

Jacob and Rachel

I am Jacob, son of Isaac, son of Abraham. The LORD has been gracious to me in many ways, including uniting me with Rachel. We will communicate with you together and I will let Rachel speak first.

Rachel: I first met Jacob when he appeared at the well where I was watering my father's sheep. All I knew at the time is that I was a niece of his mother, Rebekah. His father, Isaac, had ordered him to find a wife among his mother's family in Haran.

I did not find out until later that he was on the run from his twin brother, Esau, whom he had cheated out of the birthright. I should have suspected since my own father, Laban, was what you might call "a shrewd businessman."

Jacob knew right away that he wanted to marry me and gladly worked seven years for my father in exchange for my hand. More about that later.

Jacob: I have to say in my defense regarding my relationship with my brother Esau, I took what he did not want. Let me explain. Esau was not a complex man or a deep thinker. I believe you might say, "He doesn't read the fine print." One time when he came in from hunting, famished, he asked for food. I said, "First sell me your birthright." He responded, "Look, I am about to die, what good is the birthright to me?"

Then, to "seal the deal," I finagled to get my father's blessing. My mother put me up to it, actually. Dad was nearly blind, and Rebekah overheard his request to Esau to hunt some wild game and cook it. I hurriedly cooked 2 goats and quickly brought the meal to Dad. To disguise my lack of body hair, I put goatskins on my arms and neck. Isaac, even though he was a little suspicious, blessed me and my progeny, ending with, "May those who curse you be cursed and those who bless you be blessed."

Then Esau came in with the requested wild game and found out that the blessing had been given to me. I have been told that you, living in your day, will not understand that this was something that could not be undone. I believe in your culture there are law firms that specialize in obtaining financial gain for the victims of fraud – not to mention for themselves. But in my day, there was only a second-class blessing for Esau.

Mother and Father warned me to get out of town. Then the LORD appeared to me at Bethel. I saw a stairway from earth to heaven, with angels ascending and descending. Above it stood the LORD, who said, "I am the LORD, the God of your father Abraham and the God of Isaac. I will give you and your descendants the land on which you are lying. Your descendants will be like the dust of the earth, and you will spread out to the west and to the east, to the north and to the south. All peoples on earth will be blessed through you and your offspring." It was the same promise given to my father and grandfather. The LORD did not revoke it because of my shameful behavior.

Rachel: After Jacob worked seven years, a wedding took place. The bride was veiled and Jacob did not recognize until the next morning that he had married Leah, not me. I believe you have a saying, "What goes around comes around?" My Dad explained to the angry groom that it was a custom to marry off the oldest daughter first. (To put it kindly, Leah was "plain" and this was probably her only chance.) Jacob, probably experiencing flashbacks to his own deviousness as well as gratitude that I only had one sister, worked another seven years for me. But we were actually united right after Leah's honeymoon week.

Then the children started coming. We were what I believe you would call a blended family and it started getting really complicated! It did not take very long before Leah had 4 sons and I had none. Then I gave Jacob my maidservant, Bilhah and she had a son which I counted as my own. Then she had another. Next, Leah offered her maidservant, Zilpah, to Jacob and she had two sons. After a little "business deal" over some mandrakes, Jacob started spending time with Leah again and she had two more sons and a daughter. I had not actually carried a child until Joseph arrived. Of course, I wanted more but that did not happen right away.

Jacob: After obtaining my beloved Rachel and a child by her, I asked Laban to let me go home to my father. Laban replied, "If I have found favor in your eyes, please stay. I have learned by divination that the LORD has blessed me because of you. Name your wages, and I will pay them." He tried to give me livestock, but I was afraid he would claim to have made me rich. I asked for every animal that was dark colored or spotted or speckled and he agreed. That way it would be obvious to which herd or flock the animals belonged. The LORD arranged for my herd to increase and the strongest animals to be mine. There was a little game of putting speckled branches in front of the animals when they mated. That may have convinced the superstitious, but the results were clearly the doing of the LORD.

When the sons of Laban began accusing me of stealing their inheritance, the LORD told me, "Go back to the land of your fathers and to your relatives, and I will be with you." So I sent word to Rachel and Leah to gather up their things and come out to the fields because we were leaving. I reminded them of their father's unfairness.

Rachel: When Leah and I got that word from Jacob, we agreed to leave but also noted that our father, Laban, had wasted the increase he received by association with Jacob and essentially used up the inheritance that should have come to us. That might be why when I gathered up my things, I took my father's household gods. It was three days later that Laban discovered the ruse because he had been out shearing. Seven days later he caught up with us in Gilead. He had been warned in a dream to be careful not to say anything to Jacob, good or bad. He said things, but probably less than he would have. He pled for a chance to say goodbye with appropriate celebration but ended with an accusation, "Why did you steal my gods?"

Jacob did not know what I had done and promised that if anyone had taken the gods, they would not live. Laban made a thorough search, and was only foiled by a bit of subterfuge. I made it potentially embarrassing for him to complete the search. I put the gods inside my camel's saddle, sat on it and told him I could not move because of my monthly period. I guess deception really does run in all branches of the family. I even deceived Jacob.

After a heated exchange between Jacob and Laban, they agreed to make a heap of stones as a witness. Laban made a statement. I understand that the first part of it is used as a benediction in your day. "May the LORD keep watch between you and me when we are away from each other." It sounds like two people who will miss each other. But look at what was said next: "If you mistreat my daughters or if you take any wives besides my daughters, even though no one is with us, remember that God is a witness between you and me." Our dad was warning Jacob that he was being watched. They promised each other not to pass the heap of stones and Jacob took an oath in the name of his father, Isaac. I'm glad I was not asked to swear to anything. Next, I learned about the conflict with Esau.

Jacob: I had not wronged Laban, at least not that I knew of, yet was threatened by him. Esau had a legitimate grudge against me. But angels visited me on the way home, after which I sent messengers to Esau. But I also divided the group into two camps in case we were attacked. I then made a

genuinely humble and repentant prayer to the LORD. "I am unworthy of all the kindness and faithfulness you have shown your servant. I had only my staff when I crossed this Jordan, but now I have become two groups. Save me, I pray, from the hand of my brother Esau, for I am afraid he will come and attack me, and also the mothers with their children."

I selected from my herds and flocks a significant gift for Esau, hundreds of animals. I sent them on ahead with the message that these were gifts for Esau from his brother Jacob. Then after sending the two wives, two maidservants and eleven sons across the Jabbok river, I was left alone. Well, not quite alone because I had a visitor who wrestled me. I get the feeling it was like the wrestling matches I used to have with the children when they were little, pretending to give my best but testing their determination. The hint was that he touched the socket of my hip so that it was wrenched out of place.

Then he said, "Let me go, for it is daybreak." But I replied, "I will not let you go unless you bless me." He asked me, "What is your name?" "Jacob," I answered. Then the man said, "Your name will no longer be Jacob, but Israel, because you have struggled with God and with men and have overcome." The meeting with Esau, appearing on the horizon with 400 men, was sort of anticlimactic after that!

Rachel: Jacob choreographed the meeting with Esau by sending the maidservants and their children, followed by Leah and her children and last of all me and Joseph. Esau met Jacob with open arms. He asked who all the other people were and was told by Jacob, "These are the children God has graciously given your servant." We all were bowing before Esau as he asked about the herds and flocks that had been sent on ahead. Jacob said it was a gift and Esau graciously refused to accept them, until he had to accept to prove his reconciliation. It was a storybook ending to the journey.

Jacob wanted to move back to Bethel to settle down, perhaps not wanting to wear out his welcome with Esau. But I continued to pray for another son. I got my prayer but had difficulty with the labor. As my second son was born, I felt my life ebbing away. I called him Ben-Oni, "son of my trouble." But I have been told that Jacob called him Benjamin, "son of my right hand." My part in the story was over, but in the eternal kingdom I have been told more of the wise plan of the LORD. What a privilege to be part of it.

Jacob: I am not a great man although they call me a patriarch. I am a liar and a cheat, rescued by the LORD. God actually spoke to me, "I am God Almighty; be fruitful and increase in number. A nation and a community of nations will come from you, and kings will come from your body. The land I gave to Abraham and Isaac I also give to you, and I will give this land to your descendants after you." I called the place where God had talked with me, "Bethel."