

Asleep in Jesus



The specter of physical death has always plagued mankind. Hence one of the things Jesus came to accomplish was to deliver His disciples from fear of death. Fear of death paralyzes, especially if it were to occur in connection with the intent to preach the gospel. Sooner or later the desire to preach the word of God accurately and importantly runs counter to the desire to please men; and it is when men are sufficiently un-pleased that they "kill the messenger." Hence, as Paul put it, "If I were still trying to please men, I would not be a bond-servant of Christ" (Galatians 1:10). But there is another aspect of fear of death — concern over loved ones who have passed on, as to what will happen to them. Again, the desire of God through His word is to provide honest encouragement.

- ◆ **Asleep** — The term "asleep," used as a euphemism for "death," was introduced by Jesus Himself. When His friend Lazarus passed away, Jesus described his death to the apostles in this fashion: "Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep; but I go, that I may awaken him out of sleep." The apostles understood that Lazarus had literally fallen asleep, and that meant he would recover from the fever or whatever malady he had contracted. "Then Jesus said to them plainly, 'Lazarus is dead.'" (John 11:11-14). The picture the Lord thus painted was that death, instead of being final, is to be thought of more in terms of someone sleeping and then waking up.
- ◆ **Not to grieve** — The apostle Paul, then, in writing to the suffering Thessalonian brethren, wants to encourage them in regard to the Christians in that congregation who had passed on, either through persecution or through normal aging or disease-related causes. "But we do not want you to be uninformed, brethren," he instructs, "about those who are asleep, that you may not grieve, as do the rest who have no hope" (1 Thessalonians 4:13). There is indeed no hope for the pagan and unbelieving peoples of the world; their false gods or false belief systems provide no real hope whatsoever for the life following the grave. But for the faithful saints who have made their departure from this world, encouraging details are about to follow, so that the brethren can rejoice rather than grieve, and make the saying operative, "Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of His godly ones" (Psalm 116:15).
- ◆ **Coming with the Lord** — Christians, in one manner of speaking, when they physically die, simply change their address. "Absent from the body," as the apostle stated it, they are "at home with the Lord" (2 Corinthians 5:8). In Paradise, they are thus waiting as spirit/souls for Jesus to bring with Him when He initiates His second coming. "For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again," asseverates the apostle, "even so God will bring with Him those who have fallen asleep in Jesus" (1 Thessalonians 4:14). Jesus will return, pictured in the book of Revelation as riding on a white horse and leading the hosts of heaven to execute one final smash of the forces of darkness. Clearly, from the language of 1 Thessalonians, Jesus is *God!!* "And on His robe and on His thigh He has a name written, 'KING OF KINGS, AND LORD OF LORDS.'" (Revelation 19:16). And He is bringing the brethren who have "fallen asleep" with Him.

Jesus is bringing with Him the brethren who have "fallen asleep"

The confidence of the saints that Jesus' return is real is based on their belief, as Paul puts it, "that Jesus died and rose again." When this same apostle Paul spoke to the pagan crowd gathered on Mars Hill in Athens, he made the same point, noting that the great Creator God "has fixed a day in which He will judge the world in righteousness through a Man whom He has appointed, having furnished proof to all men by raising Him from the dead" (Acts 17:31). When He returns, the saints will rejoice, but the rest will cry to the rocks and mountains to fall on them and hide them from the wrath of the Lamb. Modern brethren, then, can take courage, and press forward in the faith once for all delivered!