

# KINGDOM SPIRIT

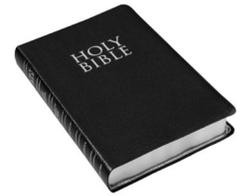
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**“SEEK YE FIRST THE KINGDOM OF GOD”**

Matthew 6:33



Issue 1103

## GENESIS 49

In Gen. 49:28, speaking of Jacob's last words to his sons, we're told **“this is it that their father spake unto them, and blessed them; every one according to his blessing he blessed them.”** But in verse 33, the verse starts out saying **“And when Jacob had made an end of commanding his sons...”** We want to study what Jacob had to say to his sons in this lesson. I think you will agree that sometimes it sounds like a blessing and other times the very opposite and sometimes it sounds like commands. Whatever, what Jacob had to say had long term effect on these sons of his and their descendants. Obviously, God, who is sovereign of all, was speaking through Jacob as only God can know the end from the beginning. I suggest that you read all of chapter 49 before we begin our study.

Jacob tells his sons in verse 1 that he is going to tell them **“that which shall befall you in the last days.”** As we follow these sons and their descendants through history, these things began to come to pass right away, but the ultimate fulfillment is on going and some yet to be completely fulfilled.

He begins with Reuben, his eldest son.

Traditionally, Reuben would have received the birthright, being Jacob's first born son. Jacob acknowledges this in verse 3, He was, as Jacob says, **“my firstborn, my might, and the beginning of my strength, the excellency of dignity, and the excellency of power.”** However, Jacob follows this up with a very serious denunciation telling Reuben he was **“unstable as water, thou shalt not excel; because thou wentest up to thy father's bed; then defiledst thou it: he went up to my couch.”** This is in reference to an event recorded in Gen. 35:22, **“And it came to pass, when Israel dwelt in that land, that Reuben went and lay with Bilhah his father's concubine: and Israel heard it.”** That Reuben lost the birthright because of this incident is confirmed in I Chronicles 5:1. We do not know much more about Reuben and his family from Biblical history except that when the Israelites came out of Egypt at the time of the Exodus, they settled on the east side of the Jordan river with the Gadites and half of the tribe of Manasseh. However, some of the symbols that were used by the Reubenites appear in some of the symbols found today in the Scandinavian countries, Greece, Netherlands and England.

Simeon and Levi are dealt with together by Jacob. The “instruments of cruelty” mentioned in verse 5 would be the sword as this became the

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primary emblem of the tribe of Simeon. Jacob is referring to the incident recorded in Gen. 34:25, 26 in which Simeon and Levi killed Hamor and Shechem plus all the males of the city of Shalem because Shechem had defiled their sister Dinah. The secondary emblem of the tribe of Simeon was a “castle gate,” apparently from the reference in verse 6, **“in their selfwill they digged down a wall.”** These emblems appear in the heraldry found in a number of the Celto-Saxon nations. We know from Bible history that the tribe of Levi was scattered throughout all of the tribes of Israel and I believe remain so today, so as a result did not receive a land inheritance when the Israelites entered the land of Canaan.

As we have mentioned before, the kingship, the sceptre was to go to the tribe of Judah. Though the first king of Israel, Saul, was from the tribe of Benjamin, David became the king whose kingdom was to last forever. As part of some unconditional promises to David, through the prophet Nathan, II Sam. 7:16 tells us, speaking to David, **“And thine house and thy kingdom shall be established for ever before thee: thy throne shall be established for ever.”** That He might lawfully inherit the throne of David, Jesus Christ was born of the tribe of Judah. In verse 10 of Gen. 49, we’re told, **“The sceptre shall not depart from Judah, nor a lawgiver from between his feet, until Shiloh come, and unto him shall the gathering of the people be.”** “Shiloh” means “tranquil.” This is clearly a reference to the return of Christ and the status of the Kingdom when that happens. In Biblical history, it would appear that the throne terminates when King Zedekiah is taken captive by King Nebuchadnezzar and all of his sons are killed. However, between the books of Jeremiah and Ezekiel, there are prophetic clues that tell us that the throne is not terminated, but rather changes locations ultimately to the British Isles and continues to this day.

The lion is the primary emblem of Judah. Quoting from the book Symbols of our Celto-Saxon Heritage by W. H. Bennett, “Keeping in mind that the purpose of heraldry is to identify and to prove continuity, let us note that the Lion in one posture or another is an emblem common

to nearly all sections of the Celto-Saxon people... As a national emblem, however, it is peculiarly the symbol of Britain...Nevertheless, it is not exclusively a British emblem, for it also appears in the Arms of England, Scotland, Northern Ireland, Canada, Norway, Sweden, Finland, Denmark, the Netherlands, Belgium and Luxembourg, as well as in the emblems of many of their provinces and cities.”

In Rev. 5:5, Christ is called the Lion of the tribe of Judah. Verse 9 of Gen. 49 prophetically speaks of Christ’s death (**couched** [lies down in death] **as a lion**) and resurrection (**who shall rouse him up?**)—only **“the Spirit of him that raised up Jesus from the dead”** (Rom. 8:11).

Verses 11, 12 apparently refer to great prosperity. The vine would be so productive that one would not worry about binding one’s ass to the vine in fear of it destroying the fruit or the vine.

Judah, with the exception of a relatively small group who returned to Jerusalem following the Babylonian captivity, was scattered among the nations both by the Babylonians at the time of the captivity and also the Assyrians took the major part of Judah captive with the Israelites so that they were mixed among the Israelites as well. I don’t think we can really identify them, as a group, with any nation today. I do not consider the vast majority of the people we call Jews today to be descended from Judah. (This is another study for another time.)

Verse 13 is quite literal in Jacob’s blessing of what Zebulun would become. A sea port being difficult to portray on a banner was possibly what prompted their use of ship as their main tribal emblem. However, remember that Jacob said in verse 1 that what he was saying was what would befall them in the last days. When the land of Canaan was divided among the various tribes following the Exodus, all of the land allotted to Zebulun was inland, none of it touched a sea. Many of scholars lean toward Zebulun today being primarily represented by the Netherlands. Holland’s ancient emblem was a ship.

Issachar (verses 14, 15) had as their national emblem the donkey carrying a large burden

as a result of this blessing. I am not familiar with much history on this tribe. Some scholars today associate the majority of the tribe of Issachar with the nation of Finland today.

The serpent and the horse (usually white) became the first symbols for the tribe of Dan (verses 16-18). The serpent was seldom used but the horse was used quite a bit, however, for some reason that I have been unable to find, later the eagle replaced the horse as the symbol for this tribe, especially as we get into the book of Revelation and see pictured in chapter 4 the camp arrangement of the Israelites as they traveled during the Exodus. Dan became the dominant tribe on the north side of the tabernacle when the Israelites camped during the Exodus. The tribe of Dan became divided while in the land of Canaan, part being on the shore of the Mediterranean and part inland. Those on the shore of the sea apparently took to the sea and are responsible for a lot of the first movement of Israelites into Europe before and during the Assyrian captivity of the rest of Israel. This is evidenced by their naming of things and places they went after their forefather Dan. Again, some scholars today believe that the majority of southern Ireland are of Danite extraction.

The emblem for the tribe of Gad (verse 19), because a troop of horsemen would be difficult to put on a standard, was instead a leader of a troop, usually holding aloft a pennant. Some scholars relate the tribe of Gad to Germany today.

In verse 20 we're told that **“out of Asher his bread shall be fat, and he shall yield royal dainties.”** It is not known for sure what is meant by royal dainties, but in that day it would probably be sure to include wine which would require a cup, or some similar container, so it is assumed this to be the reason for Asher's emblem to be a covered cup, or goblet. The tribe of Asher, like several of the other tribes, really did not do anything that would particularly distinguish them before going into the Assyrian captivity, so we really know very little of them so far as Biblical history is concerned. Some scholars place this tribe in South Africa today.

Naphtali is like Asher in that the tribe

doesn't stand out in Biblical history. Verse 21 tells us that it is a hind let loose, so it follows that the emblem of Naphtali is that of leaping hind. At first it was a female deer, and then later changed to a male, so that today a stag is the equivalent of Naphtali's emblem. Those who try to place these tribes among the nations of today place Naphtali in Sweden.

Remember that Joseph's two sons were adopted by Jacob as his own, so when we read of the blessing to Joseph in verses 22-26, we need to be aware that some of the blessing was shared by both tribes and some are divided between them. We first read, **“Joseph is a fruitful bough, even a fruitful bough by a well; whose branches run over the wall: The archers have sorely grieved him, and shot at him, and hated him. But his bow abode in strength, and the arms of his hands were made strong by the hands of the mighty God of Jacob.”** This tells us first that the tribes of Joseph were to be a very prolific people. This is born out in Israel's history as the combination of the tribes of Ephraim and Manasseh far out number any of the rest of the tribes of Israel, with the exception of the tribe of Judah.

Other writings concerning Israel compare her to the olive tree which leads us to assume that the fruitful bough spoken of here is that of the olive tree. Also the fact that archers are said to shoot at him but that his bow abode in strength, it follows that he would have something to do with arrows.

We need to look at one other Scripture to be able to identify the emblems of Joseph's two sons. In Deut. 33:17 Moses is blessing Joseph. He says, **“His glory is like the firstling of his bullock, and his horns are like the horns of unicorns: with them he shall push the people together to the ends of the earth: and they are the ten thousands of Ephraim, and they are the thousands of Manasseh.”** The two tribes drew from these two blessings to establish their tribal emblems. Manasseh chose the olive branch as their primary emblem and a bundle of arrows as their secondary emblem. Ephraim chose the bull as their primary emblem and the unicorn as their secondary emblem. If we look at the Great Seal

of the United States, we see that the eagle on the seal is holding a bundle of arrows in his left talon and an olive branch in his right talon. Great Britain is much more oriented toward emblems that we in the United States are, but if you look at the various seals and heraldry of Great Britain, you will see a multitude that have the bull, or ox, and the unicorn on them. Combine this with the blessing that Jacob gave Ephraim and Manasseh in chapter 48, **“he (Manasseh) also shall become a people, and he also shall be great: but truly his younger brother shall be greater than he, and his seed shall become a multitude of nations.”** Identifying these two tribes with the United States and Great Britain helps us understand much better the rest of the blessing that Jacob gave to Joseph, for there have probably never been any two nations any more blessed than we have been.

Lastly, **“Benjamin shall ravine as a wolf: in the morning he shall devour the prey, and at night he shall divide the spoil.”** So it follows that the emblem of the tribe of Benjamin was the wolf.

Benjamin became distinguished as the light tribe for the Kingdom of Judah which consisted of Judah, Benjamin and half the tribe of Levi when the Kingdom of Israel divided after the death of Solomon. Also, it is worth noting, I believe, at the time of Christ, the Benjaminites had settled near the Sea of Galilee following the Babylonian captivity. All of the apostles, with the exception of Judas Iscariot, were Galileans. Today, those identifying the various tribes with current day nations place Benjamin in Norway.

I think we have to be aware that there are probably individuals and elements of all of the tribes that have become a part of other tribes through the centuries, so even though I have listed the nations that some scholars believe these tribes have become, this would be far from 100% accurate. Also, most of these nations have small to large concentrations of non-Israelites as citizens of those nations as well. So when we list nations that these tribes might have become, we are speaking in generalities at best.

Once Jacob had made an end of blessing, or commanding his sons, we're told that he

charged them that they were to bury him in the cave of Machpelah where Abraham, Sarah, Isaac, Rebekah and Leah were buried. When he finished making the charge to them, he died at the age of 147.

## PAUL'S EPISTLE TO THE ROMANS

In our last lesson, we read in Rom. 11:1 the question, **“Hath God cast away his people?”** This is a reference to the 10 tribed kingdom of Israel being divorced by God and sent into the Assyrian captivity. Yet, Paul answers his question with, **“God forbid. For I also am an Israelite, of the seed of Abraham, of the tribe of Benjamin.”** While the kingdom of Israel was definitely cast out of their land and not allowed to return, we determined that Paul could answer the way he did in that he was referring to the elect, or the remnant that God has always had in Israel, of which Paul was a part. As we read further, we were told in verse 7, **“What then? Israel hath not obtained that which he seeketh for; but the election hath obtained it, and the rest were blinded.”** We discussed the fact that not only did God select the elect, not because of their works, but because of His sovereign right to select whom He wanted, based solely on His own purpose, but He also blinded the rest of Israel, again for the same reason. This then takes us to verse 11 as we begin today's lesson. (Read Romans 11:11-12) Again, we have to keep the sovereignty of God in the forefront of our mind. God, in effect, caused Israel to stumble. It is not that He lured them into false religion or that He caused them to take up a man made law system. It is kind of like the man who dug a pit and didn't provide a fence to keep animals from falling into it. As a result the neighbor's ox fell into the pit. God, in His law, says that the man who dug the pit is responsible for paying for the ox. The pit that God dug was the covenant He made with Israel. He knew Israel could not keep the covenant. Israel thought they could and agreed to do so, but instead they began to rely on the law as their salvation rather than the

law-giver, and thus fell into the pit, or as Paul puts it here, they stumbled. God did not sin in making this covenant with Israel as He was fully prepared to keep His end of the bargain, plus He hasn't reached His goal. (Remember that the definition of sin is "to miss the goal.") Many people think that because Israel stumbled, that God failed to attain His goal and had to resort to a different plan. This is not true. Everything that happened is according to God's plan. This is what Paul is telling us here. Through the fall of Israel, salvation is come unto the nations. Salvation for all people is God's goal, it is the target that He is shooting at. He has not missed. The arrow is in the air headed straight for the center of the target. Strangely enough, the first nations (Gentiles) to whom salvation is come are the same nation that stumbled and fell. Remember what Moses said and Paul repeated in Rom. 10:19, speaking of Israel, **"I will provoke you to jealousy by them that are no people, and by a foolish nation I will anger you."** Then remember the prophecies of Israel in the names of Hosea's children, **"ye are not my people, and I will not be your God."** (Hosea 1:9) Now Paul is talking initially to the nations that came out of this "not my people" plus, ultimately, all of the nations of the world. Then in verse 12 we can begin to appreciate what Paul said in Rom. 9:16, **"So then it is not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God that sheweth mercy.** For if their fall be the riches of the world and of the nations, **"how much more their fullness?"**

This is the way that God is going about to accomplish His purpose. He has temporarily caused Israel to stumble that He would have lawful reason to redeem not only Israel, but the whole world as well, but the glorious end result for Israel will be beyond our imagination.

(Read Romans 11:13-15) Paul points out that he has been called as an apostle to the nations. So if he can provoke these of the former kingdom of Israel, to whom he is related, to jealousy that some of them can be saved, this is his job. The word "reconciling" in verse 15 should be translated "conciliating" as we have discussed before. It is a one sided effort. The casting away

of Israel is an effort by God to offer conciliation to the whole world. The receiving of Israel back will be no less than resurrection from the dead. Keep in mind that parable that we looked at last lesson in Matt. 13:44, **"Again the kingdom of heaven is like unto treasure hid in a field; the which when a man hath found, he hideth, and for joy thereof goeth and selleth all that he hath, and buyeth that field."** The field is the world according to verse 38. God sowed, or scattered, Israel in the world. They became lost, the lost sheep of the house of Israel. When found by Christ, He didn't take the treasure and run, He sold all that He had and bought the whole world.

Then speaking of the remnant, the overcomers, Paul says that **"if the first fruit be holy, the lump is also holy."** (Read verse 16) We looked at the law of first fruits last lesson. Here the first fruit represents the remnant, the lump is the world. It is thought by many that the first fruits are the Christians and only they would be saved. But in the law of the first fruits, the first fruits were inspected, in effect, and if the first fruits were acceptable, then the whole harvest was acceptable. So while the first fruits are the first harvested, the lump, the whole world will be accepted and harvested as well. (Read James 1:18) It is by God's will that He begets us with the word of truth, so that we can be a kind of first fruits of His creation. Paul then says that if the root be holy, so are the branches. The root here is Christ, the branches are the believers. This tree was established, or planted at Mt Sinai with the formation of the kingdom of Israel. Many branches have been broken off because of unbelief, but the tree is the same, there has always been a remnant of branches and of course, there has always been Christ.

(Read Romans 11:17-21) There is what I consider a false doctrine, actually two false doctrines that have at least part of their basis in these verses. It is called "replacement theology." The idea is that "the church" has replaced the kingdom of Israel. First off, this is saying that God had to go to plan "B" because Israel was cast off. I don't believe that God ever had to go to a plan "B," but has always been on plan "A." As I said before,

Christ hasn't changed, He has been the same Christ both to the church in the wilderness and the church, or congregation, in Paul's day and to the congregation in our day. Paul has made a point to show us that there has always been a remnant of believers. It seems to me that those who promote a replacement theology are trying to promote two trees. These last three chapters I think are evidence that this is not the case.

The second replacement doctrine is that at some point the Jew tree will replace the church tree, i.e. sometime in the future, the Jews will take over and their "tree" will be the one everyone will have to be a part of to be saved. Needless to say, Paul makes it very clear that only by belief and faith in Christ can anyone be a branch, whether natural or grafted. There is only one tree and the root of that tree is Christ. It is not the branches that support the root, but rather the root that supports the branches.

(Read Romans 11:22-24) Verse 22 tells us to behold the goodness and the severity of God. It is sometimes hard for us to grasp this concept. God directs everything that happens both on an individual basis and a corporate basis. Some of what happens is good and some is bad, though all things that happen are in accordance with God's plan and are ultimately for the good. However, because we think we are in control, thus what we do is a reflection of the condition of our heart, God rewards the good and judges the bad, whether we are talking about the individual or the corporate entity. In the case of Israel, God caused them to do what they did as this was a part of His plan for the good of all mankind, yet because they rebelled against God, thinking they were in control, God judged them, thus divorcing them and sending them out of their land and severing their tie to God.

Yet, they have the opportunity to be grafted back into the kingdom tree through faith just as anyone else has. (Read Romans 11:25-27) I like the way Ferrar Fenton translates verse 25 in his translation, "**Therefore, brothers, I would not wish you to forget this mystery, so that you may not exult with yourselves: that a partial perversity has come to Israel until the whole of**

**the heathen (nations) can enter, and then all Israel will be saved.**" While God has used Israel in their downfall and God caused blindness as part of His plan to bring salvation to the world, He has promised through the prophets that all Israel shall be saved. However, not all will be saved until the fullness of the nations, or the time when all nations can enter the kingdom. I Corinthians 15:23 tells us that every man will be made alive in Christ in his own order. This indicates to me that there will be a process in which all men will be saved. Paul quotes Isaiah 59:20, 21 as his proof of this. Though the passage in Isaiah reads a little different from the way that Paul quotes it, I think we can safely say that Paul is correct in the spirit of the passage.

(Read Romans 11:28-32) If we are not a believer, we are an enemy of God. Jesus said in Matt. 12:30, "**He that is not with me is against me.**" So far as the gospel is concerned, Israel is an enemy of God for the sake of all mankind. But, God is faithful. Even though Israel has rebelled against God, God's promises to Abraham are still in effect because God cannot repent of what He has promised. Thus those whom God selects for certain jobs He has for them are beloved for the sake of the fathers, which goes back to Abraham. Vs. 32 says that "**God hath concluded them all in unbelief, that he might have mercy upon all.**" Both "all's" in this statement refer to the same group. A marginal reference in my Bible uses the word "confined" instead of "concluded." For God to have mercy on all, it was necessary that they all be "confined" in unbelief. If they were all believers, they would not need the mercy as the unbeliever does.

(Read Romans 11:33-36) So far in this epistle to the congregation at Rome, Paul has given us a pretty thorough study in the three steps of complete salvation; justification, sanctification, and glorification, and has gone into detail as to how God has brought this about. He has taught us of the sovereignty of God and how through election, not the works of men, God has predestined the affairs of men to conform to His plan of ultimate restoration of all things. He has used Israel as the example God intended for them to be, to

show how God works all things for the good. Paul shows us how through the remnant, according to the election of grace, God's Word has remained intact and of force among men.

I believe Paul here is kind of taking a break in writing his epistle and looking back at what all he has written and he cannot help but praise God. If we try to contemplate all that Paul has told us, I believe we too share his praise. When we see the whole plan, a plan that started working back with Abraham and proceeded with Isaac, Jacob/Israel and his sons, the formation of the nation of Israel, King David and his son Solomon, the dividing of the kingdom and the captivities of both Israel and Judah, the release of Judah and the ultimate birth, death and resurrection of our Saviour, Jesus Christ, and the evangelizing of the ex-Israelites of the Assyrian captivity, it is almost hard to accept that even God could have devised such a marvelous plan and executed it so perfectly. Paul's words of praise in these last five verses, while praising in words far better than I could use, still seem a little inadequate but worth re-reading. (Read Romans 11:33-36 again.)

Paul changes his perspective somewhat as we get into chapter 12 from presenting God's overall plan in which God has predestined people to carry out specific parts, both good and bad, to dealing specifically with the remnant, or the elect, that God has elected to the job of taking His Word to the world. Paul has some advice on how, as witnesses for Christ, this remnant should think and act, i.e. what their character should be. (Read Romans 12:1,2) If we think of sacrifice in terms of the burnt sacrifices, so also should we think of our bodies as a sacrifice. In the burnt sacrifices, the sacrifice was totally burned up. We should be willing to put our all on the line to God. There were several burnt sacrifices, but let's use for an example the sacrifice of the red heifer. The red heifer was totally burned up and the ashes were then gathered up and stored and then mixed with water in cleansing those that were unclean. If we are willing to be totally used up by God, He can use us in cleansing the unclean, but it is Him that uses us, not us calling the shots, so to speak.

The word "world" is from the Greek *aion*,

meaning age. We are not to be conformed to this age. Paul has shown us that we need to live our lives as if we had already died and been resurrected, i.e. living in the next age, the thousand years reigning with Christ that we are told of in Rev. 20. Another way to look at this is to refer back to the three feasts as ages. The three feasts had their origination in events that happened as the children of Israel came out of Egypt. Passover, the first of the feasts, commemorated their being passed over by the death angel. We have related that to justification, i.e. being made righteous through faith in Jesus Christ, that we might have our name written in the Lamb's book of life, that we might escape the second death. The second feast, the Feast of Weeks, later known as Pentecost, commemorated the giving of the law at Mt Sinai. The children of Israel then spent the next 40 years living in booths in the wilderness, not being allowed to build houses or to settle down. They lived with the hope of entering the promised land. We have related this to sanctification, i.e. the learning and practicing obedience to God, being led by the Spirit. Tabernacles, then commemorated the coming into the promised land, but to celebrate it, the people were to build booths and live in them 8 days in remembrance of their time in the wilderness. We have related Tabernacles to glorification, the placing of sons by God after the resurrection of the overcomers. If we looked at these feasts as ages, Paul is saying to not conform ourselves to the Passover age, i.e. to not be satisfied with just justification but to look forward to the age of Pentecost, but to not build a house and settle there either but rather to look forward to, or conform ourselves to Tabernacles, the true entering into of the Promised Land.

Paul says that we do this by the renewing, or renovation, of our mind that we might be able to prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God. We are in the Pentecostal age, the age of learning and practicing obedience to God. But we are not to be conformed to this age, but rather look toward the Tabernacles age.

(Read Romans 12:3-5) We are all called to do certain things. Just as our body isn't all hands, or all feet, or all eyes, or all tongues, we

are all members of one body and each has a different function. Each of us are dependent on each other, and while some may have a calling that appears more important than another, Paul warns us not to think more highly of ourselves than we ought, but to think soberly. We have to keep in mind that we are all members of each other, one in the body of Christ.

(Read Romans 12:6-8) Obviously, we all differ from each other in the gifts that we have been given, but each is no less necessary to the body than any other, even though some may seem to command more attention from others. Not only do we need to remember this for our own benefit so that we don't think more highly of ourselves than we ought, but we need to remember this in our consideration of others that we don't put them down in our mind or actions because we don't perceive their importance to the body as a whole.

(Read Romans 12:9-13) "Dissimulation" in verse 9 is rendered "hypocrisy" in the marginal reference of my Bible. Another term that I have heard used is "play acting." Love isn't just what you say to someone, but rather is evident in the actions you take. "Love" in verse 9 is from the Greek word *agape*, which we have discussed before as being defined as "head love," i.e. it is love that we actively make an effort at. The word "affectioned" is from the Greek word *philostorgos* meaning "cherishing one's kindred, especially parents or children." The word "love" in verse 10 is from the Greek word *philadelphia* meaning "fraternal affection." The word "preferring" is from the Greek word *proegeomai*, which, according to Dr. Strong, means "to lead the way for others, i.e. show deference. If we consider the meaning of these words and apply them to our relationship with each other, I think we can see how our relationship can improve dramatically.

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"Continuing instant in prayer" doesn't mean that we have to be constantly in prayer or asking for the same thing over and over, but rather to persevere diligently in prayer, to be earnest toward prayer. We need, through experience and maturing to learn what God has for us to do and then be diligent in our prayers for His help and direction in doing it.

(Read Romans 12:14-21) The common thought seems to be that when someone persecutes us, we see the devil behind him or her and thus we are justified in cursing that person. Consider the fact that God is in control of everything. This being the case, it might be that God is causing that person to persecute us to teach us to overcome. If we never have anything to overcome, how are we going to grow and mature to be able to overcome anything. When we were in school and learning math, did not your teacher, once you had mastered a given problem, put a little more difficult problem before you to solve? This is how we grow and mature. The key is how we handle that problem, or persecution. (Read Matt. 5:43-48) Jesus said, "**Ye have heard that it hath been said, 'Thou shalt love thy neighbor, and hate thine enemy.'**" "**Thou shalt love thy neighbor**" is part of God's law. "**Hate thine enemy**" is man's law, probably part of the rabbinic teaching. But note that Jesus says, "**Love your enemies, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you; that ye may be the children of your Father which is in heaven.**" We have been discussing striving to mature to the point that we might be adopted as Sons of God. How many of us have thought about this being one of the rules we need to follow to grow and mature to reach that goal? JRL