

Life Lesson 15
Jacob's Journey
Text: Genesis 28 and 29

Introduction

In our last story we learned about a tricky fellow named Jacob. He outsmarted his brother and got himself into a lot of trouble. In our story today we'll learn about the exciting trip he took--and how someone outsmarted *him*!

The Story

Esau vowed to kill his brother Jacob after Jacob stole his birthright and blessing. Jacob went on a long trip to see his mother's brother, Laban, so that Esau wouldn't have a chance to murder him.

After traveling all day, Jacob must have felt exhausted. There was no motel in that part of the country in those days. There wasn't even a house where he could stop and spend the night. Jacob camped out under the stars with a stone for a pillow. While he slept, God spoke to him in a dream.

In his dream, Jacob saw a ladder reaching up to heaven. There were angels going up and down it. At the top of the ladder was God, Himself.

"I am the Lord God of Abraham and Isaac," He said. "I will give you the land you are lying on. It will be yours, and your children's after you. You will have so many descendants that they will be like the dust of the ground -- too many to count. Through one of your descendants all the families of the earth will be blessed."

Jacob probably didn't realize what a wonderful promise God was making. He was prophesying the birth of Jesus, the Messiah, who would take away the sin of His people. Jesus would be one of Jacob's family.

When Jacob woke up, he was afraid. He made an altar to God out of the stone that had been his pillow.

"God is in this place and I didn't even know it," he said.

Jacob was shaken up by his dream, but he wasn't really changed by it. The next thing he did was to make a promise.

"If God will be with me and keep me and give me food and clothes and look out for me, then He will be my God and I will serve Him."

What a selfish vow, after receiving such a wonderful promise! He didn't surrender to God and repent of his sin. Instead he tried to bargain with God.

Jacob went on his way, wondering how he would find his uncle Laban. He came upon some shepherds watering their sheep at a well.

"Do you know Laban, son of Nahor?" Jacob asked them.

"Yes, we know him," they answered, "And there is his daughter with his sheep."

Jacob was so glad to see his cousin, Rachel, that he ran up and hugged her. She took him home with her to meet Laban.

Laban welcomed him, and after a while, offered him a job.

"What wages would you like to have?" Laban asked.

"I will work for you for seven years if you will let me marry Rachel," Jacob answered. He had fallen in love with his beautiful cousin.

Laban agreed, and Jacob worked for him for those seven years. He loved Rachel so much that the years seemed like only a few days.

At the end of the seven years, Jacob asked for his wife. They had a big wedding ceremony, and Jacob was very happy. He had his beloved Rachel at last!

But a sorry surprise was in store for Jacob. After the wedding he found that it wasn't the beautiful Rachel under the wedding veil. It was her cross-eyed sister, Leah! Laban had tricked him.

Jacob was very angry. He found out what it feels like to be out-smarted. Perhaps then he thought about how *he* had tricked Esau, and realized how Esau must have felt.

"Why did you trick me?" he demanded of Laban.

"In our country the oldest girl has to get married first," Laban said. "If you will serve me for seven more years, I'll go ahead and give you Rachel for your wife, too."

What a terrible thing! God's plan is for a man to have *one* wife and to be faithful to her. A woman should have only *one* husband. But Jacob agreed to take both of his cousins for his wives, and then had two more wives besides them.

God's way is always best--as Jacob was to find out. All his wives were jealous of one another and fought all the time. No one was happy.

Many people today think they married the wrong person.

"Oops, I made a mistake. I'll just get a divorce and marry someone else," they think.

When they do this, they are making the same mistake Jacob did. God's way is for each man to have one wife and to stick with her no matter what. Women should be always faithful to the men they marry. If they become unhappy with the one they married, they should pray about it and try to learn to get along better.

Jacob continued working for Laban, and God blessed him, although he didn't deserve it! God gave Jacob twelve sons, and lots of riches. We'll learn about his sons, and his exciting trip back home in our next lesson.

The Life Lesson

Do you think God was impressed by Jacob's vow? I don't think so. God didn't need to buy Jacob's worship with food and clothing! What do you think God thinks of people today who try to bargain with Him to get what they want? I think He's still not impressed. He wants us to repent of our sin and selfishness and surrender to Him. He wants us to love Him and serve Him because He is worthy of our love and service, not because of what we can get from Him.

Perhaps at some time *you* have thought about hell, and were afraid, like Jacob was. Perhaps you were willing to pray a prayer, or be baptized so that you wouldn't have to go there. But that isn't salvation!

Salvation is seeing ourselves for what we are -- sinners in control of our own lives -- living just for ourselves. Sin is being our own god, being concerned only with "me" and my

wants.

All sin must be paid for. All sin deserves an eternity in hell. Jesus loved his people so much that He came to earth, just as God promised Jacob long ago. He allowed wicked men to nail Him to the cross, and there He bore the punishment our sin deserved. He paid the penalty for us.

To be saved means to believe this, and confess our sin to God. We must repent or "turn around". Instead of going our own way and being our own god, we surrender to Him and trust in Him as our God. He becomes the "boss" of our lives.

God doesn't want us to bargain with Him, but to trust and surrender to Him!

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Review Questions

Why did Jacob have to leave home?

He was afraid his brother Esau would kill him.

Who was Jacob traveling to see?

His Uncle Laban

What did Jacob dream about while he was on his journey?

He dreamed of a stairway leading up to heaven.

What did Jacob do with the rock he had used as a pillow?

He made an altar.

What bargain did Jacob make with God?

“If you will be good to me, I will worship you.”

Do we bargain with God?

No, we come to God on His terms.

Who did Jacob want to marry?

His cousin Rachel.

How did Laban trick Jacob?

He had him marry Leah, Rachel’s sister.

Was Jacob happy with his wives?

No, they were jealous and fought.