

Jacob had been away for twenty years and he did not know how Esau would react when they met but Esau was pleased to see him. Jacob also saw his father Isaac again.

On the way back God met Jacob and told him that he would be called Israel. This is why the Jews are sometimes called the 'children of Israel' or 'Israelites'.

By now Jacob had twelve sons, the youngest two, Joseph and Benjamin were Rachel's children. Jacob was again tricked, this time by some of his sons when they told him that Joseph had been killed by a wild beast when in fact they had sold him as a slave to Egypt. It was about 20 years before Jacob saw Joseph again when he went down to Egypt. He lived 17 years in Egypt and saw his son Joseph rule wisely under Pharaoh.

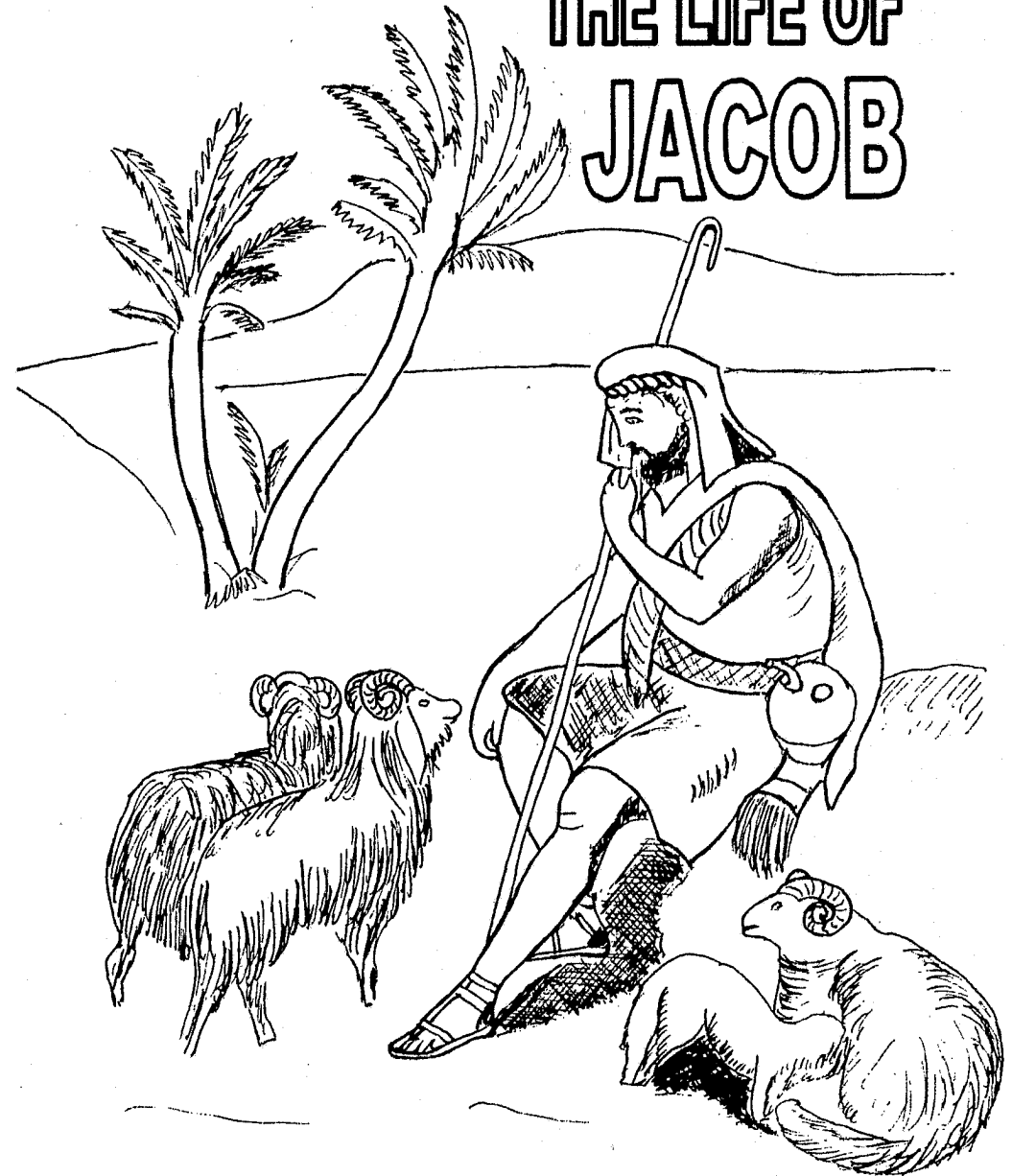
When he died aged 147 he was buried in a cave at Machpelah which his grandfather Abraham had bought many years before and where Abraham and Sarah, Isaac and Rebekah and Jacob's wife Leah were buried.

At the end of his life Jacob blessed his twelve sons as well as Joseph's two sons and spoke of what their future would be.

In the Bible, God is often called the "God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob". Jacob finally learnt that all his scheming only brought sorrow and disappointment but by trusting God he could be happy.

# BIBLE HEROES : 3

## THE LIFE OF JACOB



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Isaac and Rebekah had two sons, Esau and Jacob. They were twins and even before they were born it seems like they were fighting. Rebekah asked God why this should be and was told that two nations would come from the two brothers and that the older would serve the younger. Esau was born first but Jacob was born just after and held onto Esau's heel as he was born. Esau grew up to be a hunter but Jacob loved a quieter life and stayed close to the tents.

As the elder, Esau had certain privileges known as his "Birth Right" but he didn't think they were worth much because one day when he came home from hunting he was so tired and hungry that he agreed to swap his birthright for a bowl of beans that Jacob had been cooking.

Although God had said before they were born that the elder (Esau) would serve the younger (Jacob) Jacob was scheming to get the blessing which his father Isaac would expect to give Esau.

When Isaac thought he was dying, he asked Esau to go and hunt for venison so that he could eat it and bless him. While Esau was out hunting, Jacob, with the help of his mother deceived Isaac by cooking young goat meat to taste like venison and dressing up in Esau's clothes. He went to Isaac pretending to be Esau and when he had eaten he blessed Jacob thinking that he was Esau. When Esau finally came back, Isaac realised what had happened but he couldn't take back the blessing he had given to Jacob. Esau was furious and vowed to kill Jacob.

Rebekah decided it would be safer for Jacob to go away for a while and persuaded Isaac to send him to her brother Laban who lived in Haran. It was a long way to go and although she didn't expect him to be away for long it was more than twenty years before he returned. Probably she died before Jacob came back so

her deceiving her husband for the sake of Jacob her favourite son actually resulted in her losing him altogether.

Jacob started on his journey to Haran. One night he was sleeping on the ground with a stone for a pillow and had a dream. He dreamed of a ladder reaching between earth and heaven with angels going up and down on it. In the dream God told him that the land where he slept would be his and his children's. When Jacob arrived in Haran he enquired of the people he saw if they knew Laban his uncle. They did know him and introduced Jacob to Laban's daughter Rachel.

Jacob stayed with Laban and worked for him. After a while Laban said "Why should you work for nothing, what wages do you want?" Jacob had fallen in love with Rachel and so he offered work for seven years if he could have Rachel for his wife. When the seven years were passed Jacob expected to marry Rachel but Laban gave him her older sister Leah instead. Jacob, who had deceived his father was now deceived himself. He didn't learn a lesson from this as we shall see later. Jacob still wanted Rachel for his wife so he agreed to work for another seven years for Rachel.

After he had worked for Laban for fourteen years for his two wives, Jacob wanted to go home but Laban wanted him to stay and again asked him what he would take for wages. Jacob said he would continue to work for Laban if he could have all the striped and spotted cattle and sheep. Jacob tricked Laban and made sure that the best cattle and sheep produced striped offspring and after a few years Jacob had more and better flocks than Laban. Laban's sons become jealous of Jacob and so after six years Jacob decided to go back to Canaan with his wives, children (he had eleven sons by this time) and all his flocks and servants. He waited until Laban was away shearing his sheep and then Jacob fled without telling Laban.