

KINGDOM SPIRIT



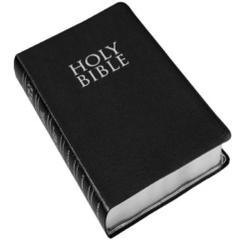
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“SEEK YE FIRST THE KINGDOM OF GOD”

Matthew 6:33



Issue 2104

IN THE BEGINNING A STUDY OF THE BOOK OF GENESIS (Part 7)

Isaac is old and has lost most of his eyesight. He feels he is near to die, but has some unfinished business that he needs to take care of first. (Read Genesis 27:1-5) Esau being his favorite, as well as his oldest son, he wants to give him a special blessing before he dies. Esau being a hunter, Isaac asks Esau to hunt a deer and to prepare him his favorite venison dish in preparation to his giving him the blessing. However, Rebekah overheard him tell Esau this.

(Read Gen. 27:6-17) Jacob had been anxious to receive the birthright and the responsibility that went with it and Esau obviously did not want the responsibility. But Esau did want the material blessing that would have benefited him right then, or at least so he thought. Rebekah recognized the need for Jacob to have the blessing to support his responsibility of the birthright and immediately set out to get Jacob to steal the blessing. She prepared goat meat the way Isaac liked it, dressed Jacob in Esau's clothing, covered his hands and arms and his neck with goat skin so that he would appear hairy as Esau. Now it was up to Jacob to complete the ruse. (Read Gen. 27:18-29) Jacob took the meat and bread into his father and lied, telling him that he was Esau. Obviously Isaac wasn't sure, so he tested him feeling of his arms and smelling his clothing, all the while Jacob telling him he was Esau. The ruse worked and Isaac gave him the blessing. **“Therefore God give thee of the dew of heaven, and the fatness of the earth, and plenty of corn and wine: Let people serve thee, and nations bow down to thee: be**

lord over thy brethren, and let thy mother's sons bow down to thee: cursed be everyone that curseth thee, and blessed be he that blesseth thee.” To me, in giving the blessing, Isaac is basically doing so with faith in God that it will be carried out. Obviously, this was God's plan for Jacob, but because Jacob obtained it by deception, there will be a cost to Jacob and his descendants.

(Read Gen. 27:30-40) Esau was very upset upon learning that Jacob had stolen the blessing, but Isaac believed he could not take the blessing back. Esau begged Isaac to give him a blessing also, which Isaac did, but it was really partly a curse as well. **“Behold, thy dwelling shall be the fatness of the earth, and of the dew of heaven from above; And by thy sword shalt thou live, and shalt serve thy brother; and it shall come to pass when thou shalt have the dominion, that thou shalt break his yoke from off thy neck.”** Esau became known as Edom. If we follow Esau's, or Edom's history down through the centuries, virtually every time Jacob's descendants were in battle, or discomfited for some reason, an element of Esau's descendants seem to be involved in that discomfiture from Israel's servitude in Egypt to our current servitude to the world banking system. This is part of the cost I mentioned above for Jacob's obtaining the blessing by deceit.

(Read Gen. 27:41-46) Esau hated Jacob for what he had done and comforted himself by telling himself that after Isaac had died he would kill Jacob. Rebekah learned of this and told Jacob to flee to Haran to the house of her brother Laban. It appears however, that he needed the permission of his father Isaac to leave. Rebekah had one other reason for Jacob to go to Haran and she used that to get Isaac to send Jacob away. She did not want Jacob to marry from the girls of the land of Ca-

Canaan and told Isaac that. She told Jacob that she would send for him when Esau's anger abated, however she was never to see Jacob again, as she died while he was away.

(Read Gen. 28:1-5) Isaac responded to Rebekah's request and charged Jacob not to take a wife of the daughters of the Canaanites, but told him to go to Laban and take a wife of his daughters. He then blessed him and sent him on his way.

(Read Gen. 28:6-9) Apparently Esau had not realized that his marrying the Canaanite women had grieved his parents so much. These marriages outside of his family earned him the title of fornicator in Heb. 12:16. When he saw that Isaac had blessed Jacob and sent him to Padanaram, he went to Ishmael and married one of his daughters, Mahalath, or Bashemath as she is called in Gen. 36.

(Read Gen. 28:10-15) God confirmed the promises, He gave to Abraham, to Jacob in his dream as he slept. So we know that it is through Jacob that the promises were to be kept.

(Read Gen. 28:16-22) The marginal reference in my Bible, referring to Jacob taking a stone and setting it up for his pillow, means setting it at his head. Jacob is to return to this place, Bethel, when he returns from Padanaram 20 years later and will again anoint a stone here. There is a strong tradition that Jacob carried this stone with him, either from the first time he was here or the second time and that it was carried by the Israelites during their 40 years in the wilderness. The tradition is that ultimately Jeremiah took this stone with him, when he left Judah, to Ireland approximately 2600 years ago. It remained in Ireland 905 years, then it was moved to Scotland for 981 years, then it was placed in the Coronation Chair in Westminster Abbey where it remained until just recently when it was moved back to Scotland with an agreement that it would be moved back to the Coronation Chair when the time comes to crown a new monarch of the British Empire. The stone has steel rings attached to two sides that staves can be run through to carry it. These rings are very well worn, by tradition, being carried by the children of Israel during the Exodus. It has a number of names, Jacob's Stone, the Stone of Destiny (i.e. *Lia Fail*), Stone of Scone, to name a few. There are many stories and speculations concerning the stone.

It is usually thought that Jacob was a young man, eighteen or twenty years old, at this time. This is not true. We can figure his age pretty close by counting backward. In Gen. 47:28 we're told that he lived in the land of Egypt 17 years and was 147 years old when he died. This would have made him 130 years old when he first came to Egypt. In Gen. 41:46 we're told that Joseph was 30 years old when he stood before the Pharaoh and told him the interpretation of his dream, that there would be 7 very good years and 7 years of famine. When Joseph revealed himself to his brothers in Gen. 45:6, they were 7 good years and 2 famine years into the 14 years of the dream which would have made Joseph 39 years old when Jacob was 130 years old. If we subtract the 39 from the 130, Jacob would have been 91 when Joseph was born and Gen. 30:25 tells us that Joseph was born at the end of the 14 years that Jacob served Laban for his wives. So subtracting the 14 from the 91 would make Jacob about 77 at the time that he went down to Padanaram in search for a wife.

Another interesting story concerning Jacob as he traveled to Padanaram is found in the 29th chapter of the book of Jasher. Here we're told that Esau's oldest son, Eliphaz, though just a teenager, had been taught well by his father to use a bow and other weapons. When Esau learned that Jacob had gone to Padanaram, he commanded Eliphaz to take with him some of his mother's brothers and to pursue after Jacob and to kill him. Eliphaz and the men that were with him did as Esau had commanded them, but when they caught up to Jacob and Jacob saw what was about to happen, he offered all the gold and silver and goods that he had brought with him, presumably to offer to the father of a wife, to them and was able to talk them into taking it and letting him live. Esau was quite angry when he learned what had happened, but was unable at that time to do any more about it.

If this story is true, this would explain why Jacob had to serve Laban for his wives as we will learn in the next chapter. Based on the story of Abraham's servant having gifts of jewels, gold and silver to offer for a wife for Isaac, I think we can presume that Jacob would have been just as well supplied as he began his quest for a wife. By the time he got to Padanaram, he apparently did not have anything left as gifts for a wife or for her

father because of his having to bribe his nephew for his life, so it was necessary that he serve Laban for his wives.

It is also interesting that in verse 14 that God told Jacob that his seed would be as the dust of the earth in number and that they would spread abroad to the west, and to the east, and to the north, and to the south. Israel did not really begin to expand until they had been in captivity to the Assyrians, but we now know that as they began to escape from that captivity, the order and directions that they went were in the order as given here. They first went west into Europe, the Isles and eventually to America, then east into India, then north into Canada, then south to Australia and South Africa.

(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.

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 Jacob 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 it 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. This was the law of the land throughout Canaan, as we mentioned before. Some of these laws are similar to the Mosaic law, but some are drastically different and drastically unjust. However, there was a law that 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 there 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 depend-*

ence 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. JRL

A STUDY OF THE BOOK OF 1st THESSALONIANS

We begin this lesson with the second chapter of 1st Thessalonians. (Read I Thess. 2:1-12) Before coming to Thessalonica the first time, Paul and Silas had been in Philippi, where some men were making money using a young woman, who was possessed with a spirit of divination, with her soothsaying, moved the people against Paul and Silas after they had caused the spirit to leave the woman. They brought them before the judges where they were beaten with rods and cast into prison. The Lord caused an earthquake that night that caused the prison doors to open and the shackles to come loose and the prison keeper prepared to take his life thinking the prisoners were all gone. Paul stopped him telling him that everyone was still there. The keeper took Paul and Silas and dressed their wounds, fed them and he and his household became believers. When the judges sent to have Paul and Silas released the next morning, Paul sent word that since they were Romans and had been beaten and put into prison without a trial, the judges should come

and release them themselves. They did this and begged them to leave Philippi. Paul and Silas then went to Thessalonica. Now Paul relates back to the Thessalonians what happened then, how they knew that they had not come to them in vain. Though there had been much contention, Paul says his preaching was not of deceit, nor of uncleanness, nor guile, but rather what God had given him to speak, he spoke not as pleasing men, but of pleasing God. As they know, he says that they did not use flattering words, nor a pretext of greed, nor did they seek glory from any man, though as apostles of Christ they could have asserted their authority. Rather he says they were gentle even as a nurse cherisheth her children. The NASB renders vs. 8 as, "**Having thus a fond affection for you, we were well-pleased to impart to you not only the gospel of God but also our own lives, because you had become very dear to us.**" As we often see, Paul apparently worked to make a living as well as preached or taught, as he did not want to be a burden to them. He reminds them of how he labored day and night to be able to do this. He says they are his witnesses, as is God, how devoutly, and justly, and unblameably they behaved themselves among them that believed. He says they know how he dealt with them as a father does his own children so that they would walk in a manner worthy of the God that calls us all into His kingdom and glory.

(Read I Thess. 2:13-16) For this reason, Paul says that he continually thanks God that they did not receive the word as the word of men only, but rather as the true word of God which, he says, performs its work in those that believe. For they have become like the churches of God in Christ Jesus that are in Judea since they have suffered at the hands of their own countrymen as those in Judea have suffered from the Jews, who both killed Jesus and the prophets and have driven Paul and others out. He says they are not pleasing to God, but are really hostile to all men forbidding Paul to speak to the Gentiles that they might be saved with the result that they fill up the measure of their sins. He says the wrath of God is come upon them to the utmost.

Having been away from the Thessalonians for only a short time, in actual presence, though not in their hearts, they have worked hard to see their faces again with great desire. But he says that though they have tried, satan, or the adver-

sary, has hindered them from doing so. But Paul has hope that he will soon see them when Jesus returns, as they are his hope, glory and joy.

(Read I Thess. 3) As we read in Acts 17, Paul was only in Thessalonica for about three weeks before he was forced to leave. When he left, he went to Berea, not too far from Thessalonica and was received much better there. However, when the Jews, that had run Paul and company out of Thessalonica, heard that Paul was preaching in Berea, they went to Berea and stirred up the people there as well. Paul then went to Athens, but sent Timothy back to Thessalonica to see how the believers there were doing. He apparently sent Silas elsewhere as he says that he was alone at Athens. Paul was very concerned that he had not been able to be at Thessalonica long enough to be sure the new believers were grounded in the faith enough to withstand the opposition that they were going to run into. So we see him here in chapter 3 telling them what had happened, how concerned he was for them and why he sent Timothy back to them. But now Timothy has returned to tell him that the believers were doing well in their faith and love and had a good remembrance of Paul and company and had a great desire to see them again as did Paul for them. So in spite of their affliction and distress, Paul says that they were comforted over them and urged them to stand fast in the Lord. He says that they can't be thankful enough for the joy he has for their sakes before our God. He is praying night and day that he will be able to see their face and might be able to perfect that which might be lacking in their faith. He prays that God will direct his way back to them and that the Lord will cause them to increase in their love for one another and towards all men even as Paul loves them. The purpose being to establish their hearts unblameable in holiness before God, at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, with all His saints.

(Read I Thess. 4:1-8) Paul acknowledges that the people are walking in accordance with the instruction that he gave them, but he exhorts them to do even more for they know, he says, the commandments that he gave them by the authority of Jesus Christ. This is the will of God. It is also their sanctification. We have discussed in the past that "sanctification" is the second step in the three step process of becoming a Son of God, or an overcomer, who will rule with Christ during the

millennium. While it is the will of God that we all achieve sanctification, there are some things we need to do or not do to achieve it. Paul gives us an example here as he tells the people that they should abstain from fornication. Scripture gives us 5 examples of fornication: harlotry, homosexuality, incest, sodomy, interracial marriage. We are not told what the fornication that Paul is warning about is as he goes on to say everyone should know how to possess his vessel in sanctification and honor, not in lustful passion as the Gentiles who do not know God. Peter uses the term "vessel" to refer to a man's wife in I Peter 3:7 while Paul uses it to refer to one's own body in II Cor. 4:7 so it would appear that we could look at it either way. Remember that "sanctification" means "a setting apart."

He tells them to not trespass and defraud one's Christian brother in any matter, as the Lord is the avenger in such matters. Paul says that he had forewarned them before of this. He says that God has not called us unto uncleanness, but to sanctification. Any man who rejects this is not rejecting man, but is rejecting God who has given unto us His Holy Spirit.

(Read I Thess. 4:9-12) Concerning love of the brethren, Paul says that he does not need to write to them about it as God teaches them to love one another and he acknowledges that they practice love to all who are in Macedonia, but he urges them to do even more.

He urges them to work to lead a quiet life, to attend to their own business, and to work with their hands, as he had commanded them, that they may walk honestly before the non-believers and that they lack nothing.

(Read I Thess. 4:13-18) Paul tells these Thessalonians that he does not want them ignorant concerning those which are asleep that they sorrow not, even as others do who have no hope. He is referring to those who have died. This seems to a mystery to many people. I had a lady write me asking what happened to people when they died as her husband had recently passed away and she wanted to know what his status was. I used this passage to explain to her that he was simply sleeping and would be resurrected when Christ returned. This was not what she wanted to hear, but since she had written to several ministries with this question and I was the only one who answered her, she sent an offering for the ministry

and told me this was not what she wanted to hear. We hear the saying very often when a loved one dies that “they are in a better place.” Death is mentioned as sleeping many times in Scripture. Solomon says in Ecclesiastes 9:10 that there is no work, nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom, in the grave. Time means nothing to one who has died.

Apparently the concern of the Thessalonians was what would happen at the resurrection. Paul tells them here that those who are alive at the day of Christ’s return will not precede those who have died, but rather that the dead in Christ will arise first. Then those that **“are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord.”** This verse has often been used, by those who believe in the false doctrine of the rapture, to attempt to prove that those who are alive will be raptured off to heaven to ever be with the Lord. First we need to see that both the dead and those alive will be caught up to meet the Lord. Second we need to study the words “to meet”. These come from the Greek *“eis apantesin”* meaning “for a meeting.” This combination of words is found four times in Scripture. 1. Matt. 25:1 refers to the virgins who went forth to meet the bridegroom. 2. Matt. 25:6 again refers to the virgins who went forth to meet the bridegroom. 3. Acts 28:15 refers to those who went out to meet Paul as he came to Rome. 4. I Thess. 4:17 referring to those who will be caught up to meet Christ as He returns. In the first three instances the people went out to meet the bridegroom and Paul to bring them back to where they went out from. The same thing applies to the verse we are studying here. Both the dead in Christ and those who are alive in Christ will jointly go out to meet Christ to bring Him back to the earth. Since Christ has promised to set His kingdom up here on the earth, these people will ever ,

be with the Lord, but it will be here on the earth, not in heaven. We could go into a long explanation as to why the rapture doctrine is false, but this is not the place for it. We just need to understand these Scriptures as written.

Paul finishes by telling the people to comfort one another with these words. To me, sleeping in death is not a horrible thought, but rather one of comfort. Time is not a factor in death. From death to the resurrection will be like going to sleep at night and awakening in the morning. The time one slept is not a factor, there is no memory of it. I don’t believe death to be any different.

However, Paul felt he had to issue a caveat in a sense. (Read I Thess. 5:1-11) The words “times” and “seasons” come from the Greek words *“chromos”* and *“kairos”* respectively. Appendix #195 in the Companion Bible defines these words as follows: *chromos*—time, duration unlimited unless defined; *kairos*—a certain limited and definite portion of *chromos*, the right time or season. The natural question that most everyone would like an answer to is, when is this resurrection to take place? Is there a specific time period when Jesus can be expected to return? Paul tells the Thessalonians that he doesn’t feel a need to write to them concerning when the resurrection will take place because they already know that the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night, i.e. no one will know when He will come. He goes on to say that the people shall say, Peace and safety, i.e. nothing will be happening that will indicate His return is imminent so far as the vast majority of people are concerned. He says that sudden destruction will come upon them, the people, and there will be no escaping it just as there is no escaping the travail of birth by a woman with child.

We will continue this very interesting discussion of Paul’s in our next issue. JRL

**But, Seek ye first the kingdom of God,
And His Righteousness
And all these things shall be
Added unto you. Matt. 6:33**