**Jacob Works for Laban**

**A Bible Story From**

**Genesis 28:1-31:55**

**Bible Story Number: 1010290**

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**Bible Story**

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**Background**

God made a profound promise to Abram (called a covenant):

I will bless you and make you the father of a great nation.

I will make you famous throughout history.

I will protect your allies and punish your enemies.

I will bless the entire world through your descendants.

**Story from the Bible**

**Genesis 28:1-31:55**

This is what the Bible says.

Jacob deceived Isaac, so Isaac gave Jacob the blessing that was intended for Esau. Afterward, Isaac called for Jacob and told him not to marry a Canaanite woman. He sent him to the land of their forefathers to find a wife. He told him to go find a wife from the daughters of Laban, his mother’s brother.

He asked God to bless Jacob and to make him fruitful and give him many children so that he would become a community of peoples. He asked God to give Jacob and his descendants the blessing given to Abraham, so that he would take possession of the land God had promised to give Abraham.

Jacob left for Haran, just as his father had told him. He stopped for the night and slept on the ground with his head on a stone. He had a dream. He saw a stairway that reached from earth to heaven and the angels of God were going up and down on the stairway. God was at the top and He said:

“I am Yahweh, the God of your father Abraham and the God of Isaac. I will give you and your offspring the land that you are now sleeping on. Your offspring will be like the dust of the earth, and you will spread out toward the west, the east, the north, and the south. All the peoples on earth will be blessed through you and your offspring. Look, I am with you and will watch over you wherever

you go. I will bring you back to this land, for I will not leave you until I have done what I have promised you” (Genesis 28:13-15).

When Jacob woke up, he worshiped God. He used the stone he had slept on to build an altar. He made a vow: “If God will be with me and watch over me on this journey … and if I return safely to my father’s house, then the Lord will be my God … and I will give to You a tenth of all that You give me.”

Jacob went to live with his uncle Laban. After living there for a month, his uncle asked him what wages he should pay him. Jacob had already fallen in love with his daughter Rachel. He said that he would work for seven years for Rachel. Laban agreed.

Jacob worked for Laban for seven years. Then he asked that he be allowed to marry Rachel. Laban had a wedding feast, but that night he gave his daughter, Leah, to Jacob in place of Rachel. The next morning Jacob realized he had been tricked, and he went to Laban. Laban said that it was their custom for the oldest daughter to marry first. Jacob complained and finally agreed to work another seven years for Rachel. After his bridal week with Leah, he also married Rachel. Jacob loved Rachel more than Leah.

God saw that Leah was not loved, and He opened her womb and she became pregnant. However, Rachel was barren. After Leah had a total of four sons, Rachel gave her maidservant, Bilhah (a slave), to Jacob as a wife in order to have children through her. Bilhah bore two sons by Jacob. Leah realized that she was not having more children so she gave her maidservant, Zilpha (a slave), to Jacob as a wife in order to have more children through her. Zilpha bore two sons by Jacob.

Some time later Leah made a deal to give Rachel some mandrakes one of her son’s had found in exchange for spending the night with Jacob. As a result, Leah became pregnant again and had another son (fifth). Then later she bore a sixth son.

Then God blessed Rachel and she became pregnant and she bore a son and named him Joseph.

Note: Leah had a total of six sons, Rachel’s maidservant Bilhah had a total of two sons, Leah’s maidservant Zilpha had two sons, and Rachel had one son.

After the birth of Joseph, Jacob asked Laban to allow him to go back to his homeland along with his wives and his children. Laban realized that God had blessed him while Jacob was living with him and he asked him to stay and to name his wages. They agreed that Jacob would receive the spotted sheep, the dark-colored lamb and every spotted or speckled goat. Laban agreed.

That day Laban took all the spotted sheep, the dark-colored lamb and the spotted or speckled goats with him and left the rest of his flocks with Jacob. Jacob tended Laban’s flocks. He took fresh-cut branches from certain trees and peeled back the bark to expose the white inner wood of the branches. Then he placed these near where the animals would come to drink. The animals mated in front of these branches and they bore young that were spotted, dark and speckled. He then selected the stronger, healthier animals to mate in front of the branches. He increased his flocks (those that were streaked, dark and speckled) with healthier animals, while Laban’s were weaker. As a result, Jacob became very prosperous and very wealthy.

God spoke to Jacob and told him to go back to the land of his father.

Laban and his sons saw that Jacob was very prosperous and had gained his wealth from what had belonged to Laban. Jacob realized that Laban’s attitude toward him was not what it had been.

Jacob, his wives, his family, his servants and all his flocks left, headed for Canaan. Rachel stole her father’s household gods before they left.

Three days later, Laban left to pursue Jacob. God came to Laban in a dream and warned him not to say anything to Jacob. When he caught up with Jacob, he asked why he had left without allowing him to say goodbye to his daughters and grandchildren. He also asked why Jacob had stolen his household gods.

Jacob told Laban he was afraid he would not allow them to leave. Jacob did not know that Rachel had stolen Laban’s gods, so he gave Laban permission to search for his gods and said that if anyone was found with them they would be killed. Rachel had hidden Laban’s gods in her saddle. When her father came to search her, she said she was in her period and asked him not to make her get down from her saddle. Laban did not find the things that had been stolen.

Jacob reminded Laban of how he had worked for Laban for fourteen years for his daughters and six years for the livestock. He complained that Laban had changed his wages ten times over the years.

Finally, Laban and Jacob made a treaty. The next day Jacob and all who were with him continued on their journey.

This concludes the story from the Bible.

Note: Jacob’s name was later changed to Israel (Gen. 32:28). Rachel later died while giving birth to another son, Benjamin (Gen. 35:16-18). Jacob/Israel had twelve sons and their descendants are now known as the twelve tribes of Israel.

**Retelling the Story**

Let’s review this story by retelling it as a group. We want to retell it as faithfully as we can to the story from the Bible. We do not want to add to it or leave out anything important. Who will get us started?

**Questions**

* Why did Isaac send Jacob back to his homeland?
* What promise did God give Jacob (in the dream)?
* How did Jacob respond to God?
* After a month, what agreement did Jacob make with his uncle Laban?
* How did Laban deceive Jacob into marrying his oldest daughter Leah?
* How many years did Jacob work for his uncle in order to marry Rachel?
* How many sons did Jacob have with each wife: Leah, Zilpha and Rachel?
* How did Jacob increase his wealth while working for his uncle?
* What did you like about this story?
* What did you not like about this story?
* What did you learn about God from this story?

**Prayer**

Prayer is more than a way to end the session. It is time to talk to God. Public prayer is a model for others. Boldly ask God to guide participants to use the Bible story with others. Ask God to give you and the participant’s insight and understanding as you think about this biblical event.