

The Farmer Boy; the Story of Jacob eBook

The Farmer Boy; the Story of Jacob

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THE STORY OF JACOB

Abraham, the father of the great Israelitish, or Hebrew, nation, was the chief, or sheikh, as he would be called now, of his family or tribe, and with his flocks of sheep, herds of cattle, camels and other animals, servants and followers, moved from place to place, adding to his wealth as time went on and making for himself a respected name wherever he went.

God chose Abraham to be the founder of this mighty nation, and at his death promised a continuation of His favor to his son Isaac, who had married Rebekah, the daughter of Bethuel, who was Abraham's nephew. Isaac was an only son and inherited his father's great wealth.

[Illustration: Abraham, the Founder of a Nation.]

Isaac and Rebekah had twin sons whose names were Esau and Jacob, and perhaps no brothers were ever more unlike in their dispositions. Esau grew up to be a hunter. Nothing pleased him so much as to take his bow and arrows and spend days away from home in the pursuit of deer, from whose flesh he made food which his father liked.

Among other customs of that time which seem strange to us now was that of rich men and their wives and their sons as well preparing food with their own hands, although it is done in the East to some extent in these days.

Abraham was certainly a rich man with a host of servants at command, yet the Bible tells us that Sarah, his wife, prepared with her own hands the food for the strangers who visited the patriarch as he sat in the door of his tent by the Oaks of Mamre. We can understand then that the sons of Isaac, who were even richer than his father, prepared food themselves.

Esau was looked upon as the older son and treated accordingly. There were certain privileges which by custom were given to oldest sons at their fathers' deaths, and these things constituted what was called a birthright. In addition to being treated as the older son Esau was also the favorite son of his father.

But Rebekah loved Jacob more than she did Esau. Jacob was of a much quieter disposition than his brother, living near his mother and probably spending much of his time with her. We may think of him as a man who liked to live in comfort and peace, hospitable to strangers, as was the custom of the country, yet all the time wishing, as he looked out over the flocks and herds, that his was to be an older brother's portion when they were divided.

The word Jacob means "supplanter," or one who takes the place of another, and Jacob acted up to the meaning of his name at the first opportunity. It came about in this way.



Jacob was cooking some food one day which smelt and looked very tempting to Esau when he came in hungry and tired to the point of exhaustion from one of his hunting trips. He asked his brother to give him some of this food, and Jacob, seeing a chance to acquire what he coveted, told him he would do so if he would give him his birthright in exchange for it. Probably Esau's hunger was more to him at the moment than any privileges he might have later in life, so he consented and the bargain was made.

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[Illustration: Jacob was cooking some food one day.]

After this there was a famine in the land where Isaac and his family lived, but Isaac did not go to Egypt to escape it as his father had done on a similar occasion. Instead, he took his family into the land of the Philistines and lived for a time at a place called Gerar.

Isaac grew so prosperous in Gerar that the Philistines envied him. They had filled up the wells which his father had dug years before, so Isaac, besides reopening them, dug others, about which there were many disputes. Then after a while Isaac took his family to Beersheba, and there God renewed to him the promises of future greatness which He had made to Abraham.

Both Isaac and Rebekah disapproved of the marriage Esau made with a woman of a neighboring tribe, but in spite of this Isaac loved him very dearly, and when he felt that he should not live much longer he wished to bestow a blessing or promise upon him. So he called Esau and asked him to go once more and get some of the meat he liked and cook it for him, telling him that when he brought it he would bless him.

Esau set out on his errand, but as soon as he had gone, Rebekah, who had overheard what Isaac had said, called Jacob, whom she loved more than she did Esau, and told him that now he had a chance to get the blessing instead of his brother, and showed him how it could be done.

Jacob was very fond of his mother; he wanted the blessing, but was afraid his father would detect the deception and that it would bring a curse instead of a blessing. But his mother told him she would take all the blame and then Jacob consented to do as she told him.

Rebekah first sent Jacob to get some meat, which she cooked in the way Isaac liked, and then she dressed him in some of Esau's clothes. Then she put hairy skins on his hands and neck to make him feel like Esau if Isaac should put his hands on him. Then she gave him the meat she had prepared and sent him on his dishonest errand.

[Illustration: The hands are the hands of Esau.]

So Jacob went where his blind father was sitting and said, "My father." And Isaac replied, "Here am I; who art thou, my son?" Then Jacob told him that he was his son Esau, and that he had brought the food as he had been asked to do. Isaac asked him how the meat could have been found and prepared so quickly, and Jacob replied, "Because the Lord thy God brought it to me."

Still Isaac was not satisfied and had him come nearer that he might feel of him, but the disguise was good and Isaac said, "The voice is Jacob's voice, but the hands are the hands of Esau." But before he ate he made one more appeal. "Art thou," he asked,



“my very son Esau?” and Jacob, forced by the first lie to tell another and then another, replied, “I am.”

Isaac ate the food and then blessed Jacob, whom he supposed to be Esau. He promised a great and prosperous future for him. People and nations should serve him, and his brothers should bow down to him. Scarcely had Jacob left his father, when Esau came back with the food his father had asked him to bring and claimed the blessing.

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When Isaac realized that he had been deceived he told Esau that he could not recall the promises he had made to the one who had brought him the food, and then Esau, who had sold his birthright, and now had been tricked out of the blessing that was rightfully his, cried out bitterly, "Bless me, even me also, O my father."

Then Isaac told him that it was his brother Jacob who had robbed him, and Esau replied, "Is not he rightly named Jacob? for he hath supplanted me these two times: he took away my birthright; and, behold, now he hath taken away my blessing. Hast thou not reserved a blessing for me?" And then in the bitterness of his heart he wept.

Moved by Esau's distress, Isaac did bless him, but the promises he made were different from those he had given Jacob. He told Esau that he should live by the sword, that he should serve his brother, but that the time would come when he would break away from his brother's rule.

Esau hated his brother after this and made threats that he would kill him after their father died. His mother heard of these threats and was afraid he would carry them out, so she proposed that Jacob should go to her brother Laban and stay with him until Esau's anger had cooled. Isaac agreed to this and told him also to choose a wife among Laban's daughters.

Before Jacob's departure Isaac blessed him, once more telling him that he and his descendants should have the land which God had promised to Abraham and his family. So the mother and her favorite son parted. Their deceit had given Jacob the blessing that should have been Esau's, but Rebekah was never to see Jacob again.

Jacob started on his journey to his uncle's house, and when night came lay down to sleep, making a pillow of stones for his head. In his sleep a wonderful dream or vision came to him. He saw a ladder with its foot resting on the earth and its top reaching to heaven. Upon this ladder angels went up and down, while at the top stood God Himself, who promised Jacob that He would be with him wherever he went, and that he and his children should have the land in which he was at that time.

[Illustration: Upon this ladder angels went up and down.]

When Jacob awoke he made a pillar of the stone upon which his head had rested, poured oil upon it, and called the name of the place Bethel. Then he made a vow that if God would go with him and provide for him he would serve Him and give to Him a tenth part of all he possessed.

Although Jacob knew a good deal about God, up to this time he had no personal knowledge of Him, but during, this, his first night from home, he had, in a vision, seen God and heard His voice in the most gracious of promises. His whole life was changed, and from that time he was God's man.

Then Jacob went on his way again and came to a well near Haran, where Laban lived. This well was not like the one where Eliezer, the steward of Abraham, had first seen the maiden who became Jacob's mother. It was more like a cistern or tank with an opening at the top which was covered by a great stone which had to be rolled away to get at the water.

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Three flocks of sheep were lying near by and Jacob asked the shepherds if they knew Laban and why they did not water their flocks. The men told him that they knew Laban and that they were waiting for his sheep to arrive and then all the flocks would be watered.

Just then Rachel, one of the daughters of Laban, appeared with her father's sheep, and the shepherds told Jacob who she was. Then Jacob went to the well, rolled the stone away, and watered Laban's sheep. Then he told Rachel who he was and she hastened away to tell her father.

When Laban heard who had come to visit him he ran to meet Jacob and made him welcome just as he had done years before when his sister Rebekah had told him of her meeting with her uncle's steward outside the city of Nahor.

[Illustration: Meeting of Eliezer and the maiden who became Jacob's mother.]

Jacob staid with Laban for a month, helping him with his flocks and becoming more and more in love with Rachel. Then Laban asked him if he would like to be his shepherd and if so what wages he would wish. Jacob told Laban he would serve him seven years for his daughter Rachel and so the bargain was made. We are told that, "Jacob served seven years for Rachel; and they seemed unto him but a few days, for the love he had to her."

But Laban was as crafty as Jacob had been when he obtained his brother's birthright and robbed him of his blessing. He tricked Jacob and made him work seven more years for Rachel.

After the second seven years had passed and Jacob had married Rachel, he made another bargain with Laban and this time it was greatly to his own advantage. He lived with Laban for a number of years and then God appeared to him, saying, "I am the God of Bethel, where thou anointedst the pillar, and where thou vowedst a vow unto me: now arise, get thee out from this land, and return unto the land of thy kindred."

So, without letting Laban know anything about it, Jacob took his family, his flocks and herds and all his possessions, and started for his father's home in the land of Canaan. He had been gone three days before Laban knew that he had left him. After seven days he overtook Jacob camped on Mount Gilead.

When they met, Laban accused Jacob of carrying away some of his possessions, and searched his tent for them; but after a while, not finding them, they talked over all that had occurred since Jacob first came to Laban's house, and in the end they made a covenant or agreement of friendship and set up a heap of stones for a witness to it and called it "Mizpah," which means, "The Lord watch between me and thee, when we are absent one from another."

[Illustration: Laban searched Jacob's tent.]

So Jacob and his family kept on their way to the land of Canaan. He had now eleven sons and one daughter and was a rich man, for God had kept His promise and blessed him abundantly. On the way he heard that his brother Esau was coming to meet him with a band of four hundred men. Jacob remembered how he had taken advantage of his brother and was afraid the time for Esau's promised revenge had come.

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But Jacob prayed to God to protect him, and after sending his family by night across a little mountain river, he remained alone in the darkness on the other side. The Bible tells us that there he met God in the shape of a man and wrestled with Him until morning, saying, “I will not let thee go, except thou bless me.” And God did bless him and gave him a new name—that of “Israel,” which means “a prince of God.”

[Illustration: Jacob wrestled with him until morning.]

In the morning the brothers met, but Esau's anger was all gone and in its place was such love for Jacob that he embraced him and kissed him, while both wept for joy. Jacob had prepared a present of sheep and cattle and camels and other animals for his brother, which at first Esau did not wish to take, but he accepted it at last and then the brothers separated, Esau going to the hilly country of Seir, while Jacob continued his journey.

[Illustration: Esau's anger was all gone.]

Jacob halted for a while at a place called Succoth, where he built a house for himself and stables for his cattle. Then he went to Shechem and bought some land near the city for “an hundred pieces of silver.” In the time of his grandfather Abraham money was weighed, not counted, but now it was in the shape of rude coins with the figures of lambs stamped upon them.

After a while God told Jacob to go to Bethel, where, on his first night from home, he had vowed to give Him a tenth part of all his possessions, and to build an altar there. His way to Bethel lay through a hostile country, but God protected him as He had promised; and at last Jacob reached the pillar which he had set up, and there he built the altar and worshipped God.

Jacob's mother had died during his long absence from home and now her old nurse, Deborah, died, so in memory of the great love mother and son had for each other he buried Rebekah's faithful servant under an oak-tree and called it “the oak of tears.”

[Illustration: The tomb of Rachel near Bethlehem.]

From Bethel Jacob now set out for Hebron, but on the way, just before they came to Bethlehem—the little village where Jesus was born many years afterwards—his beloved Rachel died, leaving him his twelfth and last son, whom he called Benjamin. Rachel was buried where she died and a pillar was placed above her grave. Then Jacob went on to see his father, who was then living at Abraham's favorite dwelling-place at the “Oaks of Mamre,” and there Isaac died, “being old and full of days: and his sons Esau and Jacob buried him.”

[Illustration: Isaac died, being old and full of days.]

After their father's death Esau and Jacob parted with the best of feeling because they were so rich in flocks and herds and servants that the land could not sustain two such large tribes. Jacob continued to live quietly at Hebron as the head of his family, in touch with everything that went on, but leaving the actual work to be done by others. He had a great number of servants and his ten older sons were in charge of his vast flocks and herds.

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Joseph was his especial favorite among his sons, and Jacob showed his preference in ways that were perhaps not wise. For one thing, he gave him a very handsome coat which distinguished him from his brothers. Then he did not send him to tend the flocks and herd the cattle, but kept him at home with himself and his little brother Benjamin.

Jacob's sons were not slow to notice their father's fondness for Joseph and it made them angry. They were all older than he and had served their father faithfully for many years, while Joseph was only seventeen years old. Another thing made them angry. Joseph used to have dreams and tell them to his brothers in what they thought was a boastful way. Their jealousy and anger grew to hatred and they talked over plans for getting rid of him.

[Illustration: Joseph used to have dreams and tell them to his brothers.]

At this time Jacob's flocks of sheep were at quite a distance from Hebron, cared for by the ten older sons. Wishing to know how they prospered, Jacob sent Joseph to inquire if all was well with them. So Joseph set out on his errand and found his brothers in the pasture-lands of Dothan.

When his brothers saw him coming they decided to get rid of him in some way. Their hearts were full of hatred and they deliberately planned to kill their brother. One thing after another was suggested until at last they decided to leave him in a deep, dry water-cistern to starve to death.

Reuben, the eldest son, intended to get Joseph out of the cistern later and send him home to his father, but he was unable to do this, for in his absence his brothers sold Joseph to some merchants who came along just then.

[Illustration: His brothers sold Joseph to some merchants.]

These merchants took Joseph to Egypt and sold him to Potiphar, one of the officers of the King's household. Potiphar was very kind to Joseph, and as he grew up made him his steward or overseer. Joseph had very winning manners and in time rose to be the governor or ruler over all the land of Egypt and in high favor with King Pharaoh.

[Illustration: Ruler over all the land of Egypt.]

Meanwhile Joseph's brothers had told their father that Joseph had been killed by a wild beast, and in proof they showed Jacob his son's handsome coat, which they had taken from him and dipped in blood for this purpose. Jacob mourned long and bitterly for Joseph, and then he and his sons lived on much as they had been doing until there was a famine in the land and no food was to be had.

Then Jacob sent his ten older sons to Egypt to buy corn, for it was plentiful there. He would not let Benjamin go, however, fearing that some harm might come to him. When



Reuben and his brothers reached Egypt they were taken to Joseph, the governor, who recognized them at once, but pretended to think they were spies. They protested in vain that they had been sent by their father to buy food and that this was their only errand.



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Joseph asked them if they had any other brothers, and they told him there was one more, Benjamin, the youngest. Then Joseph told them to go home and come back again bringing Benjamin with them, and that he would keep Simeon, one of their number, until they did this.

So back they went with their sacks full of corn which Joseph had allowed them to buy, and told their father what the governor had said and done. At first Jacob refused to let them take Benjamin away from him, but when the corn they had brought home was all gone he consented.

Once more the brothers stood before the governor of Egypt and this time Benjamin was with them. After questioning them once more, letting them start on their home-ward journey, and then bringing them back again, Joseph told them who he was and how he had been prospered. He gave them food and money and clothes and sent them back to Hebron. He also told them to bring back their father Jacob and gave them wagons in which to bring his goods.

[Illustration: Joseph told them who he was.]

Pharaoh, the King, also sent an invitation to Jacob, and in time he and his sons and their families went to Egypt and were given the fertile land of Goshen for their home. They were put in charge of all the King's flocks and herds and became very prosperous.

But before agreeing to this change of home Jacob asked God if he should go to Egypt. God told him to go, and on the way his long-lost son Joseph met him and took him to Pharaoh, who received him very kindly.

Jacob and his sons lived peaceably in Egypt for seventeen years, and then Jacob died at the age of a hundred and forty-seven years. But before he died he blessed Joseph's two sons and made him promise to bury him in the family sepulchre, the cave of Machpelah.

As the end approached, Jacob blessed all his twelve sons and foretold what their lives would be, bestowing a peculiar blessing upon his third son, Judah, from whose descendants should be born the Saviour of his people.

Jacob's body was embalmed and carried to the land of Canaan, attended by his twelve sons, and a great company of Pharaoh's household, and buried in the cave of Machpelah as he had directed.

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