Jacob Goes to Haran


Suggested Emphasis or Theme: Sometimes we learn lessons from bad things that happen to us.

Story Overview:

Having deceived his brother and father Jacob escaped to relatives in Haran. During the journey Jacob dreamed of a stairway between heaven and earth on which angels were ascending and descending to the Lord at the top. God reassured Jacob of his blessing and promise. Undeserving as he was this promise sustained Jacob over the next twenty years as he worked for his uncle Laban and built a family and wealth. Eventually, Jacob returned to his home and was surprised to find that his brother, Esau, welcomed him with open arms.
Background Study:

This lesson takes up where the story of Jacob, Esau and the Birthright left off. After deceiving his father and brother Jacob left his family home and makes his way North to his mother’s relatives in Haran. The official reason that he is looking for a wife but it is evident that he is fleeing the wrath of his brother.

Many important events happen on his trip to Haran, his life there and years later upon his eventual return to face his brother. The following events begin and end in Bethel.

- Jacob’s Stairway Dream at Bethel ([Genesis 28:10-22](#))
- Jacob Meets His Relatives in Haran ([Genesis 29:1-14](#))
- Jacob is Tricked by Laban and Marries both Rachel and Leah ([Genesis 29:14-30](#))
- Jacob’s Children are Born ([Genesis 29:31-30:4](#))
- Jacob Schemes and Increases His Flocks ([Genesis 30:25-43](#))
- Jacob Flees and Laban Pursues ([Genesis 31:1-55](#))
- Jacob Prepares to Meet Esau Again ([Genesis 32:1-21](#))
- Jacob Wrestles With God ([Genesis 32:22-32](#))
- Jacob and Esau Make Peace ([Genesis 33:1-20](#))
- Eventually, Jacob Becomes “Israel” and Moves to Bethel ([Genesis 35:1-12](#))

Although there are many important events that take place in Genesis 28-33 trying to cover all of them in one lesson would be confusing. There is certainly enough material here if you wish to spread the lesson over a number of sessions.

If you should decide to cover this part of Jacob’s life in one lesson, however, the lesson below outlines how this might be done. Time will be spent predominantly on the overarching movements of Jacob from his family to Haran and then back again and how Jacob is part of God’s plan. Instead of many details the lesson will cover a few highlights.

As you teach this you will want children to understand some basic facts that give context
to their understanding of the Old Testament and God’s promises:

- Jacob was a descendant of Abraham. In his dream of angels descending and ascending a staircase to heaven, God reveals that, despite Jacob’s faults he was chosen to carry out God’s plans. God chose him to carry on with the same blessings given to Abraham (Genesis 12:1-3) and Isaac (Genesis 26:23-24), and
- Jacob became the father of twelve sons (eleven is this lesson and the last after his return home- Genesis 35:16-20), and
- God changed Jacob’s name to Israel (Genesis 32:28).

In the lesson Jacob, Esau and the Birthright we were first introduced to the character of Jacob. He had lived a life filled with jealousy and deception that culminated in him stealing his brother, Esau’s, expected position as leader of the family. Our natural reaction to Jacob’s story might be that he does not deserve to receive God’s blessing and protection. The story of Jacob, however, reminds us that God’s plans are not dependent on man’s behaviour. After all, NONE of us deserve to represent God in any of the ways that he asks us to. The people of God are not perfect heroes and children should not be under the impression that they are. Instead, human imperfection is the backdrop of God’s perfection and amazing work.

(Genesis 28:10-22) As Jacob flees from his family in Beersheba he stops along the way one night to sleep. At this time he dreams of a stairway stretching from earth to heaven. God is at the top of the ladder and angels are going up and down it. It is here that God restates the blessing that he had previously given to Abraham and Isaac. Jacob recognises the magnitude of this promise, builds a pillar there and calls the place “Bethel”. He also strikes what appears to be a bargain with God. If God takes care of him as he says then
he vows to give God a tenth of what he has. It wasn’t until many many years later that a “tithe” becomes part of the Mosaical Law (Leviticus 27:30-32).

(Genesis 29:1-30) Jacob has always been the one who deceives but, once he connects with his family in Haran, he learns what it means to be the recipient of deception. Jacob strikes a bargain to work for his uncle Laban seven years in exchange for marrying Laban’s beautiful younger daughter, Rachel. Seven years later, at the wedding, Laban switches the brides so that Jacob marries his older daughter, Leah, by mistake. Jacob is allowed to marry Rachel too under the condition he works another seven years.

(Genesis 29:31-31:31) Bargains, tricks and deception all play a part in the lives of Laban, Jacob and Jacob’s wives. Jacob’s family grows but with much angst and sorrow. His wives are jealous of each other and even bargain over the nights they spend with their husband. They connive to have children by Jacob and even offer their servant girls to him. Twenty years after leaving his home Jacob now has two wives, two maidservants who mothered some of his children, eleven sons and one daughter. (His last son will be born after he returns to the place of his birth.)

God commands Jacob to leave and return to his home but Laban attempts to squeeze even more years of work out of him. Jacob uses his knowledge of animal husbandry to trick Laban and accumulates large herds of animals. As if all of this was not enough, Rachel steals from her father as the family sneaks away from Laban to return to Beersheba where Jacob had come from. An angry Laban follows and Laban and Jacob finally come to make a kind of treaty and separate.

(Genesis chapters 32-33) Ironically, the only person who acts righteously in this story is Jacob’s brother, Esau. Jacob, knowing he had previously treated his brother terribly, carefully plans all sorts of appeasements as he meets Esau. When they do come together, however, Esau welcomes Jacob with open arms.

Just before their meeting Jacob spends time alone. God, in the form of an angel, comes to
Jacob and wrestles with him. It is at this time that Jacob’s name is changed to “Israel” because, as the angel said, “you have struggled with God and with men and have overcome.” (Genesis 32:28)

(Genesis 35:1-12) God changed Jacob’s name to “Israel”. This is the more familiar name when we think of the “Nation of Israel” and the “12 Sons or Tribes of Israel”. Although they had made peace Jacob did not immediately move back to his former home where Esau lived. Eventually, though, God renewed his promise to him and told Jacob to go and live in Bethel (the place where Jacob had had the staircase dream).

- What happened before this story?
- What happens after this story?
- List of all Bible stories and themes on this website.

Way to Introduce the Story:

Have a number of different types of pillows and let the children vote on which is the most comfortable one to sleep on. Be sure and include a large stone among the choices. Discuss the comforts and discomforts of each choice. “Remember how Jacob tricked his father and brother in last week’s story? Jacob’s parents sent him on a trip to see his relatives in Haran. They wanted him to find a wife there. On the first night of the journey Jacob slept out in the open. He used a stone for his pillow. After all of the bad things that Jacob did, he was about to learn some good lessons from the Lord.”

The Story:

Jacob had tricked his father and brother. His brother was so angry he wanted to kill him. Jacob’s mother told him to leave and go to their family in Haran. He could find a wife
there and someday, when his brother was no longer angry, maybe he could come back.

Jacob stopped for the night on his way to Haran. He slept on the ground. For a pillow he laid his head on a stone.

When you sleep do you ever dream? Sometimes we have good dreams and sometimes we have scary dreams. But Jacob had a beautiful dream. He dreamed that a stairway or ladder reached from the ground all the way into heaven! And on that long stairway he saw angels going up and down! And who do you think was at the top of the ladder? God!

Jacob heard God say, “I am the God of your grandfather Abraham and your father Isaac. The ground you are lying on is yours. I will give it to you and your children and your children’s children. You will be the father of a great nation. There will be many children and they will populate this land.” God also promised to be with Jacob’s family and protect them.

The next morning Jacob got up very early and placed the stone on which he’d been sleeping onto its side. He poured olive oil on it and named the special place Bethel. He prayed, “Oh God, if you protect me and give me food and shelter on this journey, I will always remember you as the true God. This place will be a special place of remembrance.”

Jacob now knew that God wanted him to be good. He would be the leader of a very big family. Someone from his family would bring blessings to the whole world. He knew he was not alone—God was with him.

When Jacob finally arrived in Haran all his relatives were happy to see him. Jacob met his Uncle Laban’s beautiful daughter, Rachel, and her older sister, Leah. Rachel was beautiful.

Jacob worked hard helping Laban tend his sheep. After he had been there a month, Laban
wanted to know how much he should pay Jacob. Jacob had fallen in love with Rachel so he had an idea. He told Laban that he would work for him for seven whole years and at the end of that time, Laban could give Rachel to Jacob as a wife. Laban agreed.

After seven years the time came for Jacob and Rachel to get married. Do you remember how Jacob had been deceitful and played a trick on his father, Isaac? Now Jacob was the one that was tricked! Jacob thought he was marrying Rachel but Laban switched the brides. Instead of Rachel, Laban gave his older daughter, Leah, to Jacob. Jacob could not see Leah so he thought he was marrying Rachel. The next morning, when the sun came up, Jacob saw that his new wife was Leah!

Jacob was very angry with Laban but Laban said it was unfair for the younger sister to marry before the older. Then Laban had an idea. He would let Jacob marry Rachel too. Men in those days sometimes had more than one wife. Laban said that Jacob could marry Rachel now but he would have to work another seven years in exchange. Jacob agreed.

Rachel and Jacob got married but Jacob always loved Rachel the most. As the years went by Jacob’s family grew. Leah had a number of children but many years passed before Rachel finally had children.

Eventually, Jacob became the father of twelve sons and one daughter. He did not always obey God. Some of the children were born to his wives and some were born to his wives’ servants.

Laban did not like it when Jacob said God wanted him to take his family and return to where he had come from. Jacob agreed to stay and work for a few more years. Jacob only had a few sheep but he tricked Laban and made sure he had many sheep before the time came to leave. God told Jacob it was time to go. Laban was angry but Jacob and his family left anyway.

Before Jacob arrived at his old home he had a visit from God (in the form of an angel).
The angel wrestled with Jacob. The angel told Jacob that he was a fighter and so his name would no longer be “Jacob” but would be changed to a new name that suits a fighter. His new name would be called “Israel.”

Jacob was very afraid to meet his brother Esau again. Esau had been very angry with him all those years ago. Jacob sent servants ahead of him with many gifts for Esau. Jacob even bowed down to Esau when he saw him.

But Jacob did not need to be worried. Esau ran up to his brother and hugged him. He was so happy to see Jacob. Jacob was home now.

Back when Jacob had the dream about the staircase God had told him that he would watch over him. Sometimes good things happened in Jacob’s life and sometimes bad things happened. Every time, in good and in bad, God kept his promise and took care of Jacob.

God took care of Jacob and God can take care of you.

top

Ways to Tell the Story:

This story can be told using a variety of methods. Always remain true to the facts found in the Bible but help children connect to its meaning by using drama, visual aids, voice inflection, student interaction and/or emotion.

Click here for visual aids and story-telling methods.

Click here to download the slideshow or click here to download the pictures to print. Each teacher is unique so only use the illustrations that best relate to the way YOU are telling the story in THIS lesson. Too many illustrations can be confusing so eliminate any that cover other stories or details you do not wish to emphasise in this lesson.
Review Questions:

1. Why did Jacob leave his families’ home and go to Haran? Esau wanted to kill him for stealing the family blessing.
2. What did Jacob use for a pillow one night when he was travelling to Haran? A smooth stone.
3. What did Jacob see in his dream? A ladder between heaven and earth with angels going up and down on the ladder. God was at the top of the ladder.
4. What were the names of Laban’s daughters? Rachel and Leah.
5. After working seven years, Laban said Jacob could marry Rachel. What happened? Laban tricked him into marrying Leah instead.
6. What happened when Jacob found out that he had been tricked? He married Rachel too and then worked another seven years.

Song Suggestions:

- [Shake the Devil Off Song](#)
- [1-2-3 The Devil’s After Me Song](#)
- [My God is So Big Song](#)
- Refer to the [Song Page](#) on this website for more options.

Learning Activities and Crafts:

(How to choose the best learning activities for my teaching situation)

Activities:

- To recreate the story, set up a ladder in the room and have the children draw or make angels and place them on the steps.
• Use a paper or real rock for the children to lay their head on while listening to the story.
• Walk outside and let the children find a stone that they think would be a comfortable pillow.
• Let children share some of the dreams they have had.
• Put a towel, sheet, or piece of cloth on the head of one of the students and let them represent Jacob. Conduct the class like an interview and let the children ask Jacob questions.
• Talk about bad things that have happened in your life and what you have learned from them.
• Discuss Romans 8:28
• Sing “Father Abraham”.

Crafts:

• Make angels for a craft project.
• Have children make puppets and perform a show to retell the story.
• Paint rocks.

Check the Teaching Ideas page on this website for ideas that are adaptable to any lesson.

Click here for “Jacob Goes to Haran” printables to print (A4 paper)
Click here for “Jacob Goes to Haran” printables to print (Letter size-USA)
Other Online Resources:

- Jacob and Esau colouring page and puzzle worksheets (Calvary Curriculum)
- Jacob’s Dream colouring page and puzzle worksheets (Calvary Curriculum)
- Rachel and Leah colouring page and puzzle worksheets (Calvary Curriculum)
- “Your Name Shall Be Israel” activities (Calvary Curriculum)
- Colouring page of Romans 8:28 (Teacher Help)
- Directions for building a pretzel ladder (DLTK)