

Vayetze Genesis - Bereshit (28.10-32.3)

Isaac has been fooled into giving his youngest son Jacob the blessing of the firstborn, rather than his eldest Esau. Vengeful, Esau plots to kill Jacob for stealing his birthright. Mother Rebecca, who told Jacob to fool his father, helps him flee by convincing Isaac to send him away to her brother Laban to ensure he won't marry a Canaanite."

So Jacob went out toward his Uncle Laban's and stopped to sleep, placing some stones around his head. He fell into a dream of a ladder on the ground with its top reaching up towards heaven. He saw the angels of God ascending and descending, up and down.

Then God was beside him. God said to Jacob, "I am God, the God of your father Abraham and the God of Isaac. I will give the land upon which you sleep to you and your descendants. Your nation will grow and spread and through your nation, all the people on earth will be blessed. I am with you. I will protect you wherever you go and bring you back to this soil."

Suddenly Jacob woke up and said, "Truly God is in this place and I did not know it." Then he was frightened and said, "How awe-inspiring is this place. This is the house of God. This is the gate of heaven."

He named the place Beth-El, God's Temple, and took the stones that were around his head and made a pillar. He poured oil on it, vowing "God I promise that if you give me bread to eat and clothes to wear and help me return, in peace, to my father's land -- then God, You shall be God to me and this stone shall be a house of God and whatever God gives me I shall give back, I shall tithe to God."

Jacob continued his journey until he reached a well near his uncle's where the shepherdess' were waiting for someone to uncover it so they could water their sheep. Jacob asks some shepherds about his uncle's family. One says, "Look, in the distance, there is Laban's daughter Rachel coming now with her father's flocks."

Jacob looked at her and her sheep then went to the well and uncovered it. Then when she arrived, he watered her flock. Afterwards, Jacob kissed Rachel and wept when he told her they were kinsmen.

Rachel's father Laban welcomed Jacob as family and Jacob helped with the sheep. After a month, Laban said to him, "Even though you are family, what shall I pay you for your work?" Now Jacob knew Laban had two daughters, Leah, the elder with tender eyes and Rachel the younger who was beautiful.

Jacob loved Rachel and asked Laban if he could marry her as payment for his work. Laban agrees but then - at the wedding - he switches brides so Jacob marries Leah. Aghast, Jacob said to Laban, "Why have you deceived me?"

Laban said, "It is custom to marry the eldest first. Complete the week with Leah and then you may work 7 more years for Rachel." And Jacob agreed so that Rachel could become his wife.

Jacob loved Rachel much more than Leah. When God saw that Leah was the hated one God gave her four sons, Reuben, Shimeon, Levi and Judah.

Rachel, who had no children, was jealous of her sister and had her handmaid Bilhah lay with Jacob. They had two sons, Dan and Naphtali. Then Leah's servant Zilpah had two sons with Jacob, named Gad and Asher. Leah then birthed two sons with Jacob named Yissakhar and Zebulun and a daughter, Dinah.

Then God remembered Rachel and she bore Jacob a son, named Joseph.

After Joseph's birth, Jacob told Laban, "I want to go home." Laban says, "I believe God has blessed me for your sake, what shall I give you as pay?" They make a deal dividing the herds. That night, Jacob dreams of God telling him to go back to the land of his fathers.

The next day, he called his wives and told them to prepare to leave, quickly and secretly. Rachel gathered her things and stole her father's idol gods.

After the shock of finding everyone gone and his idols missing, Laban went and caught up with them and said to Jacob, "You stole my heart and cheated me of saying goodbye to my daughters and your families. And you took my idols too."

Jacob said, "I was afraid you would deceive me with my pay like you did at my wedding, but I did not take your idols. Whoever has your gods shall not remain alive."

But Jacob did not know Rachel had the idols and the idols were not found. Still Laban and Jacob made peace and feasted before they parted.

Questions: 1) After lying to his father, Jacob is lied to by his uncle. Do you think you "get what you give" in life? 2) When has someone stole your heart either in a bad way or a good way? 3) When and how have you made peace with someone?

Illustration Ideas: Jacob leaving home... Jacob dreaming of the ladder with God's angels going up and down... Jacob meeting Rachel, the wedding... Jacob working... Leah and her babies... Rachel having a baby ... Jacob and his family going home