

Jacob Becomes Israel

by Joelee Chamberlain

Hello there! I have another interesting Bible story to tell you today. Would you like to hear it? All right, then, I'm going to tell you about Jacob.

Jacob is a very important man in the Bible. We hear about his life in the book of Genesis, the very first book in the Bible. I've already told you a quick story about the whole book of Genesis, haven't I? In it I told a little about Jacob's grandfather Abraham and a little about Jacob's father Isaac as well as a little about Jacob himself. But the Bible says so much about Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob that at other times I have told you a lot more both about Abraham and about Isaac. Well, now, today I'm going to tell you a lot more about Jacob.

Now, you remember that the Lord had made many promises to Abraham, and then the Lord had passed those promises on Abraham's son Isaac, hadn't He? Well, later the Lord passed the promises on to Isaac's son Jacob. And Jacob became the father of all of the Jews. In fact, the Lord often calls Himself in the Bible the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. So now let's talk about Jacob.

Okay, let's start with just a little about Jacob's parents, Isaac and Rebekah. Isaac had married his beautiful cousin Rebekah. Of course, they wanted children, but for 20 years they didn't have any. Isaac prayed to the Lord for children, and finally they were going to have a baby. But it wasn't just one baby, there were two! Rebekah was going to have twins! Before they were born, the Lord told her, "Your two babies are going to become two nations. One of those will be stronger than the other. And the older will serve the younger."

Now what does that mean, "the older will serve the younger?" Well, it was the custom that the oldest son in a family would after a while become the head of the family and would inherit more from the father than younger sons would, and the older son would also have some special blessings. But in this case, the Lord said that the younger son was going to become the leader and become more important.

Anyway, when their daddy Isaac was 60 years old, the twins were born. The older twin, the first one, when he was born he was all red and had lots of hair, even little hairs on his body. So they named him "Esau", which in their language meant "Lots of Hair." Then the second twin, the younger son, was born, and as he was born, he grabbed onto little Esau's heel. So they named him "Jacob" which means "Heel Grabber" or "Supplanter", that is, someone who tries to take someone else's place.

And from various ages given in the Bible, we know that the twins' grandfather Abraham lived until his twin grandsons were about 15 years old. So Abraham would have known Jacob and Esau. Isn't that nice? And when Abraham died, his son Isaac buried him in the cave of Machpelah where Abraham's wife Sarah was buried.

Well, the boys grew up. Esau became a very good hunter, and Jacob became what we'd call a rancher, taking care of the flocks and herds. Their father Isaac liked Esau better because he liked to eat meat from the animals that Esau hunted, but their mother Rebekah liked Jacob better.

Well, after a while, one day Jacob was fixing something to eat. It seems to have been some sort of red lentil stew. Anyway, Esau came by, and Esau was very hungry. So Esau said to his twin brother Jacob, "Feed me, please, with some of your red stew, for I am very weak."

Jacob said, "Then sell me your birthright today."

The birthright was a special thing that the first born son, that is, the oldest son, got. It meant that when his father died the first born son would become head of the family and would inherit two parts of whatever his father had left. The other sons would each get one part. So since Esau was the oldest son, of course the birthright was his. And now Jacob was asking Esau to sell him this important birthright just for some of the red stew he's cooking. So what do you think Esau will do? Well, let's see!

Esau said, "Look, I'm ready to die I'm so hungry. What good would the birthright do me?"

Jacob said, "Promise me then, today."

So Esau made a solemn promise that from then on the birthright would belong to Jacob. So then Jacob gave Esau some bread and some of the lentil stew. Esau ate the food and drank something and then went on his way. The Bible says that Esau despised his birthright, that he didn't think it was much good, that the birthright wasn't worth much. After all, he didn't wait to go home to get a meal, he just sold it for some food.

And because the lentil stew was sort of red in color, then Esau got the nickname of "Edom", which means "red" in their language. We often hear of Edom or Edomites in the Bible, and those are all referring to Esau or his descendants. (Remember, "descendants" means a person's children and grandchildren and great-great-great-grandchildren.)

Well, time went by. Jacob and Esau got to be in their 70s. Esau was married, but Jacob wasn't married yet. And Isaac got old and became blind; he couldn't see. And one day Isaac called his son Esau to him and said, "I'm going to die one of these days. I don't know when that will be. Now, you take your bow and arrows and go hunting and get a wild animal and make me some of that delicious food that I like so much. Then I will eat it and give you my blessing."

You see, it was a ceremony to give the blessing to the son, and having a meal was often part of that ceremony. So Esau went out hunting.

Well, Rebekah heard Isaac talking to Esau. So Rebekah said to Jacob who, remember,

was a little younger than Esau (even though they were twins), "I heard your father talking to your brother Esau just now. So you do what I tell you. You go get me a couple of young goats from our flocks and bring them to me, and I will fix some of that delicious meat your father likes so much." You see, Rebekah liked Jacob better, and she wanted Jacob, her younger son, to get the special blessing instead of Esau.

But Jacob said to his mother, "But look, Esau has lots of hair all over him, and I don't. My father may touch me and he'll realize that I'm not Esau, and then he will curse me instead of blessing me."

But his mother Rebekah just said, "That will be my problem. Just do what I say and get me the goats."

So Jacob did, and his mother fixed the meat just the way his father Isaac liked it. Then Rebekah took some of Esau's best clothes and had Jacob put them on. And she took some of the skins from the young goats and put them on Jacob's hands and neck so that if Isaac touched him, he'd feel lots of hair like Esau had. Then she gave Jacob the delicious meat she'd cooked and some bread.

So Jacob took the food and went into the tent where his father Isaac was. (They lived in tents.) And Jacob said, "Father."

Isaac said, "I'm here. Who are you, my son?"

Jacob said, "I'm Esau, your firstborn. I've done what you told me. Please get up and eat my meat so that you can bless me."

Isaac said to Jacob, "How did you find an animal so quickly?"

And Jacob said, "Oh, the Lord brought it to me."

Well, Jacob's voice didn't sound like Esau's voice. So Isaac said, "Please come over here so that I can touch you and see if you're really Esau or not." (Remember, Isaac was blind.)

So Jacob went over near to his father Isaac, and Isaac touched him and felt the goat's hair. And Isaac said, "It sounds like Jacob's voice, but you have Esau's hands."

Again Isaac said, "Are you really my son Esau?"

And Jacob said, "Yes, I am."

Then Isaac said, "Bring the food to me and I will eat it and then bless you."

So Jacob took the goat meat and bread to his father Isaac, and Isaac ate it. Then Isaac

said, "Come near me now and kiss me, my son."

So Jacob did. And when he kissed him, Isaac smelled the clothes Jacob was wearing, which were Esau's clothes, remember. And then since he thought it was Esau, Isaac blessed Jacob. Isaac asked the Lord to bless Jacob and to give him plenty of food growing. He asked the Lord to make Jacob to be the leader of his relatives. And Isaac asked the Lord to bless those who blessed him and to curse those who cursed him.

Now, Jacob was lying, wasn't he? He was saying he was Esau and was getting the blessing that Isaac had meant to give to the older twin, Esau. Jacob was lying and tricking his father Isaac. And his mother Rebekah had told him to lie and had helped him trick Isaac. That was very wrong of both of them to do, wasn't it? We mustn't lie. And tricking people like that is lying, too, isn't it? As I said earlier, the Lord had said before the twins were even born that the younger son would be the leader, hadn't He? But Rebekah and Jacob didn't have to lie to have that prophecy come true. The Lord could have worked it out without their lying and tricking, couldn't He? But let's go on.

As we just said, Isaac blessed Jacob, and then Jacob left his father. Well, Jacob had hardly left when Esau came back from hunting. And Esau had fixed some nice meat for his father Isaac, and Esau took it in to Isaac and said, "Please, father, get up and eat my meat that I got while hunting. Then you can bless me."

Remember, Isaac was blind now, he couldn't see. And Isaac said, "Who are you?!"

Esau said, "I am your firstborn son, Esau."

Well, that scared Isaac! Then Isaac started shaking and said, "Who?! Who just now brought me meat and I ate it and blessed him before you came??! Yes, and that one will have that blessing!"

When Esau heard this, he realized what had happened, and he cried out, "Oh my father, bless me, too!"

And Isaac said to Esau, "Your brother came and tricked me and took away your blessing."

And Esau said, "Oh, he has a right to have been named Jacob which means supplanter! He has taken my things twice now, first my birthright and now my blessing!"

And Esau said to his father Isaac, "Don't you have any blessing left for me?"

And Isaac said to Esau, "Look, I've made Jacob to be the leader over all his relatives, and I've blessed him with lots of food. What can I do for you now, my son?"

And Esau said to his father, "Do you only have one blessing, my father?? Bless me, too." And Esau started to cry. (Men in that country cried easily, so Esau wasn't just being a baby.)

So Isaac said to Esau, "Yes, you will plenty of food, but your brother will be the leader."

Well, that made Esau hate his twin brother Jacob. And later Esau said to himself, "My father will probably die soon. Then I will kill my brother Jacob!"

Well, some way their mother Rebekah heard what Esau was saying, and she called Jacob to come to her and said to Jacob, "Look here. Your brother Esau has decided he'll kill you. Now you do what I say. You're going to have to run away. Go way up to where my own brother Laban lives. You stay with him for a little while until your brother isn't mad at you anymore and he forgets what you did to him. Then I will send for you to come back here."

So Rebekah went to her husband Isaac and said, "I don't want Jacob to marry one of the women from here in the land of Canaan where we live, like Esau did. We've seen that they're not good wives." (And the people of Canaan didn't worship the Lord; they worshipped idols and false gods.)

So Isaac sent for Jacob and blessed him and said to him, "You are not to marry one of the women from the land of Canaan here. Get up, now, and go way up to where our relatives live in Syria. Your mother's brother Laban lives there. Marry one of your uncle Laban's daughters. And may God Almighty bless you and give you lots of descendants. And may He give to you and to your descendants the blessing that He gave to Abraham, the blessing where God said He'd give this land to Abraham."

So Isaac sent Jacob away, and Jacob started off on his long journey. After a while he got to a place and was going to spend the night there. He wanted something to use as a pillow while he slept, so he used one of the stones there as a sort of pillow and went to sleep.

Then Jacob had a dream. In this dream he saw a ramp or sort of ladder set up on the earth. This ladder reached up to heaven, and he saw the angels of God going up and down it. And the Lord stood above it and spoke to Jacob.

The Lord said, "I am the Lord God of your grandfather Abraham and your father Isaac. I'm going to give the land you're lying on to you and to your descendants. And you'll have so many descendants it will be like trying to count the dust of the earth! And all the nations of the whole world be blessed in your descendant."

And the Lord said to Jacob, "Now, look here, I will be with you and take care of you everywhere you go, and I will bring you back here again. I will not leave you until I have done what I've said."

Well, Jacob woke up and he said, "The Lord is here, and I didn't know it!"

And he was afraid and said, "This is scary! This must be the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven!"

And Jacob got up early in the morning, and he took the stone that he'd been using for his pillow, and he set it up like a pillar and poured oil on it. (I think that means that he sort of made it like an altar to the Lord.)

And Jacob made a promise. He said, "If God will be with me and take care of me as I travel and let me come back to my father's house in peace, then He shall be my God. And this will be God's house here where I've put up this stone pillar."

And Jacob named the place where he had slept "Bethel", which in Hebrew, his language, means "House of God."

Then Jacob kept on with his long journey to go way up to where his mother's relatives lived. It may have taken him a month to get there. When he finally got there it was at noon time, and he came to a well out in the field, and he saw lots of flocks of sheep lying down there by the well. And there was a big rock covering the opening to the well.

Jacob asked the people with the flocks, "Where are you from?"

They told him, and it was from the place where his relatives lived. So Jacob asked them, "Do you know Laban?" Remember, Laban was his uncle, his mother Rebekah's brother.

They said, "Yes."

Jacob said, "Is he well?"

They said, "Yes, he is well, and look, here comes his daughter Rachel with his sheep."

Well, Jacob knew about sheep; he used to take care of them at home. And he knew they shouldn't just be lying down by a well in the middle of the day; they should be out in the pastures eating. So he said, "Look, it's the middle of the day. The animals shouldn't just be gathered here together. Water the sheep and take them out to eat."

But they said, "We can't do that until all of the flocks are gathered together, and then they will roll away the big stone that is covering the well, and then we can water our sheep."

While they were talking, here came Rachel with her father Laban's sheep. Evidently it was her chore to take care of them. Well, Jacob just got up and rolled the big stone away from the opening to the well by himself! Then he watered all of his uncle Laban's sheep himself! I wonder what Rachel thought of that!! Now remember, Jacob was her cousin, but she didn't

know who he was!

Well, after that Jacob went over and kissed Rachel and told her who he was, that he was Rebekah's son. And Rachel turned around and ran home and told her father Laban. Well, when Laban heard that his nephew, his sister Rebekah's son was there, he ran out to meet Jacob. He hugged him and kissed him and then took Jacob back home with him. And then Jacob told him all about everything.

And Laban said, "You are my nephew, my close relative!"

And Jacob stayed there with his uncle Laban and his family for a month. And he helped his uncle.

After that Laban said to Jacob, "Look, you are my relative. You shouldn't work for me for nothing. What do you want me to pay you?"

Well, Laban had two daughters. The older one was Leah, and the younger one was Rachel, who had taken care of the sheep. And Rachel was very beautiful, and Jacob loved her.

So Jacob said, "I'll work for you for 7 years if you'll let me marry Rachel, your younger daughter."

Laban liked that idea, so he agreed. And Jacob worked 7 years to get to marry Rachel. And that 7 years just seemed like a few days to him, because he loved Rachel so much.

Well, at the end of the 7 years Jacob said, "All right. I've worked for you for 7 years, so let me marry Rachel now."

So Laban got all the men together and put on a big feast. In those days just the men went to the parties. (We're not told, but I would imagine the women had a feast for themselves, too.) At any rate, it got to be night time and it was dark. They didn't have electric lights then. And after the feast Laban brought one of his daughters out, and Jacob married her. But guess what??!! Laban tricked Jacob!! Yes, instead of bringing Rachel for Jacob to marry, he brought his older daughter Leah for Jacob to marry! But since it was dark, Jacob didn't realize that!

The next day when it was light, Jacob looked, and he saw Leah! So he went to his uncle Laban and said, "What did you do to me??!! I worked 7 years for Rachel! Why did you trick me?!"

Laban said, "Oh, in our country the younger sister doesn't get married before the older sister gets married. But I'll tell you what. You have a week's honeymoon with Leah, and then you can marry Rachel, too, and then you can work another 7 years for me." (In those days many men had more than one wife, though that isn't the way God had made it in the beginning or the way He likes it.)

So, since Jacob loved Rachel so much and really wanted to marry her, that's what he did. After a week's honeymoon with Leah, he married Rachel, too. But he didn't like Leah, his first wife, very much. That is a bad and sad situation, isn't it?

And when both Leah and Rachel married Jacob, Laban gave each of them a handmaid, a servant girl who would be with them and help them.

Anyway, the Lord saw that Jacob didn't love Leah, so the Lord let Leah start having children, but Rachel didn't have any children. Children are very important, aren't they?

Leah had 4 sons right away. Two of Leah's sons were named Levi and Judah. Well, Rachel wanted to have children, too, so she told Jacob, "Look, I have a handmaid. I want you to marry her and when she has children, it will be like they are mine."

So Jacob married Rachel's handmaid, and the handmaid had 2 sons. Well, Leah had stopped having children, so she told Jacob, "I want you to marry my handmaid, too. Then I can have children by her." So Jacob married Leah's handmaid, and Leah's handmaid had 2 more sons for Jacob. So now Jacob, who had only wanted one wife, had 4 wives!

After a while Leah had 2 more sons and one daughter herself, and finally Rachel had one son herself. Rachel named her son Joseph. So now Jacob had 11 sons and 1 daughter! Wow!

Well, after this Jacob went to his uncle Laban and said, "I've worked for you as I said I would. Now I want to go home to my father. Let me take my wives and children and leave."

But Laban said to Jacob, "Oh, please, stay here a while longer, because I've found that the Lord has blessed me because of you. Just say what you want me to pay you."

Then Jacob said, "You know I've worked hard for you, and now you have lots of herds because the Lord has blessed you because of me." (Remember how the Lord had earlier told Jacob that He would take good care of him?)

Jacob said, "But I don't have any herds of my own. So I will work for you if you will let me have any of your sheep or goats that are striped or spotted or all brown. You will have all the others."

I'm not sure, but I think maybe sheep and goats usually are all one color, that not so many would have stripes or spots, so that would mean that Laban would have more herds than Jacob. But at any rate, the Lord made it so that more and more striped and spotted sheep and goats were born, so that Jacob began getting more and more herds. And Jacob began getting many servants and camels and donkeys, too. He was getting rich. And this made Laban and his sons jealous! So Jacob thought it was time to get out of there! Jacob had been with Laban for 20 years.

Well, Jacob was afraid that Laban wouldn't let him leave with his wives and children and herds. But the Lord spoke to Jacob. The Lord said to him, "Go back to your own country and your father, and I will be with you."

So Jacob called his wives Rachel and Leah to him, and they went out into the field where no one could hear them, and he talked to them and said, "Your father doesn't like me as much as he used to, but God has been with me. God has made me rich, and God has told me to go back to my own home."

Rachel and Leah said to their husband Jacob, "You do whatever God told you to do."

Now, Laban had gone off with his sheep quite a ways away, so he wasn't there. So Jacob got up and put his wives and children on camels to ride, and he got all of his herds together, and he started off with them to go back to where his father lived in the land of Canaan. And Laban didn't know it.

But someone went up to where Laban was and told him that Jacob had left. And Laban got his relatives together and chased after Jacob. It took him a week to catch up with him. The Bible doesn't tell us what Laban was planning on doing to Jacob, but the Bible does tell us that the night before Laban caught up with Jacob that God spoke to Laban in a dream. God said to Laban, "You be careful what you say to Jacob! Don't you say anything bad to him!"

Well, then Laban caught up with Jacob, and he was very careful what he said to Jacob. He just said, "Why did you sneak away like that? I could have given you a goodbye party! I didn't even get to kiss my daughters and grandchildren goodbye!"

And Jacob and Laban talked together and made an agreement not to hurt each other. Jacob offered a sacrifice there, and they all ate a meal together. Then the next morning Laban got up and kissed his daughters and grandchildren and then went back home. So the Lord had protected Jacob and his family from any harm that Laban might have been thinking of doing to them.

Well, Jacob continued on down south toward his home, and he got to thinking of his older twin brother Esau. Was Esau still mad at him for having tricked him out of the blessing?

Esau didn't live with their father Isaac anymore. He lived quite a ways away from him. So Jacob sent some men down with a very polite message to where Esau lived. Jacob said to the messengers, "You're to tell my lord Esau that his servant Jacob wants him to know that he had been up with their uncle Laban all these years."

Jacob was being very polite to Esau. He calls him "my lord Esau", but he wasn't saying that Esau was God. He was sort of saying, "Sir Esau". And he's calling himself Esau's servant to show that he is being very humble.

Jacob said to the messengers, "And tell my lord Esau that I have many oxen and donkeys and goats and sheep and servants, and that I'm sending to tell you this so that you may be kind and merciful to me."

Well, the messengers went and told Esau, and then the messengers came back to Jacob and said, "We told your brother Esau what you said, and he's coming to meet you with 400 men with him."

Well, this scared Jacob! Was Esau coming with an army to kill him and his family?! Jacob didn't know. So Jacob did the best thing he could do -- he prayed! He said, "Oh God of my grandfather Abraham and God of my father Isaac. You are the Lord who told me to come back to my country and relatives and that you would take care of me."

Jacob said to God, "I am not worthy for you to be so good to me. You have made me rich. Now, please, save me from my brother, for I'm afraid of him that he might come and kill me and my wives and my children. You told me before that you would be good to me and give me so many descendants that they couldn't be counted."

So Jacob stayed there and got together some presents to send to his brother Esau. He got together herds of goats and of sheep and of camels and of cows and of donkeys. And he gave these herds to some of his servants and told them to go off with them, each group of animals by itself with some servants.

And Jacob said to each group, "When my brother Esau meets you and asks whose these herds belong to, you tell him that they are a present to my lord Esau from his servant Jacob. And then say that Jacob is coming behind you."

Jacob was thinking, "Maybe the presents will make Esau not mad at me." And he sent the various groups of herds and servants off toward where Esau was coming from.

Then Jacob sent all of his family and the rest of his herds across the river, and he stayed by himself. And that night as Jacob was alone, a man came and wrestled with him. Now, from things in the Bible we can figure that Jacob was about 100 years old at this time, but Jacob wrestled with the man all night long! (Remember, people lived longer back then.) Finally when the man saw he wasn't winning, he touched Jacob's thigh and put it out of joint. Then the man said, "Let me go; it's getting to be daylight."

Jacob said, "I won't let you go unless you bless me."

The man said, "What is your name?"

Jacob said, "Jacob."

The man said, "Your name won't be called Jacob anymore. You will be called Israel, for you struggled with God and with man and have won."

And Jacob said to the man, "Please tell me your name."

And the man said, "Why do you ask my name?" And then the man blessed Jacob.

And Jacob realized that the man was really God! God had wrestled all night with Jacob and had let Jacob win! And Jacob said, "Oh, I have seen God face to face, and I wasn't killed!"

Then Jacob, whose thigh was out of joint, went limping over the river.

Well, Jacob looked up and what did he see?! Here came Esau and he had his 400 men with him! So Jacob divided his children up with their mothers, having his beloved Rachel and her son Joseph in the very back. Then Jacob went in front of his wives and children to meet his brother Esau. Jacob was very, very polite. As he went to meet Esau, he bowed down to the ground 7 times until he got near to Esau. (That must have hurt with his thigh out of joint, but wanted to be very polite to Esau!)

And what do you think Esau did? Why Esau ran to meet Jacob and hugged him and kissed him and began crying! Aren't you glad?! Then Esau looked up and saw Jacob's wives and children and he said, "Who are these with you?"

Jacob said, "These are the children which God has kindly give to me, your servant."

And then the women and their children came near to meet Esau, and they also all bowed.

Then Esau asked Jacob, "What do you mean by all the herds I met?"

Jacob said, "Oh, those are for you so I will find favor in your sight."

And Esau said, "I have enough of my own, my brother. You keep them yourself."

But Jacob said, "No, please. If I have found favor in your sight, please take them as a present from me. I have seen your face, and you are glad to see me. Please take my presents to you, because God has been very kind to me, and I have enough."

So finally Esau took the presents of herds that Jacob had sent to him.

Esau said, "Let's travel on together."

But Jacob said, "No, my lord. My children are young, and the herds with their babies can't travel fast. So you just go on ahead."

So finally Esau left and went back home to where he lived, and Jacob crossed over the Jordan River and headed over toward where their father Isaac lived. He stopped for a while at a couple of places, but after a while God told Jacob, "Get up and go live at Bethel and build an altar to God there, to God Whom you had seen in your vision when you were running away from your brother Esau." (You remember about that, don't you? The ramp or ladder up to heaven? Remember, God had told Jacob that He would bring Jacob back home again.)

So Jacob packed up everything and went to Bethel and built an altar to God there.

And God appeared to Jacob again. God blessed him and said, "Your name is Israel now. I am God Almighty. You will have many descendants. And this land which I promised to Abraham and Isaac, I also promise to you and your descendants."

Well, they left Bethel and began going off toward where his father Isaac lived. But a very sad thing happened on the way. Jacob's beloved wife Rachel died. But she had a baby boy just before she died, and Jacob named the baby Benjamin. So Rachel had 2 children, Joseph and Benjamin. Jacob was very sad when Rachel died, and he buried her right near Bethlehem. (This is the same Bethlehem where many years later king David would be born. And then many more years later Jesus would be born in that same Bethlehem.)

Finally, though, Jacob got to where his father Isaac lived, and it seems that Jacob stayed near Isaac then.

Well, Jacob now had all of his children, 12 sons and one daughter. But his favorite child was Joseph, the older son of Rachel. He even gave Joseph a special coat of many colors. And Joseph's brothers were jealous of him. But Joseph was a prophet and God gave him special dreams that later came true.

But we're not going to talk a lot about Joseph today, though the Bible tells us quite a bit about Joseph. But you can hear more about Joseph in the story I told you about Genesis, the Book of Beginnings and also when I tell you two more stories that are mainly about Joseph. However, today we're mostly talking about Jacob.

Well, after a while Joseph's brothers sold Joseph as a slave into Egypt, and Jacob thought Joseph was dead and was very sad. From the ages given in the Bible we know that it was after Joseph had been sold into Egypt that Jacob and Esau's father Isaac finally died. And then Jacob and Esau got together and buried their father Isaac in the cave of Machpelah where their grandparents Abraham and Sarah were buried.

Well, down in Egypt the Lord was with Joseph, and after a while Joseph was made to be a very important man in Egypt by Pharaoh the king. Joseph was also a prophet of God, as I just said, and Joseph prophesied about a great famine that was coming. This famine came, and Jacob sent Joseph's brothers to Egypt to buy grain to eat. Eventually Joseph told his brothers who he was, and they were very surprised! Joseph told his brothers that he forgave them for selling him

as a slave, that God had used that to make Joseph important in Egypt so that he could take care of them during the famine. Then Joseph told his brothers to go back to their father Jacob and tell him that he was alive and to bring their father and their wives and children down into Egypt to live because there were going to be more years of famine. You see, Egypt had food, and Joseph could take care of them.

So Joseph gave his brothers wagons for their father Jacob and their wives and children to ride in, and the brothers left Egypt and headed back to the land of Canaan to their father Jacob. And when they got there, they said to Jacob, "Joseph is still alive, and he's the ruler of all the land of Egypt." And when Jacob heard this, he nearly fainted! And he didn't believe them!

But they told him everything that Joseph had told them to say. And when Jacob saw the wagons which Joseph had sent, he finally believed them, and he began to feel not so faint.

Then Jacob was so happy and he said, "That's enough! My son Joseph is really alive! I will go and see him before I die."

So Jacob got all of his family and his herds together and started out on his journey to move down into Egypt. But he stopped and offered sacrifices to the Lord. And the Lord spoke to Israel, to Jacob. (You remember that Israel was the other name that God gave him, don't you?) God said to him, "Don't be afraid to go to Egypt. I will make your descendants into a great nation there, and I will bring you back again. And Joseph will be with you when you finally die."

So Jacob, that is, Israel, went down into Egypt with all of his family and his herds. He had about 70 descendants that went with him to Egypt beside his sons' wives. There were his sons, his grandsons, even a few great-grandsons, and his daughter.

And Jacob was so happy when Joseph came to meet him there in Egypt! And Joseph had them live where there were very good pastures for their herds, and Joseph took care of them all. And Jacob lived in Egypt for 17 years, for the rest of his life.

And when Jacob got to be very old and knew he was going to die soon, he called Joseph to him and said to him, "Please promise me that when I die that you won't bury me in Egypt. Promise me you will carry my body back to the land of Canaan and bury me in the cave of Machpelah where my grandfather Abraham and father Isaac are buried." And Joseph promised him that.

Well, one day someone told Joseph that his father Jacob was sick, so Joseph took his own two sons, Ephraim and Manasseh, with him and went to see his father Jacob. Jacob sat up on his bed and said to Joseph, "God Almighty came to me in the land of Canaan and blessed me and said He would give me many descendants and promised me that they would have that land forever."

And Jacob said, "Now, I'm going to adopt your two sons, my grandsons Ephraim and Manasseh, as my own sons."

Jacob said to Joseph, "I had thought you were dead, but now not only have I seen you again, but I've seen your sons!" And Jacob hugged and kissed Ephraim and Manasseh and he blessed them. But Jacob did a strange thing while blessing them. Jacob blessed Ephraim, the younger son of Joseph, first and then he blessed Manasseh, the older son, second. Joseph started to object, but Jacob just said, "I know what I'm doing. The younger brother will be greater than the older brother. The younger brother will have many, many descendants." Then Jacob blessed Joseph who had been such a good, faithful son to him.

Now, all of the Jews, the children of Israel (Jacob's other name, remember) are descended from Jacob. And the Bible talks about the 12 tribes of Israel. Well, two of those tribes are the tribes of Ephraim and Manasseh, descended from Joseph's two sons. And Ephraim's tribe became larger and more important than Manasseh's tribe, just as Jacob has prophesied.

Well, Jacob was a prophet of God. And so, since he knew he was dying, he called all of his sons together and blessed each of them. But he gave especially big blessings to Judah and to Joseph. He sort of made Judah the head of the family and said that some of Judah's descendants would be kings. We know from later in the Bible that King David and Solomon and many other kings were descended from Judah. Also, Mary, the mother of Jesus was descended from Judah. So Jesus was descended from Judah! Did you know that?!

Anyway, Jacob then reminded his sons saying, "Be sure to take my body back to the land of Canaan and bury me in the cave of Machpelah where my grandfather Abraham and his wife Sarah and my father Isaac and his wife Rebekah are buried and where I buried my wife Leah."

Then Jacob died; he was 147 years old. And there was a very big funeral for Jacob. Even the Egyptians mourned for Jacob, the father of the very important Joseph. And Joseph remembered his promise to his father Jacob, and Joseph and his brothers took Jacob's body back to the land of Canaan and buried it in the cave of Machpelah where Abraham and Sarah, Isaac and Rebekah, and Jacob's first wife Leah were already buried.

So that is the story of Jacob whose other name is Israel. Jacob is very important in the history of the Jews. As I said earlier, all of the Jews, the children of Israel, are descended from Jacob. Jacob was just a man, though, and he did some things he shouldn't have done, especially when he was younger. But as he got older, he trusted God and worshipped Him. And God calls Himself the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

But Who is the most important descendant of Jacob? Yes, Jesus is the very most important descendant of Jacob, isn't He? Jesus' mother was Mary who was a great-great-great-great-granddaughter of Jacob. But, remember, Jesus is also God. And why is Jesus so important? That's right. Jesus, Who had no sins of His own, died on the cross for our sins so that we could someday be with God forever. And 3 days after He died on the cross, He

was resurrected, made alive again, wasn't He? Lots of people saw Him and talked to Him. And then He went back up to heaven and is still alive there now. And if we believe on the Lord Jesus, trust Him to save us, He has promised that He will. And God always keeps His promises, doesn't He?