguing with himself, he asks what Abraham gained by the ordinance of circumcision. Abraham obeyed God and was a righteous man, so as a man he could boast of his righteousness, but man's righteousness does not meet God's standard of righteousness. Thus, in no way could Abraham boast to God that he deserved justification, based on his own righteousness and daily life. However, Paul quotes Gen. 15:6 to tell us that because Abraham believed God, God counted his belief for righteousness. (Read Gen. 15:1-6) When we say that Abraham believed God, there is more said here than first meets the eye. Not only does God promise Abraham a son plus a great multitude of descendants to follow, but we have to be aware of what else God has promised Abraham. If we look at all the unconditional promises that God made to Abraham, basically God promised Abraham that his seed, his descendants, would rule the world. (Read Gal. 3:13-18) The ultimate ruler of the world is to be Jesus Christ, it is He who is the ultimate heir of the promises to Abraham. (Read Gal. 3:29) The Galatians were Gauls, descendants of 10 tribed Israel who had moved out of their captivity and had moved west in accordance with God's plan. They first settled in what we know today as France, but then a group moved back into Asia Minor into the area known in Paul's time as Galatia. There is some difference of opinion as to whether Paul's letter to the Galatians was sent to the Gauls in Galatia or the Gauls in what is today known as France. Either way, they were Israelites by race, or family. Certain of the Jews were trying to convince these Gauls that they had to be circumcised and follow the law to be justified. As in his letter to the Romans, Paul is showing the futility of this and tells them in Gal. 3:29 that even though they were of the seed of Abraham, to be considered to be of the seed of Abraham by God, they had to be Christ's, then they would be heirs, or joint heirs with Christ, of the promises to Abraham. Though Paul was speaking specifically to these Galatians, because of the problem of the Jews trying to pervert Paul's teachings, this would

also apply to Christians from any other nation, or nationality, as well, I believe.

Back to Gen. 15, we don't know how much Abraham understood of God's overall plan, but it would appear that he understood, in the promise of a son, that there was far more involved than him just having a son in his old age. Yet, we are told that he believed God and it was counted to him for righteousness.

(Read Romans 4:4-8) We have 3 different English words that all come from the same Greek word. The words "counted," "reckoned," and "imputeth or impute" all come from the Greek word "*logizomai*." It is really a bookkeeping term indicating that something has been entered into the books, or become a matter of record. Paul says that if a man earns his pay by his work, it is not "reckoned" to him of grace, or as a favor. Rather it is "reckoned" as a debt to be paid him. The King James translation then says, **"But to him that worketh not, but believeth on him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness."** We need to be careful how we read this. There are those that take this to mean that they are not to do anything that could be considered "work," such as obedience to God's law, for fear that someone might consider them to be working for their justification. Rather, I believe that we need to consider "justification" to be something that simply can't be earned, regardless of the quantity or quality of the work. This is kind of hard to grasp, as it was for the Jews who were steeped in the law. But if we consider it to be a standard beyond man's grasp by his own efforts, no amount of "work" will obtain it for us. The only way that it can be obtained is by accepting it as a gift from the God that established the standard and this can only be done through believing that God has given it to each of us. If we believe this, God then reckons, counts, or imputes justification, or God's righteousness to us. Paul tells us that David understood this and quotes Psa. 32:1,2 to prove this.

(Read Romans 4:9-12) Paul then says that it would be somewhat ludicrous to claim that this justification came only to the circumcised because it was reckoned to Abraham before he or any of

his household were circumcised. If it only applied to the circumcised then it would not apply to Abraham since he was not circumcised when God reckoned his faith for righteousness. Circumcision was an outward sign, or a seal, of Abraham's inward faith that was reckoned to him for righteousness. That his faith was reckoned for righteousness before he received the covenant of circumcision and then that he then received the covenant of circumcision made him the father of all that believe, that righteousness might be imputed to them, whether they are not circumcised in the flesh, or whether they are not only circumcised in the flesh but in the heart as well and walk in the steps of that faith of our father Abraham.

(Read Romans 4:13-16) There is not a singular promise in the O.T. that Abraham would be heir of the world, but rather all of the promises together teach us this as Paul acknowledges here. However, we need to note that they are unconditional promises, not law, either to Abraham or to his descendants, Israel. If Abraham had not believed God, the promises would have been of no effect to him. Also, had they been a law rather than a promise, the law would have demanded a performance on the part of Abraham and his descendants for them to receive the inheritance. Since there is no performance on the part of man that can secure the inheritance, though many have tried through the centuries, the law would have had no effect. What has happened to all who have tried to rule the world? So Paul says that the promises were not through the law but by the righteousness of faith. If these promises are then obtained through faith, they cannot be limited only to those who claim the law. Paul claims that the law worketh wrath, i.e. the wrath of God for the transgression of the law. If there were no law, then there would be no transgression; but the opposite is true as well. Where there is a law, there is transgression, thus wrath.

Paul then concludes that the promise is of faith, that it might be a gift, that it might be to all of Abraham's seed, both physical and spiritual, that he might be the father of us all before God whom he believed. (Read Romans 4:17-18) It is only God who has the power to resurrect from the

dead and only He can call those things that are not as though they were, i.e. call us righteousness though we are not. There is no other way we can attain to God's standard of righteousness. This in effect is the definition of the words counted, reckoned and imputed that we have seen Paul using here. God imputes, reckons or counts us righteous, even though we are not.

Abraham believed in hope beyond hope that God would perform His promise that Abraham's seed would be in number like the stars of the heavens. (Read Romans 4:19-21) Even though Abraham was 100 years old (normally considered beyond the child producing age) and Sarah was beyond the child bearing age, Abraham believed and was persuaded that when God promised him that his seed would be in number like that of the stars of the heavens, or the sand of the sea shore, that He was able to perform that which he had promised.

(Read Romans 4:22-25) I may be beating a dead horse, but we need to understand all that is being said here. Being resurrected from the dead and being called righteous are two different things. As we will see in the next chapter, men die a mortal death because Adam sinned, i.e. we all are paying for Adam's sin. To reverse that penalty, or judgment, God has said that He would accept another death in the place of our death. He showed the Israelites this pattern through the blood sacrifice of bulls and goats. As we discussed in our last lesson, by His own law God made Himself liable for Adam's sin, thus it became only His death that could be acceptable as a substitute for ours, and of course, we now know that He has died the same mortal death in the personage of Jesus Christ. But most of mankind had already died, or were sure to do so, so to make the penalty of mortal death of no effect, those who have died, or will die have to somehow live again. That God has the power to resurrect man from mortal death, God proved by resurrecting Jesus Christ from the grave, thus we can expect the same power of resurrection for us. I don't know how much Abraham understood so far as the details are concerned, but He did understand that man would live again, that God had the power to

assure this.

However, being resurrected alone does not make us righteous, or justified; believing the One who has the power to resurrect does. We're told in several places in Scripture that all men will be resurrected ultimately, some to age lasting, or eternal, life and some to judgment. We need to note that to be in the presence of God, we must be righteous, i.e. having met God's standard of righteousness. What Paul is talking about here is inheriting the world, i.e. ruling the world, this being the promise to Abraham and his descendants. We have seen that this promise was ultimately to Jesus Christ, the seed of Abraham, but it also included those who believed on Christ, whether literal seed of Abraham or not. To do this we must be righteous. That righteousness is imputed to us through Christ, not based on our own righteousness, which is totally inadequate. Paul says that the imputation of righteousness to Abraham was not for his sake only but also for the sake of all who believe on Him that raised Jesus Christ from the dead. That belief then is imputed to us for righteousness, thus justification. JRL

**GOD'S LAW**  
FOR  
**YESTERDAY, TODAY, FOREVER**

We are continuing our look at God's Law as pertaining to property, both personal and real.

Servants were considered property. A man is to treat his servants well. If he smites a servant and the servant dies right then, the owner is to be treated as a murderer. If the servant doesn't die for some time, the owner's punishment is his loss of the price of the servant. (Ex. 21:20-21)

If an owner smites a servant that they lose an eye or a tooth, he is to release the servant for the sake of the eye or tooth. (Ex. 21:26-27)

If another man's servant escapes his master and comes to you, you are not to deliver him back to his master, but are to allow him a place to live with you. (Deut. 23:15-16)

A man's livestock and crops are personal property as well. In fact most anything else he owns is personal property. But again, the owner has a responsibility not only to take care of it, but to insure it doesn't damage someone else. If a man's livestock damages someone else, he is responsible for the damage under most circumstances. If he knows before hand there is danger, such as having a known mean bull and it kills someone, the owner could lose his life, if the family of the deceased is unwilling to accept a ransom for his life. (Ex. 21:28-32) If two bulls got to fighting and one killed the other, the live bull is to be sold and his price plus the dead bull are to be divided between the two owners. (Ex. 21:35-36)

Letting one's livestock eat another man's field means he is to make restitution from the best of his own field. (Ex. 22:5)

If one accepts property from another to keep, he is responsible for it in case of loss unless it can be proven to be an accidental loss. (Ex. 22:7-13) If one borrows from his neighbor and something happens to the borrowed item, the borrower shall make it good unless the owner of the item was with it. (Ex. 22:14-15)

God claims all firstborn as His. Firstborn of men and of unclean animals were to be redeemed, and God says not to delay making that offering through the priests. (Ex. 22:29-30; Ex. 34:19-20; Lev. 27:26-34; Deut. 15:19-23)

Property of any kind was to be earned and not stolen. (Ex. 20:15; Deut. 5:19) The sentence for stealing was restitution from two to five times what was stolen, depending on if the thief still had it in hand, or whether he had sold or destroyed it, and the kind of item stolen. (Ex. 22:1; Ex. 22:2-4)

We are to respect and protect other people's property as well. (Ex. 23:4, 5; Deut. 22:1-3; Deut. 22:4; Deut. 23:24, 25)

We are to be willing to share the property God has given us, with those in need as well as those who have served us. We are to tithe of our increase to go primarily to the Levites, or those who are meeting a need we have. Part of the tithe and the gleanings and extras in our fields are to go to the poor and needy. (Lev. 19:9, 10; Lev. 23:22;

Deut. 14:22-27; Deut. 24:19-22)

To provide the best for our property, whatever kind it may be, the best we can do is keep God's commandments, statutes, and judgments. If we do this God promises blessings on our land, on our family, and on our property, whatever it may be. Of course, this will mean blessings on us. (Deut. 11:13-17)

We have looked at God's law as it pertains to family, health and property. We could probably categorize His law into several more categories, but I would like for us to look at a couple of categories that we might not think of. The first is what I call "physical law."

When God created the universe, He established certain orders that when violated, bring drastic consequences. For example, He worked six days or time periods and rested on the seventh. He commands us to keep that order of working six days and resting the seventh. (Ex. 20:8-11; Deut. 5:12-15) He extends that to Sabbath years as well, working six and then letting the land rest on the seventh. (Ex. 23:10-12; Lev. 25:2-7) He extended it even more to a special Sabbath year called the Jubilee, every seventh Sabbath year, or every forty-nine years. (Lev. 25:8-13) Not only

do we need to understand this order and live it, but much of the timing in the Bible is based on these cycles, or multiples of them. So this order needs to be firmly entrenched in our mind.

In the first chapter of Genesis, we see the term, "after his kind" used quite frequently, as we're told that God created the living things on the earth, each after their own kind and "God saw that it was good." (Gen. 1:25) In the law, we have a couple of laws reinforcing this order of things. Lev. 18:23 and 20:15, 16 strictly and strongly forbid man or woman from having sexual relations with beasts. The judgment for such a thing is death. (Ex. 22:19)

Deut. 22:9 tells us to not sow our vineyard with divers seeds lest the fruit be defiled.

We're told in Gen. 1 that God created the animals and man both male and female. Propagation of the species is through the natural union of the male and the female. For obvious reasons, union of the same sex would not result in propagation, which is the intent and purpose of sexual union. To do it anyway is an abomination to God. Lev. 20:13 tells us this and gives a judgment of death to anyone doing it.

We will look at more of these "physical

**IF MY PEOPLE, WHICH ARE CALLED BY MY NAME, SHALL HUMBLE THEMSELVES, AND PRAY, AND SEEK MY FACE, AND TURN FROM THEIR WICKED WAYS; THEN WILL I HEAR FROM HEAVEN, AND WILL FORGIVE THEIR SIN, AND WILL HEAL THEIR LAND. (II Chronicles 7:14) This verse is often repeated. How often is it heeded, even by Christian people? Our Heavenly Father, we plead for your mercy and forgiveness, individually and nationally.**