

EL ELOHE ISRAEL, GOD, THE GOD OF ISRAEL!

Jacob is one of the fascinating characters of the Bible. Many of us would like to be identified with a forgiving Joseph or a godly Daniel, but we would like to keep Jacob at arm's length. Jacob is immediately associated with sly behaviour, cheating his brother, working his way assiduously up the ladder and so on. But when we peer closely into his character, we could all find in there a reflection of our own selves. Even for me this was not a very nice thought, to see my own reflection in his character, but nevertheless this is true. We would rather boast of being like a Joseph or a Daniel but not a Jacob. But it is in Jacob we can find many points of intersection.

But from where he was and where he reached is a real walk of grace upon grace of his Father's God.

The name Jacob itself means supplanter, one who grabs the heel. In plain words someone who cheats. He was truly crafty. He knew the spot of weakness of his elder brother and also knew how to use it for his advantage. He bargained birthright for a bowl of lentil soup. What an incongruous bargain! Jacob knew the full force of this bargain, but Esau did not care to check what he would be losing out. Jacob probably knew with certainty that his elder brother was the man of the moment and capitalised on this nature of his brother. Most of us live like Esau trading the eternal blessings for a bowl of soup or for a bowl of wine or a night of carousing or a carnal trip.

Rebekkah might have told Jacob the story of the womb, how they both struggled inside the womb, and there was a word from the Lord that the older shall serve the younger. (Genesis 25,23)

So the desire to rule over the inheritance must have sprouted in his heart and would have led him to cheat the inheritance out of his brother's hand.

And again when it was time for imparting the family blessing to the first born, Jacob once again put on an act, to cheat his brother out of the father's blessing. The master mind behind this conning was Jacob's mother. It was she who prodded Jacob into grabbing the blessing. Jacob is quite hesitant because if he was found out not only will he lose the blessing, but he will be cursed for generations. Only when Rebekkah assured him, that she will take the curse(27,13) if it came, Jacob ventured cautiously to grab the blessing.

Isaac had asked his first son to cook good food so that he could bless with a filled heart and stomach. Esau unsuspectingly went to hunt for game, whereas his wife takes a lamb from the house and cooks up the food the way her husband liked it best and dresses her beloved son Jacob in Esau's attire and send him to the near blind Isaac. The father and the second son, in the guise of first son meet.

Jacob is clothed for the occasion and comes to meet his father. Father is surprised by his quick arrival and asked about it. For which Jacob the seasoned liar as he is instantly replies, "Because the Lord **your** God caused it to happen to me.(v.27,20) "

Notice he speaks cautiously. It is not his God, but your God, his father's God as though he has nothing to do with this God. Or rather at that point of time in his life, Jacob never had any consciousness of God. For him God meant only his father's God.

Hear this conversation.

Genesis 27:18-24 (NASB) ¹⁸Then he came to his father and said, "My father." And he said, "Here I am. **Who are you, my son?**"

¹⁹Jacob said to his father, "**I am Esau your firstborn**; I have done as you told me. Get up, please, sit and eat of my game, that you may bless me."

²⁰Isaac said to his son, "How is it that you have *it* so quickly, my son?"

And he said, "Because the LORD **your God** caused *it* to happen to me."

²¹Then Isaac said to Jacob, "Please come close, that I may feel you, my son, whether you are really my son Esau or not."

²²So Jacob came close to Isaac his father, and he felt him and said, "The voice is the voice of Jacob, but the hands are the hands of Esau." ²³He did not recognize him, because his hands were hairy like his brother Esau's hands; so he blessed him.

²⁴And he said, "**Are you really my son Esau?**" And he said, "I am."

Isaac then in his ignorance blesses Jacob with the royal blessing. But Jacob's heart would have been pounding with fear, not fully taking in the wonderful blessing. He must be wondering what if his brother suddenly comes in the scene.

This is sad, you may have the greatest blessing spoken over your life, but in your hearts you will know clearly that you are stealing it from under the nose of the rightful person. Having a great blessing in your life, you could not sit down to enjoy it.

The moment he received the blessing, Jacob started fleeing. His whole life now became that of a fugitive. He runs for his life, he runs for his wives, he runs away from an exploitative father-in-law. In the land of refuge God had a master deceiver waiting for Jacob. It was pay back time for Jacob. In place of Rachel he was given Leah and for each he worked for 14 years as bride price. His father in law changed his salary ten

times(31,41)! How humiliating. Finally after being constantly humiliated and deceived, Jacob almost after two decades decides to return to his inheritance, his father's land with his big family. (chapter 28-32). He finally draw courage to meet his brother, his own sin, his action of deceit rather than being constantly teased and humiliated by a father in law.

He finally had the courage to face his own failings, his own sin and turns towards the very place where he once deceived his aged father.

The journey home is quite significant. Before he could meet his brother, his father's God confronts him beside the ford of Jabbok.

When we decide to face and settle our inner hidden secret sins and even before we could reconcile with whom we had cheated, we have to confront our God.

Even when Jacob had run away from the Promised Land, his very own inheritance which he got in a short cut, God's eyes were on him. Jacob was God's choice and God had been continually working in him, to straighten up things. It was God who set up a Laban over Jacob. If not for an exploitative Laban, Jacob would have never thought of coming back.

So now Jacob comes with a big group and yet he is so mortally afraid of Esau. God sends angels as he set out. Jacob needed that sign to go back to his Promised Land. As he neared home, he heard Esau is coming with 400 men to meet him. Jacob's knees turned to jelly and for the first time we hear him pray.

Genesis 32 : 9-12. Jacob prays. This is his first prayer.

Genesis 32:9-12 (NRSV) ⁹And Jacob said, "O **God of my father Abraham and God of my father Isaac**, O LORD who said to me, 'Return to your country and to your kindred, and I will do you good,' ¹⁰I am not worthy of the least of all the steadfast love and all the faithfulness that you have shown to your servant, for with only my staff I crossed this Jordan; and now I have become two companies. ¹¹Deliver me, please, from the hand of my brother, from the hand of Esau, for I am afraid of him; he may come and kill us all, the mothers with the children. ¹²Yet you have said, 'I will surely do you good, and make your offspring as the sand of the sea, which cannot be counted because of their number.'"

God had met him before (28), but Jacob never turned to God. Even then he just made a bargain with God when God opened up His heavens(28, 22). But now Jacob prays, but he only prays to the God of his father Isaac and his grandfather Abraham. This God is not his God yet.

That night before meeting Esau, Jacob had another appointment.

Genesis 32:24-31 (NRSV) ²⁴Jacob was left alone; and a man wrestled with him until daybreak.

²⁵When the man saw that he did not prevail against Jacob, he struck him on the hip socket; and Jacob's hip was put out of joint as he wrestled with him. ²⁶Then he said, "Let me go, for the day is breaking."

But Jacob said, "I will not let you go, unless you bless me."

²⁷So he said to him, "What is your name?" And he said, "Jacob."

²⁸Then the man [£]said, "You shall no longer be called Jacob, but Israel, [£]for you have striven with God and with humans, [£]and have prevailed." ²⁹Then Jacob asked him, "Please tell me your name."

But he said, "Why is it that you ask my name?" And there he blessed him.

³⁰So Jacob called the place Peniel, [£]saying, "For I have seen God face to face, and yet my life is preserved."

³¹The sun rose upon him as he passed Penuel, limping because of his hip.

The Lord confronts him physically and Jacob realized it was God! And his mind immediately thought of what he could get from Him and holds onto God, demanding that he would bless him.

This is a very beautiful moment. Jacob is hanging onto God to bless. He is not after human beings now.

But God had to settle certain things and it is so amazing that God asks the very same question Isaac asked Jacob many many years ago. "What is your name?" To his father Jacob had answered that he was Esau, but now the very same question comes from God.

And he answered "Jacob."

The Lord had straightened the crooked wires of his heart. This is a candid confession. Jacob acknowledges himself as Jacob the deceiver.

It is exactly at this point the Lord gives him a name, a new and eternal name that will never be forgotten as long as this earth and heavens will be.. ISRAEL..

Soon after this encounter the sun rose. A new day has dawned in the heart of Jacob, Israel. Not only does he have a new name, but he also has a new heart. A heart which can know its Master.

That day he meets Esau and in place of hatred there is love. After a rich encounter with God even deadly enemies can become like angels. When they both met, Esau ran towards him, hugged him, kissed and cried. Unbelievable yet true. Jacob then gives his brother gifts and tells him that he is like an angel of God. (33,10). After this Esau goes his way.

The Highway to the Promised Land is wide and open. Jacob now has the rite of passage to his Inheritance at last.

So moved by all this, at this point Jacob builds an altar, the first altar that he built and named it EL ELOHE ISRAEL meaning GOD, THE GOD OF ISRAEL. Yes this God of Abraham, this God of Isaac, has now also become the God of Israel ie the God of Jacob.

But it has been a long journey from Jacob telling Isaac, “your God,” to where he builds an altar and names it EL ELOHE ISRAEL, GOD, THE GOD OF ISRAEL!

Praying that this God of Abraham, this God of Isaac, this God of Jacob, this God of Israel becomes your God and my God all through this year and forever more.