

The Providence Of God (Part 5)

A Scattered Church

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I'm going to continue once again in the series on The Providence of God. I'm going to just remind us of the premise that we began with and that is that we should consider the events of our lives that we might normally look upon as being curses or a plague, as something that God has provided for our good. Now the scriptural foundation for this is in Romans 8:28 which clearly states that "all things work together for good". But, there were two qualifiers. The first one being that they work together for good for those who are the called. God is not saying that everything works together for good for everybody. It works together for good for the called and secondly, for those who love God.

We also saw that Job was totally mystified as to why those evil calamities were happening to him. But he vigorously defended himself against his friends who were accusing him of hidden sins. But in this case, Job was indeed guiltless, as God assures us right at the beginning of the book. The calamities that befell Job were instigated by God. That's a key to this. God brings calamities into people's lives and those calamities turn out to be for good for His people. So, they cannot be considered in the normal sense of being a kind of calamity that is intended to destroy us in any way, but are actually intended for our good.

The calamities that befell Job were instigated by God through Satan with limitations as to how far Satan was permitted to go. The calamities were, in fact, tests of Job's loyalty to God and they served a double purpose of greatly increasing both his understanding and ours as well, because we can learn from his experience. At the end, Job deeply repented of speaking of things which he formerly didn't understand, but now understood, exclaiming that he had heard of God by the hearing of his ears, but now, as a result of his calamities, he saw clearly. Therein lies the benefit.

It's good to remember an Arabic proverb: "All sunshine makes a desert". It's also equally good to remember that suffering of and by itself is of no value either. It is only when understanding or wisdom or good qualities of character are produced through the suffering that it has positive value. We can suffer and it can be a total waste of time, an endless expending of energy, a tremendous building up of anxiety and stress and it will produce no good. But I can guarantee you if God is involved in our lives, we're one of the called and we love Him, regardless of the stress and anxiety He seemingly puts us through, it's going to produce something good in us. God is not in the torturing business. He is in the creating business, and these calamities—these things we might consider to

be plagues—are actually part of His creative process if we permit it.

We must never let it get far from our thinking that from the time that He wills to call us and to bring us into His family, that He is never out of our lives, EVER. He is an ever present reality. He is always mixed within the context of every event of our life. What He puts us through always has positive value in mind. He is aiming to create something that is part of His image in us.

We then spent the better part of two sermons on one incident that God provided in the life of Jacob. Like the Job incident, it was of major importance to the outcome of Jacob's life and it serves a double purpose of giving us understanding for our time. God broke Jacob's contentious, manipulating, controlling will by providing him with, of all things, a wrestling match. It showed Jacob that in his deceitful, manipulating contentions with man to get what he wanted to get out of life, that he was in reality wrestling against God's will for him. It is never God's will for us to self-centeredly get by breaking His commandments. His way is always accomplished through cooperatively serving.

God blessed Jacob by putting his hip out of joint as a constant, humbling, somewhat painful reminder so that, from that time forth, every step he made in his life served to remind him of a wrestling match that he lost. Then He further blessed him by changing his name to Israel which means 'God prevails' or 'God rules.'

Now that incident marks the time when Jacob finally had his will broken because he much more thoroughly got the picture. I said in that sermon that sometimes we have the tendency to think that we might be weak willed. But we can always remember that the carnal mind is enmity against God and our will is not weak in this regard.

Last week we went through Hosea 12 in a fair amount of detail showing that Jacob's descendants, Israel, those who have also made a covenant with God, were plagued by some of the same characteristics as a nation that Jacob was as a man. Now there is one more level of application, another parallel that I want to pick up on today. As a church, as well as an individual child of God, we have to look into this for instruction because we are Jacob's spiritual descendants as well as being the Israel of God.

There is one obvious difference between the Church and Israel the nation. That is that with the Church, things are happening much more rapidly than they did with Israel the nation. Time has been compressed. We are in the end. The return of Jesus Christ is not very far away. Herbert Armstrong said, "Get the church ready". We have to get ready.

Let's set the time element again in the book of Hosea. You might recall that I mentioned

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that Hosea was a younger contemporary of Amos. Amos prophesied two years before a great earthquake. Archeologists have dated that earthquake as occurring in 762 B.C. That was forty years (interesting) before Assyria conquered Israel and Israel was taken into captivity. It was almost like the earthquake was announcing the social and cultural destruction that was going to come just a little bit later.

Hosea prophesied shortly after Amos, but still within a couple of decades before Israel went into captivity at the hands of Assyria, and about 140 years before Judah went into captivity at the hands of Babylon.

Let's shift gears here a little bit. The Church has had its own spiritual earthquakes. Back in the '70s there were several of them and they cumulated in the January, 1979, legal attack of the State of California. It took the Church into receivership to the state for a little while. Now you'll recall that Herbert Armstrong, after that occurred, was calling upon us to get back on the track. After he died, Joseph Tkach was trying to carry out (I think) what Herbert Armstrong had given him as a commission, at least for a short time. His trumpet song was "We Are Family". We were supposed to be unified and as a family, becoming unified toward the Kingdom of God.

I submit to you that they never succeeded. There was some measure of turning around while Herbert Armstrong was still alive. Some changes were made, but Herbert Armstrong died and it began to become evident (I feel in looking back on it; I didn't realize it so sharply then, although I did have some ideas back in the '80s) that God had judged that the changes had been merely on the surface. My evidence of God's judgment is that we are scattered. We did not hold together. If we really had made the changes, we would have not been scattered, because the love would have been there. I'm talking about the love of God. His spirit in us would have been strong and we would have held together, unified. But the very fact that we were scattered according to Leviticus 26 is an indication that we were breaking the commandments of God. That is a punishment, one of the two worst that God has. The second one is the sword.

We're not only scattered, but the scattering is continuing. I think it should become increasingly obvious that God is not pleased with us as an assembly of His people. If you can remember in Hosea 12, He said, "I have a controversy with you." And I think the evidence is showing us that He has a controversy with us even as He had a controversy with Jacob and a controversy with Israel the nation.

Turn with me to Matthew 10 and we're going to look at five or six verses there, beginning in verse 16. Jesus is the speaker.

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Matthew 10:16-18 Behold, I send you forth as sheep in the midst of wolves, be you therefore wise as serpents, and harmless as doves. But beware of men, for they will deliver you up to the councils, and they will scourge you in their synagogues; and you shall be brought before governors and kings for my sake, for a testimony against them and the Gentiles.

Matthew 10:22-23 And you shall be hated of all men for my name's sake, but he that endures to the end shall be saved. But when they persecute you in this city, flee you into another, for verily I say unto you, You shall not have gone over the cities of Israel, till the Son of man be come.

Holding that thought in mind, go to Acts 8.

Acts 8:1 And Saul was consenting unto his death [Stephen's death]. And at that time there was a great persecution against the church which was at Jerusalem; and they were scattered abroad throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, except the apostles.

None of the things that are mentioned in these verses is happening to us. We are not being chased from city to city; the sword isn't out after us; the government is not throwing us into prison; we are not being persecuted by our neighbors. There is not an external persecution against the Church that is scattering us all over the place, and yet we are scattered.

Now I submit to you that there is a source, which I will not go into in any detail, but just beginning in Leviticus 26, the 'blessings and cursings' chapter, scattering when you are not being scattered by persecution is something that is from God. He did it. He scattered us because He is displeased. Read it yourself. He has a controversy with us and scattering is a punishment that is intended to have a good end. It's intended to make us think and to analyze, "Why am I in this position? Why is the Church in this condition? What are solutions? Is it possible that I am a/the cause or part of it? Can I be part of the solution?"

There are positive answers for those questions. We are having to flee for our spiritual lives, to preserve them. The message that is contained within Hosea 12, combined with a couple of references in Revelation, Jeremiah 3 and Genesis 28, I think shows what we need to do with this scattering and why it has occurred.

The principles contained within each of these passages that I'm going to be using make a modern day application to us. I think you will see that I am not stretching things a bit

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when I do this. Let's first go back to the book of Genesis. It is here that the foundation begins. Again, it's a starting place for Jacob.

Genesis 28:13-15 And behold, the LOORD stood above it [i.e., above the stairway that went from where Jacob was and went up into the heavens] and said, I am the LOORD God of Abraham your father, and the God of Isaac; the land whereon you lie, to you will I give it and to your seed; and your seed shall be as the dust of the earth and you shall spread abroad to the west, to the east, to the north and to the south; and in you and in your seed shall all the families of the earth be blessed. And behold, I am with you and will keep you in all places where you go, and will bring you again into this land; for I will not leave you until I have done that which I have spoken to you of.

Here are the promises made to the fathers, Abraham, Isaac and now to Jacob, that were later confirmed by Jesus Christ. We fit into these promises because we are heirs with them. I want to turn back to the book of Galatians so that you will see this clearly.

Galatians 3:16 Now to Abraham and his seed were the promises made. He says not, and to seeds, as of many, but as of one, and to your seed, which is Christ.

We're moving here to identify who the seed is so that we can see that what he said to Jacob applies to you and me.

Galatians 3:26-29 For you are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. And if you be Christ's, then are you Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise.

If we are in Christ, if we are the called, we have become one body with Him. He is the head, we are the body and the promise was made to that one institution, that unified institution. This is where the seed comes from that is back in Genesis 28. I mean the most serious aspect of the seed, because we are the spiritual seed of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. Many of us, indeed, are also physical descendants of them.

While we are in the New Testament we are going to go to Romans 9 and pick up a couple of verses there. What I am going to show you here is that the seed of Abraham was broken by God into two distinct parts.

Romans 9:6-7 Not as though the word of God has taken none effect. For they are not all Israel which are of Israel [kind of a mysterious verse]. Neither, because they

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are the seed of Abraham, are they all children. . .

Let's put Galatians 3 with that. Who are the children? The real children are those who are in Christ and now he's saying that just because you are a physical descendant of Abraham does not mean that you are part of the true seed.

Romans 9:7 Neither, because they are the seed of Abraham, are they all children; but in Isaac shall your seed be called.

Isaac was the son Abraham had of promise. We are the children of promise.

Romans 9:8 That is, [this is about as plain a statement as you are going to see in regards to this subject] they which are the children of the flesh, these are NOT the children of God.

I don't know how God could make it any plainer. The seed He is talking about in Genesis 28 is the Church. The children of promise are counted for the seed and the descendants of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob have been divided into two distinct groups. The natural, still called the nation of Israel. The other one called here the children of promise. At other places called the elect. In another place called the very elect. At other places called the church and by Paul himself in Galatians 6:16, the Israel of God.

There are two distinct Israels: the physical nation and the spiritual nation. There is one Israel that God divorced and no longer belongs to Him. She was His wife, but once He divorced her she no longer belongs to Him. But there is an Israel that does belong to Him, the Israel of God. The word 'of' shows possession. The Israel that belongs to God is the Church.

So, back to Genesis 28 and I'm going to read it again. Notice the promise here.

Genesis 28:15 And behold, I am with you and will keep you in all places where you go and will bring you again into this land; for I will not leave you until I have done that which I have spoken to you of.

This was first spoken directly to Jacob at Bethel, and following this Jacob made a vow. He entered into a covenant with God. Not the old covenant, but nonetheless he entered into a covenant with God.

Now when God said this to Jacob, it was not merely intended to be a matter of encouraging comfort to him. Much more importantly, it was intended to show Jacob that

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God would be guiding, preserving, instructing and correcting him wherever he went in order that God's purpose for him would be completed.

Let's go to Hebrews 13 and I want you to see a New Testament take on this same principle of "I will be with you wherever you go." Now Jesus says to the New Testament Church in verse 5:

Hebrews 13:5-6 Let your conversation [or your conduct] be without covetousness; and be content with such things as you have, for he has said, I will never leave you nor forsake you. So that we can boldly say, The Lord is my helper and I will not fear what man shall do unto me.

I would like you to hang on to that thought because it impacts very greatly on what happened to Jacob as well. We're going to see today where the real flaw in Jacob's character laid.

Let's go to Deuteronomy 31 and we are just going to pick up a couple of scriptures here that again contains a principle. This is actually in a section that has to do with Israel going into the land and taking over the land of Canaan.

Deuteronomy 31:5 And the LORD shall give them up before your face . . .

These are instructions to the Israelites. Whenever you see or hear the word Israelites, it's a good idea to think "me" or "I." "I am an Israelite. I'm a child of God."

Deuteronomy 31:6 Be strong and of a good courage, fear not, nor be afraid of them [Hebrews 13:6: "I shall not fear what man shall do to me because the Lord is with me"]; for the LORD your God, he it is that does go with you; he will not fail you nor forsake you.

Deuteronomy 31:8 And the LORD, he it is that does go before you; he will be with you, he will not fail you, neither forsake you; fear not, neither be dismayed.

Now back to the New Testament and this time in Philippians 1:6, which is a very familiar, very encouraging scripture where Paul said to those people:

Philippians 1:6 Being confident of this very thing, that he which has begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ.

If you look in your margin, my Bible has beside the word perform a little 1 and it says in

the margin 'complete.' He will complete it.

Let's recap just a little bit.

Genesis 28:15 I will be with you wherever you go and I will bring you back into this land.

The seed spoken of there is you and me. He said it to Jacob. "Jacob, I will be with you wherever you go." Jesus Christ says it to you and me. "I will be with you wherever you go." However, there is a requirement that we have to be in the midst of these calamities that He sometimes creates for our benefit and He says, "Don't be afraid! Fear not! I am with you."

Now what was Jacob's problem? Despite being a man who was physically strong and very gifted by God, he was afraid to live by faith. He set himself to live according to his will to get what he wanted, even though it meant breaking the commandments to do it. It was FEAR that was driving him. He was afraid. He was competitive. He was afraid that people would get ahead of him. He was afraid that people would take advantage of him. He was afraid that Esau would get more than he would get. He was afraid that the scheming Laban would get things that he wouldn't be able to get. And so he hid his own accomplishments in selective breeding. He hid them from Laban so that Laban couldn't share in those things with him, things which God undoubtedly revealed to Jacob so that he could take advantage of things.

God, in effect, was telling Jacob back there in Genesis 28:15, "I am going to complete making My image in you. Regardless of where you go, I am going to bring you back here and you're going to be a finished man." Very comforting, really, but it might be scary from time to time.

Let's go back to Hosea 12:4. I think that we're finding out that just because God is with us doesn't mean that we can't get confused, or scared, or have anxiety building up within us and have stress levels that might put the thermometer out the top. But in Hosea I'm going to draw your attention to something that I did last week.

Hosea 12:4 Yes, he had power over the angel and prevailed; he wept and made supplication unto him; he found him in Bethel and there he spake with us.

Let's look at those pronouns again. First pronoun "he." That's Jacob. Second line "he wept." That's Jacob who wept. "He found him in Bethel." That "he" is also Jacob. Who did he find in Bethel? God, because God revealed himself to him there. The next "he" is

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God and there He, not Jacob (Jacob didn't speak to us) spoke with us. That's really interesting. Why did He say "us"? Remember, Hosea was speaking this just a decade or two before Israel went into captivity. The "us" when Hosea originally said it was were the physical Israelites to whom he was speaking. He said it that way because he wanted to make sure that what had been written previously by Moses in the book of Genesis was intended for the Israelites in his day.

Now what I have just done is update it to the 20th Century A.D. We are the real seed there in Genesis 28, the seed of Jacob. God is speaking to you and me.

Notice that God spoke at Bethel. The site of the first part of that verse is not Bethel, but Mahanaim, which I believe is in the land of Manasseh. The wrestling match took place in Mahanaim. But that quickly, Hosea switched from the wrestling match to when God revealed Himself to Jacob. He applied that speaking to Jacob, to the Israelites of his day and to you and me. We have to do it that way. Otherwise we can excuse any part of the Bible we want as not applying to us.

Hosea 12 is written to the Church. Anytime the Church finds itself in a position that parallels any portion of the Bible, we are to gather the instruction from that which God has recorded to our situation so that we can find the solutions, but maybe first the causes. Once you have the causes, then the solutions, hard as they are, are not as hard as they would be if we didn't know what the causes are.

We are to live by every word of God. That is the only way we can. That is written to us. We are the seed.

This is spoken to any descendant of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob whenever they happen to be living. Whether it's in the 1st Century A.D. or in the 20th Century A.D., we find ourselves in a condition where God obviously has a controversy with us. Because of His faithfulness to His promise, "I will never leave you nor forsake you, I will lead you, I will guide you, I will correct you, I will do whatever has to be done in order to bring you into the promised land, the Kingdom of God." Because of His faithfulness to His promise, He is moving to correct us even as He moved to correct Jacob and Israel.

Jacob took it. He repented. He wept and made supplication. It means that he repented, that he pleaded with God to forgive him. But, unfortunately, Israel did not do that and they went into captivity.

We're having a major, major wrestling match with God right now. All of us are to a lesser or greater degree. The object is to make sure that our relationship with Him is what is

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should be. Not "what organization am I in," but "what is my relationship with God like? What's its quality?"

That's what happened in that wrestling match with God and Jacob. Jacob got his relationship with God straightened out. But God really had to take him down a peg or two, because, honestly, he was quite a man.

Now let's go to Jeremiah.

Jeremiah 3:8 And I saw, when for all the causes whereby backsliding Israel committed adultery I had put her away, and given her a bill of divorce; yet her treacherous sister Judah feared not, but went and played the harlot also.

It was 120 years later, but it nonetheless came to pass.

Jeremiah 3:9 And it came to pass through the lightness of her whoredom, that she defiled the land, and committed adultery with stones and with stocks.

That verse 9 is still addressed to Israel. Verse 10 switches to Judah.

Jeremiah 3:10 And yet for all this her treacherous sister Judah has not turned unto me with her whole heart, but feignedly, says the LORD.

I want to pay attention to three things here. The first is the mention of the particular sin of Israel. Adultery with stones and stocks. This is spiritual adultery with foreign gods because Israel was married to God through the covenant. In reality, it is actually idolatry in the form of worldliness, but adultery is used as the image because of the marriage relationship between the two. The actual sin is idolatry. Israel had an irresistible urge to produce syncretistic religions, i.e., to always be looking into how the pagans worshiped their gods and then make it into their worship of the true God. Just like the golden calf. They took something from Egypt and then proclaimed a feast to the Eternal. Israel could never seem to get this out of their mind. Now we have Buddhism, Hinduism, Taoism, all these Eastern religions. In fact I read an article that had to do with how foreign religions are watering down Protestantism and Catholicism.

That's the first one though, Israel's sin. The second and the third things are specific words. The word 'likeness' in verse 9 and the word 'feignedly' in verse 10. Both of these are attitudes that impacted upon their manner of obedience. Modern translations replaced "likeness" with "casualness." The Revised English Bible renders that "casual prostitution." The Amplified Version says "unseemly frivolity." It's a matter of saying that

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sin was no big deal. Like we have heard so frequently with the trial that the United States has gone through, "It's just a family affair."

Let me give you some possible other words for this word "casual" or "likeness." All you have to do is look it up in a good dictionary.

Indifferent, nonchalant, off-hand, blasé, blithe, unconcerned, cool, dispassionate, apathetic, relaxed (boy, do we like to be informal), unbothered, thoughtless, indiscriminate, lackadaisical.

I wonder if any of them struck a cord in your mind with Revelation 3:16? Israel's sin was taking God for granted. Casual, off-hand.

What about "feignedly," Judah's sin? It is replaced in the Revised English Bible and the New International Version with 'in pretense'. The Living Bible is very plain. It says, "Her sorrow was only faked". The Amplified Bible says, "Judah did not return to Me in sincerity and with her whole heart, but in sheer hypocrisy." To "feign" means to simulate or pretend.

I think that it's pretty easily seen at this point and time that just before Judah fell to the Babylonians, that the sins of these two nations fall into two broad categories that are actually, in many respects, quite similar.

Israel's was dominated by an attitude of casual indifference that produced a syncretistic religion that was, in reality, nothing more than out-and-out idolatry as far as God was concerned. But all the while, they seemingly prospered and were deceived into thinking that somehow God approved. That's very important when we try to make an application to the Worldwide Church of God. In the late '70s and early '80s, the income of the Worldwide Church of God was reaching \$200 million a year. The Church was seemingly prospered, which makes it very easy for people to think since they were part of producing that prosperity and their lives were going along seemingly smooth, that somehow or another God approved. No, He did not approve. A person's economic state is not the equivalent of being in the same state spiritually. Maybe it is, maybe it isn't. Money is a neutral.

Judah, by a hypocritical insincerity that was nothing more than a deceit that would allow them to pretty much continue living as they always had, gave the appearance of really being 'with it' as we might say. This one is really interesting because at the time that Judah was exhibiting these characteristics to God they had as their king possibly the best king Judah or Israel ever had. His name was Josiah. God allowed him to be killed

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at the very height of his power. Apparently, when he was in high spirituality in a pretty good relationship with God, because he did something dumb and stupid, God took him out of the way and the nation's hypocrisy was exposed. They were hiding behind Josiah's spirituality.

Is it possible that we can replace the name of Josiah with Herbert W. Armstrong? "The temple, the temple, the temple of the Lord is here, and I'm in the Church." And all the while the relationship with God is deteriorating through a self-deception and a casual attitude.

The Church is, I believe to a greater or lesser degree, afflicted with both of these problems and all of us need to evaluate ourselves in light of this as we move toward Passover. They both reveal a greater or lesser degree of loss of devotion to God and His purpose.

Our problem is partly doctrinal. But it is mostly attitude. There's not a great deal of difference between United, Global, Living, Church of the Great God or Philadelphia in terms of doctrine. But I can tell you from my experience that there are some attitudinal differences. I think that this is the big problem between us and God. We love Him in terms of keeping His commandments, but we don't love Him WITH ALL OF OUR HEART! It's the devotion that has waned. And God isn't too sure about us as to where we stand in terms of our devotion.

Let's go back to Revelation 2 and we're going to look at two of the Churches. I want to tell you right up front that I am approaching this from the premise that since all seven Churches existed at the same time in the 1st Century, there is absolutely no reason why all seven Churches can't exist at the same time in the 20th Century. Almost every one of these involves attitude problems. We're only going to look at two of them because they are the most obvious.

Revelation 2:1 Unto the angel of the church of Ephesus write; These things say he that holds the seven stars in his right hand, who walks in the midst of the seven golden candlesticks;

Incidentally, verses 2 and 3 are quite complimentary.

Revelation 2:4 Nevertheless I have somewhat against you, because you have left your first love.

I want you to see that. I doesn't say "you have lost" the love. The love is still there, but it

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is not being exercised, is what He means. We're not following through in expressing that love to Him. Would you want to marry someone that could take you or leave you? Someone who treated you with casualness, who was indifferent and lackadaisical toward you? I don't think so. The problem with Ephesus is that they've left it. The love is still there, but they have left it.

Revelation 2:5 Remember therefore from whence you are fallen and repent and do the first works; or else I will come unto you quickly, and will remove your candlestick out of his place, except you repent.

I'll tell you, that is the threat of somebody who is upset. That is a pretty stringent warning. I don't know that He does it to any of the others, i.e., the threat to remove the candlestick. If He was a man, we would say that God's feelings are hurt. After all He has done, after all the love He has shown us, we treat Him casually.

Revelation 3:15-17 I know your works, that you are neither cold nor hot; I would that you were cold or hot. So then, because you are lukewarm and neither cold nor hot, I will spew you out of my mouth. Because you say, I am rich and increased with goods, and have need of nothing; and know not that you are wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked.

That one is pretty obvious too. It's a matter of an attitude that's also accompanied by a towering pride. You have need of nothing. That's saying to God that "I'm OK the way I am." It's almost like saying, "I'm sinless. I don't even need forgiveness." That is pretty proud. The pride has so blinded them that they don't realize they are blind and naked. These are pretty good terms to give us an idea of how He feels about it.

If you want to you can go back to Hosea 12 once again in verse 8 where Ephraim says virtually the same thing. "I am rich!" In fact, they go on to say, "You will find no iniquity in me." Ephraim there, remember, was the leading tribe of Israel, and is a type, really, of the Church. That's pretty proud. God goes on to say that there are idols all over the place in Gilead. Do you know where Gilead was located? It was in Manasseh. So we have the two leading tribes of Israel in the days of Hosea and also in the days of the 20th Century, at the end time, bearing the brunt of God's charge. Two of the richest nations on earth. If you can recall two sermons ago, I quoted from the Living Bible that they translated a portion of those verses that riches cannot make up for sin. God is going to go on and they are going to be humbled, dwelling in booths as in the Feast of Tabernacles.

What we need to do is take stock of how serious and how devoted we are toward

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making effort to achieve something when we believe that we already have it. Hope is one of the greatest motivators that there is. "I am rich and increased with goods and have need of nothing." In practical terms, what is God's accusation against the Laodiceans? They are no longer seeking Him. They don't have any need for Him.

We're in a very difficult period in the life of the Church and in reality, like Jacob, we are wrestling with God within it. There is no way we can physically win it. The only thing that we can do is, like Jacob, repent and submit. Jacob endured what must have been an enervating and emotionally draining situation there. It's interesting to note that he did not come out of the battle unscathed. I don't think that we should think that we're going to come out of this wrestling unscathed either. He was blessed with a limp, to keep him humble, as a constant reminder of the battle that he both won and lost.

I think that we are becoming battle scarred. I hope that battle fatigue does not set in. Remember that God says "I will be with you right up to the end." The reason is to perfect His purpose in us.

Hebrews 10:36-37 For you have need of patience, that after you have done the will of God, you might receive the promise. For yet a little while, and he that shall come will come, and will not tarry.

Here comes our assignment:

Hebrews 10:38 Now the just shall live by faith: but if any man draw back, my soul shall have no pleasure in him.

I said earlier that I think that we have gotten to Jacob's real problem. It was a matter of weak faith. Like all of us do carnally, he used everything within his very fertile wit, his intelligence and his gifts from God to achieve things for himself. He achieved a great deal. He made an agreement with God, but like all of us, his faith wavered from time to time. He lost the vision and he wandered around. He used deceit and manipulation of others to take advantage of them to get what he wanted. He was afraid that if he didn't do what he thought was necessary, they would beat him to the punch and he would lose control. Jacob's problem was, the bottom line, a lack of faith. He was afraid to live by faith. He really did not believe God as he should have.

We have to do what he did and repent. Jacob got the picture. He went on and, incidentally, God shows in the Joseph incident that Jacob had learned his lesson. It's interesting that it was so significant that if you look in Hebrews 11, the Hall of Fame, He only mentions Jacob one time. It was the incident that proved that Jacob had learned

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his lesson. He now believed God with all of his heart. That episode proved it. It's when he blessed Ephraim and Manasseh. For the first time, Jacob did not listen to the will of man. Do you know who expressed the will of man? Of all people Joseph, his most godly son. I'm sure he did it in not any way deceitful. He did it because he thought his father was making a mistake. But his father was not making a mistake. He knew the will of God and he followed through with it regardless of the one person on earth who probably could have persuaded Jacob to do it some other way and Jacob rejected it. That's what God put in Hebrews 11. Jacob had learned his lesson. He now believed what God said, explicitly, and then he died.

I think that is a good place to stop for today.