

JACOB AND HIS 12 SONS

Jacob's family grew large. Then he decided it was time to go back to the Promised Land. But on the way Jacob had to deal with both Laban and Esau.

by Shelby Faith

After Laban tricked him, Jacob married both Leah and Rachel. (God created marriage to be between one man and one woman. Jacob should not have had more than one wife.) Jacob loved Rachel more than Leah, and this made Leah sad.

God blessed Leah with a firstborn son named Reuben. She then had three more sons: Simeon, Levi and Judah.

When Rachel did not have any children, she became upset. She told Jacob, "Here is my maid Bilhah. Have a child with her so it will be as if it were mine." So Jacob took Bilhah as his wife. She had two sons, Dan and Naphtali.

Since Leah had stopped having children, she gave her maid, Zilpah, to Jacob as a wife. Zilpah had two sons, Gad and Asher.

God then blessed Leah with two more sons: Issachar and Zebulun. She also had a daughter named Dinah.

Later God blessed Rachel with a son named Joseph. Then she had another son named Benjamin.

JACOB BECOMES RICH

During this time, Jacob's years of serving Laban were finished. Jacob wanted to return to his home country and take his wives and children with him.

Laban begged him to stay. "Please stay, for I know that the LORD has blessed me because of you." Then Laban said, "Tell me what you want, and I will give it to you."

So Jacob said, "You know how I have worked hard for you. You only had a little, but I have increased your herds. Now I need to provide for my own family. If you will do one thing for me, I will again care for your flocks.

"Let me remove all the speckled and spotted sheep and goats. And let me remove all the brown lambs. These will be my wages."

Laban agreed. Jacob came up with a plan to increase his herds. He worked hard and became rich. He had large flocks and many servants.

TIME TO LEAVE

Then Laban's sons complained. They said, "Jacob has taken away our father's wealth. That's how he has become rich."

Jacob saw that Laban was becoming angry with him. He told Leah and Rachel that it was time to go back to his country. He took his family and livestock and left Haran.

QUIZ TIME

Why did Laban want Jacob to stay?

Laban didn't know that Jacob had left. Three days later he found out. Then Laban noticed that some of his idols were gone. Rachel had stolen them from his house before they left. (She should not have done this.)

LABAN CHASES JACOB

Then Laban and his family pursued Jacob. After seven days, they caught up with him. Laban asked Jacob, "Why did you leave secretly? Why did you steal my daughters away from me? You didn't allow me to kiss them good-bye. And why did you steal the idols?"

Jacob answered, "I was afraid that you would take your daughters away from me by force. I didn't take your idols. Go ahead and look for them. Whoever stole them, do not let him live."

Jacob did not know that Rachel had stolen them.

So Laban searched all of their tents, but he did not find them. Rachel had put the idols in a camel's saddle and sat on them. Her father didn't search there.

Jacob was angry with Laban. He said, "Why have you so angrily chased me? You accused me of stealing your idols. You searched and found nothing. I have served you many years. You would have sent me away empty-handed if it had not been for God's blessing."

AN AGREEMENT

Laban answered, "These are my daughters. I wouldn't do anything to my daughters or to their children. Let us make an agreement."

So Jacob took a stone and set it up. They gathered more stones and made a heap. Then Laban said to Jacob, "This is a witness. We will not pass beyond this heap to cause harm to each other."

Early in the morning Laban arose. He kissed his daughters and blessed them. Then Laban went back home.

God said to Jacob, "Return to the land of your family, and I will be with you."

So Jacob continued on his journey to his country. The angels of God appeared around him. When Jacob saw them, he said, "This is God's camp." He knew God was taking care of him and his family.

QUIZ TIME

Why was Jacob afraid of Esau?

CONTACTING ESAU

Many years before, Jacob had left his country because his brother Esau wanted to kill him.

Now Jacob sent messengers to Esau. He told them to tell Esau, "We are from your servant Jacob. He says, 'I have lived with Laban all these years. Now I'm coming back. I hope I may find favor in your sight.'"

The messengers returned to Jacob. They said, "Esau is coming to meet you with 400 men."

Jacob was very afraid. He thought Esau was still angry with him and might attack him and his family. He divided the people, flocks and herds into two groups. He hoped at least one group would be safe.

Then Jacob asked God to protect them from Esau.

Jacob decided to send Esau some gifts. He sent many goats, rams, sheep, camels and donkeys ahead with his servants. He divided them into three gifts, each one to arrive after the other. He hoped that Esau would accept these gifts and forgive him. He hoped Esau would no longer be angry.

That night Jacob sent his family over to the other side of a river. He stayed alone.

WRESTLING WITH GOD

A Man appeared to Jacob. He wrestled with Him all night. This was God testing Jacob. Jacob would not give up. So God put Jacob's hip out of joint.

God said, "Let Me go, for day is coming."

Jacob said, "I will not let You go unless You bless me!"

So God said, "What is your name?"

He said, "Jacob."

Then God said, "Your name will no longer be Jacob, but Israel. You have struggled with God and with men, and have prevailed."

Then Jacob said, "Tell me Your name."

God did not tell Jacob His name, but He blessed him there. Jacob called this place Peniel. He said, "I have seen God face to face, and I lived!"

MEETING ESAU

After this, Jacob saw Esau coming with his 400 men. Then Jacob crossed over ahead of his family. He bowed down to the ground seven times until he came near his brother.

Esau ran to meet him! He hugged and kissed him, and they both wept. Then Esau saw the women and children, and said, "Who are these?"

Jacob said, "These are my children that God has blessed me with." Then all of Jacob's family came to Esau and bowed down. So Esau returned back to his home.

Jacob had finally returned to Canaan, the land of his father, Isaac. He had made peace with his brother, Esau. God blessed him and was with him all the days of his life. His 12 sons multiplied their families. They became known as the 12 tribes of Israel.

Joseph, one of Jacob's younger sons, was taken to Egypt as a slave when he was a young man. God had a special plan for Joseph. He helped save Jacob's family when a great famine came on their land. (Read more of this story in "[Joseph: The Slave Becomes the One Who Saves.](#)")

QUESTIONS

Here are some questions to think about or talk about as a family:

1. How many sons did Jacob have? Can you memorize their names?
2. Jacob had a daughter. What was her name?
3. What did God intend for marriage? What problems were caused by going against this and having more than one wife?
4. What happened when Jacob wanted to take his family back to his country?
5. Whom did Jacob wrestle with?
6. What was Jacob's name changed to?
7. What happened when Jacob saw his brother Esau?

Read this story in your Bible in Genesis 29-33. Read more about Jacob in the Bible Stories "[Esau and Jacob and the Birthright](#)" and "[Jacob Is Deceived by Laban.](#)"



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