

Names of God from the Bible

15 – Fear of Isaac

This appears to be a very strange name for God. However, since Jacob used it, we need to consider it, as every name of God is an eternal Name.

Reading: Genesis 31:22-42

Let's try and see if there were any clues suggesting why Jacob and the writer of Genesis would use this name for God.

Jacob used it when addressing Laban, Rachel's father, at the time of the final separation between Laban and his family, and Jacob and his family.

True to form, the two deceivers were trying to justify their actions to each other. Laban accused Jacob of running off without saying "goodbye", thus preventing Laban from blessing Jacob and thereby allowing them to separate on amicable terms. Jacob responded that Laban had not left him much option by the bad way Laban had treated him. Jacob went on to say that if it hadn't been for God's gracious hand of blessing and protection guarding him, he was sure Laban would have sent him away empty handed.

At that moment, Jacob referred to God as "*the God of my father, the God of Abraham and the Fear of Isaac.*" I wonder why he used that expression. Laban knew that Isaac was Jacob's father. I wonder if Jacob wanted to emphasise to Laban how much he actually trusted in God. To stress that Jacob's acquiescence to Laban's unjust schemes was not a weak human response, but rather a decision made in the light of the fact that he had vowed to follow God and serve Him.

Laban's family was outside of the Abrahamic covenant. Jacob was the heir, albeit through his and his mother Rebekah's contrived deception. Jacob met with God at Bethel on the way to Haran and his whole attitude to life changed dramatically. Nevertheless, it doesn't seem that Jacob felt that calling God his God was strong enough. Jacob wanted to invoke a name for God that would be like a bolt of lightning hitting Laban and so he chose "*the Fear of Isaac*".

So, what was the significance of that name to both Jacob and Laban? Let's begin by asking the question: How would Isaac have viewed God? Surely, from how Abraham walked with God and the stories that Abraham recounted to Isaac, the first would undoubtedly have been the fact that Isaac was a miracle baby. Both Abraham and Sarah were well passed natural childbearing age, and yet God performed the impossible and Isaac was born.

I'm sure the subject of Ishmael came up and Isaac would have been overwhelmed by the fact that God had discredited his older sibling from receiving the first-born's rights and privileges. I'm sure Isaac would have been humbled by the grace of God.

Then there was the episode at Moriah. Isaac was not a baby; he was a grown man when Abraham took him with the determined intention to kill him as a sacrifice to his God. Isaac wasn't stupid. He asked about the sacrifice and Abraham gave him an ambiguous answer. Worse still, he tied Isaac up and would have killed him, had God not intervened.

Yes, Isaac knew a lot about Abraham's God. Isaac not only trusted Him but was an avid follower as well. He had witnessed God's salvation and blessing in his life.

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Yes, Isaac had every excuse to be scared stiff of God and reject Him as his God, and yet the name, the "*Fear of Isaac*", relates to a healthy respect and a life of willing obedience to an awesome, miracle working, loving and gracious God. That was Isaac's view of God and that was the view Jacob had come to know intimately, too. No doubt Laban also knew those stories and took the point.

What does that name mean for us today

It reminds us that the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob is the ever-living God. As we fear Him and follow His ways, so He will bless us and watch over us, just as He had watched over the patriarchs. The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom.

Prayer

Father, thank You so much for the privilege of a Christian heritage. Thank You for showing us so vividly that Jacob respected his father's God. Please help us to pass on our faith in such a way that our children will have a healthy fear of You. Amen.

Additional Readings

- Genesis 21:1-21
- Genesis 22:1-19
- Genesis 24:15-61

Questions

1. How do you explain the fear of God to your offspring?
2. Would you be happy for your children to call God, 'the fear of you'?
3. How do you think Jesus demonstrated that name while He was on earth?