

Abraham, Isaac and Jacob

WHAT'S IN A NAME?

In the Old Testament Hebrew concept the name was a concise description of the person's nature, qualities and calling. In some cases when the nature or calling was changed by a divine encounter the name had to be changed.

When a person's nature or calling was complex he may have had a compound name or perhaps several names. Thus, the first step in getting to know or understand a person began by getting to know their name.

THE NAME ABOVE ALL NAMES

From the above we see that getting to know our God entails getting to know His name. However, the awesome beauty and ethereal complexity of our God requires that He should have many names. One name alone could only describe one aspect of His unsearchable nature.

In fact, it will require all of eternity to fully get to know our God. In the meantime, a study of any one of his many names by which He describes Himself will give us some further insight into His Splendor, His nature and His ways. One of the names that he ascribes to Himself is first found in Exodus Chapter 3.

THE GOD OF ABRAHAM, ISAAC AND JACOB

Our interest here is to discover the significance of this title or name of our God. In order to do this, we must ask several questions. First, what is the context in which this name appears, and, second, what does it tell us about God, and how does this apply to us in our journey in getting to know our God and becoming increasingly like him? The primary interest in this study is this third aspect.

The Context

Moses was born in Egypt, found and raised by Pharaoh's daughter but eventually fled to become a shepherd in the desert. One day the angel of the Lord appeared to him in a burning bush. Here God addressed Himself as, "I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob." Exodus 3:6

Later, this was further reinforced when Moses enquired as to who was sending him to deliver the Israelites, After He had said "I am Who I am." God again named Himself, "The Lord, the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. This is

my name forever, the name by which I am to be remembered from generation to generation.” Exodus 3:15.

Up to this time God had encountered individuals on a personal level. Adam, Able, Enoch, and Noah. However, in each case the dealings seemed to have an end in itself. However, when we come to Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, the work of God in these characters became the foundation for the development of a nation to be known as the people of God.

God’s Intention

Somehow as we study the lives of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob we will see how God deals with us to bring us into His likeness and thereby we will discover something of God’s nature. Since it took the life and experience of each of these to be the foundation for a people of God, we can assume that our experiences should reflect theirs. So, the combined experience of these three sets the course to be followed by God’s children to become God’s New Testament family.

We see that Jesus also referred to these three as central to the fullness of God’s people. See: Matthew 22:31-32 and Luke 13:28 Just as he chose and took these out from the fallen world to become His people so he desires to take us out, by the same course.

We don’t only want to know God as the God of Abraham in our experience we need to know him as the God of Isaac in our experience, because if we don’t know him as the God of Abraham and Isaac we will not be able to handle getting to know him as the God of Jacob.

Jacob speaks of our natural character, and for God to break our natural character sometimes he has to be very tough with us. If we don’t know him as the God of Isaac we will not be able to accept His dealings, so God will have to just leave us alone otherwise we will get offended. We will become insecure, feel rejected, and blame others. Later we will see how critical it is that we get to also know our God as the God of Isaac.

May we be those who can say, “I experience my God as the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.”

ABRAHAM

We will begin with the life of Abraham, because his life is so full of light and revelation for our own journey. In Romans 4 and again in Galatians 3, Paul presents Abraham as the father of all them that believe and thus an example for all believers. In the great hall of faith, Hebrews gives Abraham far more attention than any others. Being such a pattern of the starting point in the journey of faith we do well to closely review and apply the principles of his walk with our own journey.

“Understand then that those who believe are children of Abraham.” Galatians 3:7; “If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham’s seed, and heirs according to the promise.” Galatians 3:29

A Two Phase Start

With the Family

From Genesis 11 and from Stephen’s message in Acts 7:2 ff, we see that Abraham’s journey began with his following his father and family. This however only brought him as far as Haran and they settled there. Simply accepting his father’s calling only brought him so far. Eventually, each one of us must hear and respond to the call on a personal level. All of our children honored and accepted our calling, but until they heard and accepted their own call they were not secure and able to commit fully.

Personal Call and Response

In Genesis 12 Abraham responded, but he made a mistake based on his earlier assumptions. He took his nephew Lot with him and Lot gave him a lot of trouble. The first thing we would like to do when we receive the call is to grab somebody, a brother or someone and have them come with us. The call must be individual, although the walk may be corporate. The Abraham journey is individual and personal, only when we get to the Jacob experience are we prepared for the full corporate walk. Each one must hear the call personally and start alone, being willing to forsake all other relationships on the basis of responding to that call. Others may come, and we can certainly pray and intercede for our family but it’s not a matter of, ‘if you go I will go’. Remember that even Jesus said anyone who puts mother or father, sister or brother ahead of me is not worthy of me. See: Matthew 10:37

Called “Out From”

The first thing we learn about Abraham is that he was a pagan and an idolater in the middle of the fallen world and that’s where we all start. It doesn’t matter how we were born, where our home was or anything else, we all begin as a part of the fallen world. God’s intention was that through Abraham He would produce a people which would demonstrate to the world who God is and what His purpose for man is. In the same way He calls us out of the fallen world to become part of a “new creation,” as representatives of His kingdom.

So. God said, “I want you, to leave your country and come out and follow me”. Do you remember the day that that happened to you? I remember the day and the hour. When He said, to me, “come follow me.” I hadn’t

planned it ahead of time, I knew there was a lack there, but my walk began with a response to God's call.

Where to?

Abraham didn't even know where he was going. But listen, if you know where you're going, then you're still in charge. If you think you understand everything about God, then he is not God; then you make yourself higher than Him. So, the first thing we have to recognize when we receive the call, is that He who called knows where he wants us to go and will lead us. Abraham responded, believed followed by faith, and in this way he became the father of faith and an example for all of us, who must each begin our journey by faith.

THE PROMISE

Genesis 12:-3, contains the promise the Lord made to Abraham. It contains the words "I will make your name great." This lies in stark contrast with the determination expressed by the builders of Babel in chapter eleven, who wanted to make a name for themselves. Only the Name above every other name is able to make one's name great. And, this is the promise to those who surrender their name and future to His call and purpose. As we respond to His call our life will be have meaning and purpose.

ONWARD JOURNEY

In Genesis 12: 8 it says; "From there he went toward the hills east of Bethel, and pitched his tent, with Bethel on the west and Ai on the east," Bethel means house of God and Ai represents a heap of ruins. Abraham pitched his tent between those two. On the one side was the house of God; on the other side a heap of ruins. The heap of ruins is our past; our hopes, our ambitions and our plans. The house of God is His plans and purposes. As we go along we will see it's quite a journey to eventually get to Bethel and stay there permanently. I must come to recognize that what I had outside of God's call is a heap of ruins, and be willing to leave it all behind.

THE TEST OF FAMINE

By this time Abraham had a second assurance from the Lord, that not only will He makes Abraham's name great but also that He will give him the land. Although God had promised Abraham a name and provision he wasn't fixed very solid and when a famine came, he went down to Egypt. Egypt is the natural way to get things we need.

A famine is a test to determine whether we believe that the God who called us will supply. If there is no famine, we can glibly say, “Only God is my supply and He will always provide for me!”

Sometimes it takes a famine to test our faith and see whether we believe and know that our God as the God of supply. Only after we have come through a test can we claim this as our reality. After Janet and I recommitted to follow the Lord at all costs He presented us with a test. We found ourselves with four small children and no income. One evening we sang the song containing the lines, “Take my silver and my gold not a might would I withhold,” At that point the Lord asked us to give all our remaining savings to the elders of the church.

After this God ended up supplying us in unexpected ways. After this when we said God is our supply it was not quite so light. Then we could say, “we proved Him over and over”. Have you allowed Him to prove His faithfulness over and over or have you always found a way around the test?

Abraham got himself into further trouble by portraying that his wife was actually his sister. Why did he do this? Because he had not yet fully trusted God’s promise of protection so he had to protect himself. Even here he was scolded and rebuked by a man of the world. How typical of our journey!

When the famine comes have we always gone to Egypt and found our supply. As long as we do, then every time a famine comes we will get nervous and uneasy, until we’ve passed through that test.

THE TEST OF CHOICE

The next test came when it was discovered that there was not enough room for Abraham’s flocks and Lot’s possessions. The quarreling made it obvious that the situation needed to be faced. Until such situations come you don’t know what the real response will be. So, the question was; some of us will have to go up towards the mountains and some of us will stay down here in the valley. What did Abraham say? “Lot, you choose”. Here is a sign of maturity coming. A mature person can let others choose. An immature person cannot let others have the first choice. We must learn to trust God to keep for us that which He has given us and not to grasp it by natural means.

Soon, another even further test came. Lot gets captured by a whole bunch of kings. Now, if Abraham were immature, he would say, “Well you’ve had it coming to you; boil in your own stew.” That would indicate still a very natural response. But Abraham gathered his forces and went and rescued his nephew, who had got himself into that trouble. Have we learned to know the God of Abraham at this level?

After he took these steps of maturity, God showed up in an interesting form called Melchizedek. Somehow Abraham recognized him as a priest of God Most High and gave him a tenth of everything.

Also, after this victory the king of Sodom offered goods to Abraham, but Abraham refused to take anything. He had come to the place where he saw God alone as his only source and security!

HOW ABOUT A SON?

All the promises given to Abraham were great and much appreciated. But somehow without a son as an heir their potential could not be realized. So, in chapter 15, he confronted the dilemma directly. "But Abram said, 'O Sovereign Lord, what can you give me since I remain childless. . . .'"

Of course, Abraham needed a son as an heir, but the question was, was he ready to allow God to bring forth this child in His way? Many times God would gladly give us fruit, but until we have exhausted our natural strength that "child" would not be a fruit of Life but a fruit of our natural strength.

To prepare Abraham to bring forth the Isaac that would God needed required three more tests.

THE TEST OF TIME

By this time Abraham was eighty-five and he felt it was time for his son to arrive so he adopted Sarah's suggestion, and took Hagar as a wife and produced Ishmael. He simply felt that he needed to help God to bring the promise to pass. But Isaac was to be a son of promise, a work of God's grace.

How often have we taken steps to produce the fruit of God's promise and produced our own Ishmael? Although God wants things done He only wants us to be the medium of what He is doing. Only what comes from God can satisfy God! "Not everyone who says to me, Lord, Lord, will enter into the Kingdom of Heaven, but only he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven." Matthew 7:21 See also 1 Corinthians 3:12-14.

Sometimes as in the case of Abraham it may take many years for us to come to the end of our natural strength. Sometimes it takes until we are, "as good as dead."

THE TEST OF CIRCUMCISION

There is no record of God appearing to Abraham for fifteen years. Then, suddenly He reappears as, "God Almighty." He takes the promise a step further and declares Abraham to be the father of many nations, and even changes his name from Abram "exalted father," to Abraham, "father of many."

But at this point the covenant must be expressed by circumcision. It is to be a sign for Abraham and all future generations that in the flesh they are helpless.

By this time when God told Abraham that Sarah would have a son he laughed, knowing that this was impossible by any human standards. There was no more self confidence left in him.

A FRIEND OF GOD

In Chapter 18, three visitors show up, and somehow in Abraham's spirit he sensed that something about this was significant and he addressed them as Lord.. This is the only record in the Old Testament where God showed up in person. So, he said to them, "Stick around and I will make some meat and some bread for you." And that sticking around wouldn't be like five minutes, because they had to kill a calf and make some bread, and while they ate, he stood near them under a tree.

By this action he was taken into the divine counsel, as a friend of God. Have we become sensitive enough to recognize "angelic" visitors?

After he hosted them and honored them, they said "where's your wife?" They told him she would have a son and she laughed.

When they got up to leave, they looked down toward Sodom and Abraham walked along with them to see them on their way. Somehow, Abraham sensed that these men represented the presence of God and it seemed like the presence was about to leave so Abraham walked along beside them to see them on their way. Sometimes we need to tarry in the presence rather than just say it's over, I'm done, thank you very much. There always may be something more that will not be disclosed unless we take time to linger. Then the Lord said, "Shall I hide from Abraham what I am about to do? Abraham will surely become a great and powerful nation and all nations will be blessed through him. For I have chosen him so that he will direct his children." Exodus 18:17

Here Abraham began to dialogue with these men about whether Sodom could be saved. I won't go further into that except in this case I simply want to reinforce that many times we don't get the fullness of what the Lord would have for us because we don't have the patience to stay with him. So, the final word we want to leave you with about Abraham in this matter is that when you are with the Lord, don't leave too quick.

FAITH TO PRAY FOR OTHERS

In chapter 20 we have a situation similar to when Abraham first went down to Egypt. We will only comment on the end of the story. Here Abraham prayed that the women of that region could bear children and they did. The

fact that this his own prayer for a child was never answered must indicate that he trusted in God more than in his own prayer. The irony lies in that immediately following his prayer for the these women, Sarah became pregnant.

THE ULTIMATE TEST

Chapter 22 begins with, "Some time later God tested Abraham." "Then God said, "Take your son, your only son, Isaac, whom you love, ...Sacrifice him there as a burnt offering..."

The stunning thing is that early the next morning Abraham got up and went. (Here we digress for a moment since this is such an obvious type of our heavenly Father and the sacrifice of His Son our Lord Jesus. Note that on the third day this took place. Also that he placed the wood for the offering on his son. Eventually the sacrifice was a lamb.)

So how could Abraham be tested yet again if he already had the son of promise? Had Isaac the gift become more important to him than God the giver? Abraham had come to be clear that it was God the Father who had given Isaac, was He still now God if Isaac were gone? In order to pass the test Abraham had to take the matter to the point where unless God had definitely intervened Isaac would have been sacrificed.

Isaac can represent many things. He may represent our gifts. We can dwell on our gifts at the neglect of Him. If we truly know that God gave us something we can fully surrender it back to Him. If after we offer it, it still ours then it has passed through resurrection. This also proves that our trust is in Him not in His gifts.

I here refer back to the experience I mentioned earlier. When Janet and I committed to live and walk in full surrender it cost us our position, our career and our income. We sold what we had and moved to the city and became part of a new fellowship. For months as our reserves dwindled I could not find a job. Suddenly upon singing the song, "Take my silver and my gold..." the Lord tested me and asked me to give all my remaining money to the elders. When I offered it to them God gave the leader great wisdom. He responded, "On behalf of the church we receive it, and down we give it back to you. It is no longer yours but God is entrusting it to you for you to provide for your family." Only by taking this to the point of fully surrendering it was my "Isaac sacrificed yet brought back in resurrection.

ISAAC

In Abraham we see the basic foundational steps for our journey of faith. We also see in him a father through whom we gain insight into the nature of our heavenly Father.

Abraham had many breakthroughs and many new experiences. Isaac on the other hand simply accepted what his father had done and lived like his father had lived. His life demonstrates the sonship, one who by honoring his father received the full inheritance; even as a type of Christ the Son. Just as Jesus did, he only did what he saw his father do.

For a full and balanced Christian life we do need the experience of both Abraham and Isaac to prepare us for the experiences of Jacob. To become the corporate expression of the family of God we both individually and corporately will need the experiences of all three.

ATTRIBUTES OF SONSHIP

We are not told about the early years of Isaac, except that his half brother was sent away and he became the one and only son. Even here while Ishmael had mocked Isaac we see no evidence that Isaac reacted or defended himself. He left that up to his father.

Trusting His Father

We have always seen the offering of Isaac as a test for Abraham but consider it from the side of Isaac. Isaac willingly responds to his father's invitation to join him to go to the mountain to make a sacrifice. Chapter 22. He accepts the request to carry the wood with one simple question, "Where is the lamb?"

The father's simple response, "God Himself will provide..." seems to satisfy him. Even as his father bound him and lifted the knife, we have no record that the boy struggled or resisted. Is this not a picture of how Jesus did not resist the Father offering him to the cross? Herein also lays a challenge as to how far we trust our heavenly Father.

Receiving a Bride

In chapter 24 we see that Isaac allowed his father to choose a bride for him and make all the arrangements to bring the bride to him. Here again is a beautiful type of our heavenly father preparing a bride for His son. At the same time we see Isaac again accepts the will of his father.

Receiving the Full Inheritance

"Abraham left everything he owned to Isaac," Genesis 25:5 Then in Genesis 26:2-5 the promise to Isaac is the same as is given to Abraham. Later

at Beersheba Isaac is told that the blessing is his on the basis that he is Abraham's son. (26:24)

We also see that the Lord blessed Isaac and he became very prosperous. Here also he did nothing original, but simply unstopped the wells which his father had earlier dug

Protected from Misstep

In his old age Isaac was about to give the first blessing to his older son, Here God intervened and "ticked" him into blessing his younger son just as his father had been asked to do.

THE SECURITY OF SONSHIP

While the experience of Abraham is basic we must also know our God as our Father who provides everything for us in Christ. The underlying principle of the Isaac life is being secure in receiving and not in doing. Until we have the full assurance of His love, His protection, and His provision we will be too insecure to accept His disciplining our Jacob nature.

Our provision, protection and security are assured simply because we are His child. This is grace. It is impossible to be poor if we have a rich father. Isaac was rich not because of what he had done but because he had a rich father whom he honored and trusted,

In Galatians Paul develops this matter; "If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise." 3:29 Also: "Now you, brothers, like Isaac, are children of promise." 4:28

As children our sonship is secure in two ways. First, we are in Christ, and secondly Christ is in us. Jesus expressed it thus: "Abide in me and I in you." John 15:4

Since we are in Christ, all that He has passed through is ours simply by us accepting them as our own. Further by virtue of the fact that Christ is in us, we become partakers of His life. All that He now is and desires to do is becomes ours. Both of these aspects become our inheritance. This is ours as we embrace the experience of Isaac.

JACOB

Our first introduction to Jacob was at his birth when he was already in competition with his brother. Even the name Jacob means, heel holder, or, deceiver. This is a picture of our natural strength. It expresses itself in our determination to get what we want in the way we want when we want it. If this is not dealt with, we may spend much of our "Christian" life working

zealously to do things for the Lord. All of which the Lord calls, “wood, hay and stubble.” 1 Corinthians 3:12.

GRASPING WHAT IS MINE

God had already told Rebecca that the older son would serve the younger. No doubt she reminded Jacob of this promise. To assure it Jacob found a way to take advantage of Esau’s weakness and grasp the birthright. Then together with his mother’s conniving he was able to deceive his father and receive the blessing. It appears that by this Jacob got what was to be his. However, the problem was he seized it in his own way and not in God’s way. So, the Lord needed to bring him through many situations until that natural strength was broken.

The problem lies in that God’s work cannot be accomplished through the will of man or through the capacity or the ability of man. Let’s go to Gen 28:13. Here is where God is appearing to Jacob at Bethel. And in verse 13, There above it stood the Lord and he said, “I am the Lord the God of your Father Abraham and God of Isaac, I will give you and your descendants the land on which you are lying.”

There’s four important words in there. “I will give you!” What did Jacob do? He spent the next 20 years of life trying to do it himself. Even after that promise he was still bargaining with God. Go to Verse 20, what did Jacob say back to God? “Then Jacob made a vow saying, “If God will be me and will watch over me on this journey I am taking and will give me food etc”.

If God will do his part, I will do my part. This is the Jacob. This is our natural ability. This is automatically our unconscious response to God. So, what does God have to do? He has to take Jacob on a life journey to transform him to the point where he has no more strength and he must rely on God’s strength.

The Deceiver being Deceived

After Jacob deceived his father to get the birthright, because of his brothers anger he had to flee to Rebecca’s brother Laban. One of Jacob’s natural strengths was the ability to deceive and get what he wanted. Whatever is our strength in the natural God will find ways to deal with that in a very unique way. While he is with his uncle Laban, he falls in love with Laban’s beautiful daughter, Rachel. He makes a bargain that he will work 7 years for her. So he works 7 years and then there is the wedding night. I guess they are all tired and exhausted and maybe a bit drunk, and they don’t have electricity and in the morning Jacob wakes up with his bride and says “who in the world are you? You’re not Rachel you’re Leah”.

Do you get a connection? What was the last thing he did before he left his other family? He deceived them. What is the first thing that happens when he gets to where he's running? He gets deceived. I think this is so ironic how it comes right away.

Well that's one little blow, so here we are with Laban and the amazing thing is, Laban has just the same kind of personality that Jacob does. And Jacob could say, well this guy really rubs me the wrong way. It's like Jacob is getting his medicine back to him again and the next years he has to work and connive over and over to get what God had already promised him. So, Jacob even found ways to get a step ahead of Laban by cheating him.

The flesh will always find ways of taking care of itself. I'm not going to take that, that's not fair, I'll find a way to get back, nobody is going to take advantage of me. Of course, we have such a beautiful Christian façade that we would never say those things out loud. Now after he's been tested with Laban and the work that God wanted to do with Laban is done, God released him.

As Long as it Takes

Let's look at Chapter 31:3. "The Lord said to Jacob go back to the land of your fathers and to your relatives and I will be with you." That means Jacob should be very happy and very secure no matter what. Do you think that there is any reason now for Jacob to have any fear or anxiety? God himself appeared and said "I will be with you". First of all, he is afraid of his father-in-law so he leaves without letting him know. When his father-in-law finds out he rallies an army to track him down and he was ready to do something vicious when God appears to Laban in a dream. He warned Laban, "Be careful, don't you harm Jacob and the family." This is one way in which God's promise came true as He had said, "I will be with you". So, they had a very special and emotional time together. And he's released. Why? Because what God wanted to accomplished in Jacob through Laban had been completed.

Sometimes we are connected through our work or ministry or elsewhere with a Laban and it seems like we are constantly hitting each other, and this thing goes on and on, and we wonder "How long is this going to go?" The answer is simple, until God has accomplished what he wants in that situation. It may be 6 months or 6 years. But God is at work. We are waiting for this thing to be over with so that God could work, but this is how He is doing His working. You know if it takes 20 years for God to accomplish something in our life, so that in the next 3 weeks we could do something according to his command instead of according to our good will, then that is a good exchange. Do you believe that God could do more in one day than we

could do in one year? So, what if it takes him 10 years to do a work in us so he could do something in one day?

Personal Journey

Personally, when I came across Watchmen Nee's book called: Changed Into His Likeness, we were at the height of our ministry. We had the largest youth group in the denomination: I was in charge of the youth work in the entire province, I was on our college board of overseers in Indiana, we had just received a call to come to a new church in Edmonton with a nice free house, next to the university, and a few other things. But somehow I ended up in a place called Peniel. (more later)

Reverting to Natural Strategies

On his way back to his father's house, Jacob heard that Esau was coming towards accompanied by a whole army marching. At that moment Jacob totally forgot God's word; "I am with you" and he went back into his strategy mode. When we are in crises it's a test as to whether we will go back to our own natural strategy.

So being in, "great fear and distress," he considered the situation and decided if he put a small group of his people forward first and test out Esau's reaction, and then plan his next step. If you really study his strategy, he put himself at the very last at the end, it sounds good but actually he put himself in the place where he would have the least chance of getting hurt. But, this left himself desperate and alone and it was at a place called Peniel.

AT PENIEL

At that place, Peniel, is where the man wrestled with him and it's called the face of God. When we see the face of God, light and revelation comes. We finally begin to see ourselves. Until we have been to Peniel we don't really know ourselves. The face of God brings light; while it lights up God beautifully, the problem is, that it also lights up who we really are. And at that moment we fall on our face.

My Personal Peniel

Back to my story, when this experience came, I suddenly fell apart, I saw that all of those things I mentioned were very deeply engrained with my ambition, my determination, my ego, my, my. I suddenly saw that the way I treated my children, was really not for their sake but for how I would look; for what people would think of me. One night when the light came on I started to cry and weep and sob. I said to Janet "I'm sorry, I'm so sorry,"

She said “what do you mean, you’re sorry”? I said that the way that I treat you, and the way that I treated my daughter the other day is just to make me look good, That Sunday I was walking down the aisle of our church holding her in my arms, and she put her little thumb in her mouth. I took my thumb in her little arm and I wrenched it down. The Lord brought that to me, He said “why did you do that that? That was not for her sake, but was for your sake, because you thought it would be embarrassing, and might reflect on you as a perfect father.”

“The way you treat your children, is inter-connected with the reputation you are developing for yourself? Yes, you are very self-confident but that self-confidence is just enlargement of your ego.”

“Why do you have problems with that old man in the back of the church? (In those days after we had the sermon, the pastor would walk down to the back of the church and he would stand there and shake hands with the congregation. They would say, “Very fine message, thank you.”

But, that old man never had a good word for me, one time he even said, that message was like a brain surgery, destroying the simple faith of the believers. I was teaching some of the German theology where you can explain away all the miracles of the Old Testament. I’m sorry to say, I was in that space in those days

Anyway, that old man saw through this boy and so the Lord asked me that night, “Why does he always bother you?” and suddenly I realized that he was just there to prick a pin into my ego balloon. Well the short of it is, I had to resign, I had to go out with my wife and family to be alone, I had no more confidence. I said if the Lord would let me find a place and I could just sit in the back row of a church fellowship I would be happy.

I didn’t even realize that in those days I was unconsciously controlling and abusing people. I could always tell if they approved or agreed with me. If they agreed with me I would give them a closer place in my sphere and in my heart. If they had any questions or any disagreement with me they could just feel they were not pleasing me. I only realized in God’s light that that is a form of control.

The Hip Jolt

So what else happens in that wrestling match at Peniel? Eventually God touches the hip of Jacob, the hip is the strongest part of the body.

Chapter 32:24, “so Jacob was left alone and the man wrestled with him until daybreak. When the man saw that he could not over power him, the man touched the socket of his hip so that his hip was wrenched when he wrestled with him.” At that point, when the hip was wrenched, Jacob’s name

was changed, Jacob's name became Israel. The name Jacob means wrestler, competitor. But from that moment on, he had no more strength to compete. I would advise you that if your hip is ever out of place then don't try to wrestle anymore and don't try to compete anymore. The evidence of the degree to which God has worked in your life, is very much evidenced by your competitiveness. If I'm working with my colleagues and I'm always competing, then there is still a lot of strength of the old man. Whether or not I even compete in my mind, is evidence of the degree to which my life is a life of surrender and a life of hearing and obeying.

In Chapter 32:30. "Jacob called the place Peniel, saying it is because I saw God face to face and my life was spared." The next verse is so beautiful. "The sun rose above him as he passed Peniel and he was limping because of his hip".

A Limping Saint

We all go through this journey in various degrees and levels. I think that the Christian life is somewhat of a circle. But, if we are in a state of growth and maturing each circle is a little higher than the last one, so we need to come to Peniel every once in a while. I consider some who I have known for quite a few years and I could say to quite a few of you, you're really not as competitive as you used to be. You're really not as strong-willed and determined as you used to be. And this is a good sign.

So now he meets Esau and his attitude towards him was quite different from what it would have been if he hadn't been through all of this. He honors Esau, and tries to give Esau gifts. It may have been a little bit out of the motivation to save his own skin but actually it's out of a good heart, his heart has been changed.

Don't Settle to Soon

But we have to go to the end of Chapter 33, "After Jacob came from Paddan Aram, he arrived safely at the city of Shechem in Canaan and camped there within the sight of the city. For a hundred pieces of silver he bought from the sons of Hamor, the father of Shechem the plot of ground where he pitched his tent".

The truth of the matter is, he hadn't completely come back to Bethel yet. And he did something his father Isaac never did, he bought land and he settled in Shechem. Shechem means strong or shoulder. Here his family got into a ton of trouble and by the end of chapter 34, Jacob said to his children, you're making my name stink. It's clear he should have kept moving on and not parked there and buy land. Don't be too quick to settle down and commit

yourself to a certain place. It's better to keep living in a tent. I've even learnt this with my schedule. I don't like to schedule too far ahead, or too definite because if the Lord comes up with something completely different I want to be able to say "I'm available." I advise and recommend to the young people, as much as possible find ways to provide for yourselves without being tied down too definitely.

Settling in Bethel

After this sad Chapter 34 and we get to the beginning of 35 and we find out what God has in mind. "And God said to Jacob, go up to Bethel and settle there and build an altar there to God who appeared to you."

Where do we need to set our tent? At the place where God appeared to us. Bethel is made up of two words; Beth, meaning house, which also implies a family, and El meaning God. Once we go to Bethel we are no longer individuals, we are now a part of a house or a family. Before Jacob got to Bethel he was an individual, strong and completely in control and in charge of his life and everything else. But when he came to Bethel he became dependent on and inter-connected with others. Before we move to Bethel, we don't need or trust anybody else. When we come to Bethel we have a realization that we need others. We have a need to have input and help from one another especially if we are limping. So, we have a whole different way of conducting ourselves. Because God has broken our self-sufficiency.

Chapter 35:27 "He came to Hebron, home to his father Isaac." He came full circle; he came home to his father. Eventually we are coming home to our father in Hebron, Hebron means "fellowship". Here he re-aligns himself with his father and grandfather to become a continuation and a completion of those generations.

A Changed Man, now Israel

Eventually Jacob ends up with twelve sons including a special son Joseph. Motivated by their jealousy his brothers were able to get rid of him and he ended up in Egypt. But eventually we get a little glimpse of a different Jacob. The brothers had gone to Egypt a couple of times to get food and they now come back with the knowledge that Joseph is actually alive, and they reported it to their father. They had earlier told their father that wild beasts had killed him and they even brought back a bloody coat as evidence. They had totally deceived their father. That was a grief and bitterness and anger to their father. But now Jacob is an old man, Israel, having a broken hip, having seen the face of God and had seen himself, how does he respond?

Jacob was stunned, he did not believe them but when they told him everything Joseph had said to them and when he saw the carts Joseph had

sent to carry him back, the spirit of their father Jacob revived and Israel said "I'm convinced my son Joseph is still alive and I will go and see him before I die."

You don't pick up that old flavor do you? And eventually this old limping man is praying for and blessing Pharaoh. And Pharaoh asks "how old are you?". Can you imagine what the young Jacob might have said, but Israel said, "I am a poor old man, few and weak have been my days". A very different character. And eventually this old man gives a prophesy over all his sons.

This is the transforming story of Jacob, and a pattern for all of us. From that point on those twelve sons begin to multiply and God has a people. Step by step.

I believe that God is accelerating the journey and I am thrilled and blessed to see how God is working especially with the younger ones. And I am not here suggesting that if you are a young person you need to count on 50 years of dealing, just be willing day by day. Some of us old folks took many years to break.

He will Complete His work in Us

But here's something else, if you heard the call like Abraham did, God already took into consideration all of your strengths and all of your faults and He will finish whatever He begins. He moves quickly but He's never in a hurry, quickly for Him might be 50 years or it might be 50 days. He's not in the time realm. He has something he is accomplishing and He's accomplishing it in each one of us. While He is accomplishing it to a certain degree He inter-connects us with others. Maybe some of us are called to be Labans. I wish we knew what eventually happened to Laban. Maybe some are called simply to be the hammer to crush the stones so they fit into the temple. Where they themselves will finish is not our question.

But every single one of us must be willing to welcome God's hand. Some of the most deep saints welcomed the hand of God; they welcome the breaking, the dealing and His discipline.

The environment of our society that we live in is absolutely the extreme opposite. The environment we live in is, "don't limit me, don't give me any limitations, don't give me any confinements, don't give me any constructions, I will do what I want to do." And it all goes back to this little word, rights. I have the right to be whatever I want to be. The matter of discipline, the whole matter of being restricted is completely taboo. However, in the middle of all that darkness God is preparing light. That light will shine from His which is being reflected off the faces of those who have seen His

face. The world will see the light of His face as it is reflected from the face of his family.

But those who are called will rise as sons of righteousness. God is merciful not only to let us hear his voice but to grant us the assurance of Isaac. Even as Isaac we can trust our Father assured that He knows what He is doing.