

The God of Jacob

“... *h*ave you not read what God said to you, ‘I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob’? He is not the God of the dead but of the living” (Matt 22:32).

May the Lord answer you when you are in distress; may the God of Jacob protect you (Ps 20:1).

A record of the genealogy of Jesus Christ the son of David, the son of Abraham: Abraham was the father of Isaac, Isaac the father of Jacob, Jacob the father of Judah and his brothers, Judah the father of Perez and Zerah, whose mother was Tamar ... Salmon [was] the father of Boaz, whose mother was Rahab, Boaz the father of Obed, whose mother was Ruth ... Jesse the father of King David. Solomon, the father of Rehoboam ... the father of Abijah ...the father of Asa ... Jehoram the father of Uzziah ... Ahaz the father of Hezekiah ... the father of Manasseh ... Jacob the father of Joseph, the husband of Mary, of whom was born Jesus, who is called Christ (Matt 1:1-16).

What a disillusionment to discover, as the years go by, our own weakness, brokenness and sinfulness. It bewilders us and drives many of us to despair. Particularly if we have become converted, if we are Christians filled with the Holy Spirit, yet are still discovering brokenness, weakness and sinfulness in ourselves.

The story of Jacob opens a door to us and gives us hope and deliverance. As Jacob and Esau were brought into the world, Jacob’s hand grasped his twin’s heel, and the term “the God of Jacob” literally translated, means “the God of he [who] grasps the heel, the supplanter; and figuratively, the deceiver”. Jacob was the kind of man you would keep an eye on at all times. You would watch your back when he was around. You would not want him as an intimate friend, you would never be sure of him. He was a man who tricked his own brother out of everything, a man who thought nothing of lying to his father and deceiving his father-in-law.

Yet we read that God pursues this man. God *associates* with this man. He is not uncomfortable with him. From here on we often read about the God of Jacob in the Bible. God goes looking for him. When he is fleeing from his brother, God goes with him. As he lies sleeping at night, God reveals Himself to Jacob at Bethel. Years later, when Jacob was returning to his country, God, without warning, began to wrestle with him at the Jabbok. This went on all night until God asked Jacob, “What is your name?” Exhausted and out of breath, he answered, “Jacob, he who grasps the heel, the deceiver.” Only then did God bless him, let him go and He became the God of Jacob.

God also calls Himself the God of Judah. Judah was the kind of man whose name you would not like included in your genealogy. One would prefer that not even high school children read his story in Genesis 38; he is most certainly not the kind of man you would choose to be your father or grandfather. Take a look at his history. He goes against the wishes of his parents and marries a Canaanite girl; his eldest child is so wicked that the Lord takes his life at an early age. Afterwards Judah slept with a woman he thought to be a prostitute, but who turned out to be his own daughter-in-law. We read in the genealogy of Jesus: “Jacob the father of Judah, Judah the father of Perez.” Perez, the child born out of wedlock.

God is not embarrassed by, paralyzed by Judah and his wickedness (ungodliness, unrighteousness). And Jesus is called the Lion of the tribe of Judah. Read Revelation 5:5 – *Then one of the elders said to me, “Do not weep! See, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has triumphed. He is able to open the scroll and its seven seals.”*

There are numerous examples in the Bible of prominent believers who failed at times. There is Abraham, the man who did not even have the courage to tell Pharaoh that Sarah was his wife. And God calls Himself the God of Abraham.

He is also the God of Peter, the man who denied the Master Himself. Peter, who was a loudmouth; a rash, impulsive and impetuous man. Peter who turned his back on the gospel and went back to fishing, his calling forgotten. And it was this man of all people that God made a pillar of his kingdom.

He is also the God of Ruth, the Moabite, a nation that had its origin in Lot's incestuous behaviour. He is the God of Solomon, the king who had a thousand wives and concubines and eventually followed other gods. Also included in the genealogy of Jesus is Ahaz, the king who was even more wicked than all the other kings before him put together, Hezekiah and Uzziah, the two kings who became haughty, Manasseh the most ungodly of all the kings in the Bible.

God, the God of Jacob, is also the God of Rahab the whore. This woman of ill repute is included in the genealogy of Jesus only on the grounds of God's grace and compassion. God becomes the God of Rahab, the shamed woman.

He is the God of David, the king who committed murder and adultery. And he, David, is called a man after God's own heart.

God is also the God of the Syro-Phoenician woman, the woman that Jesus compared to a dog. Jesus laid down his life for this woman, because didn't He allow her to eat the "crumbs" that fell from the children's table? He is the God who did not condemn the adulterous woman (John 8), as He did not condemn the woman who had already had five husbands (John 4). He is the God of the robber on the cross. He is the God of the lepers, the outcasts and the "unclean" of society. He is the God who does not snap the bruised reed and who does not snuff out the faint smouldering wick.

Are we really so different from Jacob, David, the leprous, Judah, Rahab, Peter and the adulterous woman? *We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way; and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all* (Isa 53:6). Paul writes: *I know that nothing good lives in me, that is, in my sinful nature. For I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out ... As it is written: "There is no one righteous, not even one"* (Rom 7:18-19 and 3:10).

For this reason and this reason alone, each of us qualifies to be helped by Him. He is the God of hope. He is the merciful and compassionate God. He is the God who forgives and does not think about it anymore, who mends and heals. He is the God who makes new again. The God of starting over. He is the Friend of tax collectors and sinners. How often He visited and ate at the homes of tax collectors, prostitutes and those possessed by the devil.

He is God, our shadow. Think about it: our shadow. Psalm 91:1-2 gives us permission to sit and rest in his shadow, and there are times that He, the sovereign God, chooses to be our shadow.

He never leaves us; He walks alongside us and identifies with us. He is not embarrassed to be our God. God is never ashamed of us and at no time does He *not* want to be seen in our company.

Your sin and brokenness cannot surprise God. Your sin and brokenness are never out of God's reach, never so deep that you cannot be lifted out of it by the grace of God.

God gave his Son so that not one of us needs to be a pitiful, second-class Christian. Our Father gave us a Mediator and High Priest, Jesus Christ the Righteous, who delivers us from sin and has compassion for our weaknesses. God knows that we are made of dust; in fact He made us this way. But God is greater than our weaknesses and transgressions. Our sins and weaknesses do not intimidate Him, they do not embarrass Him. He is not helplessly wringing his hands because He doesn't know what to do with us. No, He is a strong Redeemer, He is our Helper, He provided a Paschal Lamb for us. He is like the shadow of a massive rock in a barren landscape, a Father who has mercy on us. He is the Balm of Gilead, the Healer of every wound and illness. *His* wounds made this possible.

He came for murderers, thieves, drunks, homosexuals, rapists, addicts, the immoral, idolaters, the avaricious, for slanderers, deceivers, adulterers and outcasts: *And that is what some of you were. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God* (1 Cor 6:11).

He is familiar with brokenness, rejection, contempt, derision, defamation, scorn, failure, despair and Godforsaken desolation. It was the Master Himself who cried out in desperation on the cross: *"My God,*

my God, why have you forsaken me?" He was rejected by people, scorned, mocked, despised and spat on, maligned, beaten and finally killed. He is, according to the Bible, the Man of Sorrows, familiar with sickness. In Psalm 22 He calls Himself a worm and not a man. He is the one who was pierced for us and in the eyes of the world He was a failure. He is the Stone that the builders rejected.

He is the God of Jabez. Jabez means "the one that causes pain". During his birth his mother called out "Jabez", which among other things, could also mean, "You cause pain". Thus he entered the world, branded. Everywhere he went he caused pain. Until Jabez called upon the God of Israel! And Israel's name was Jacob at first. Jacob, the deceiver becomes Israel, which means: the prince of God. Jacob cried out to God in Genesis 32 and God heard him, blessed him and changed his name to Israel. In the same way, Jabez cried out to the God of Jacob, "Oh, that you would bless me and enlarge my territory!" God heard him and gave him what he asked (1 Chron 4:9-10).

God can hear you. Call upon Him. He will change your life. He will take away your shame and derision, your disabilities and your sin. He will relieve your pain. He will free you from causing pain to others. He is the God of gangsters, prostitutes, pimps, drug pushers and drug addicts, witches and Satanist high priests. It is for people such as these, for sinners, for those who need a healer, that He sent his Son to the world so that the blood of Christ can wash them clean of sin.

Our brokenness and our sins do not surprise Him, neither do they impose limitations on Him in any way. There is a God available for you right now, at this moment: a God who can do what is humanly impossible. He is a God who crushes hearts of stone, a God who can give you a new heart, who can remove all bitterness, the inability to forgive, all hatred and, in its place, gives you sublime peace, hope and love.

The God of Jacob is a God of inconceivable grace, strange grace, irrevocable grace, because the gospel of Jesus Christ is a gospel *of grace and more grace*. *From the fullness of his grace we have all received one blessing after another* (John 1:16). He knew that we would need one blessing after another.

God is greater, always greater. His grace is greater. Guaranteed for ever and ever. It is enough for you and for me. And it is this abundant grace that makes it possible to follow the Crucified One.