

A Good Shepherd  
Sacred Story

**Jacob Tricks Laban**

Adapted by:  
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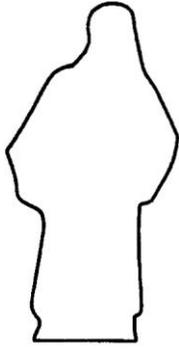
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Jennifer Schoeneberg**

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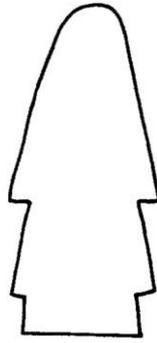
## **JACOB TRICKS LABAN .... MATERIALS**

- medium wicker basket to hold:

- wooden Laban figure
- wooden Jacob figure
- wooden Rachel figure
- wooden Leah figure
- wooden sheep
- 3 wooden goats



Jacob



Rachel

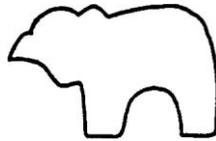


Leah

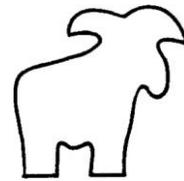
Goats



Laban



Sheep



## JACOB TRICKS LABAN .... GENESIS 30:25-43, 31:1-35

### ACTIONS

After speaking, stand and get the story from it's shelf. Return to the circle and sit down, placing the story next to you.

Gently stroke one or more of the wooden figures as you center yourself and the children in silence.

Place the Jacob figure in the center of the storytelling area.

Place Laban next to Jacob on the left.

Touch Laban as you speak and then gently touch Jacob as Laban speaks of him.

Move Laban slightly closer to Jacob.

Touch Jacob and nod as you say "but now it is time".

Hold out both hands, palms up, and raise your eyebrows.

Touch Jacob and firmly shake your head "no".

Hold up your index finger as you say "wages", to emphasize the rest of the sentence.

### WORDS

Watch carefully where I go to get this story so you will know where to find it if you choose to make this story your work today or another day.

All the words to this story are inside of me. If you will make silence with me I will be able to find all the words to this story of the people of God.

After Jacob had worked for Laban for fourteen years he decided he wanted to take his family and go back to his home.

Jacob told Laban he wanted to leave.

But Laban didn't want Jacob to go. He told Jacob that God had helped him understand that he had been successful because Jacob had been with him.

Laban offered Jacob any amount of money he wanted, to stay.

But Jacob said, "I've worked for you and you've done well, but now it is time for me to provide for my own family."

Laban wanted to know what he could give Jacob to make him stay.

But Jacob did not want to take anything from Laban.

Instead he told Laban that he would take wages, but it would be fair.

Place two goat figures and the one sheep figure a slight distance from Jacob and Laban.

Touch the animals briefly as you speak.

Touch Laban and nod.

Move the Laban figure near the animals and then move Laban, one goat and one sheep a distance away to the right.

Take an imaginary branch and "peel" it. "Place" it in front of the goat standing alone.

Remove the third goat from the story basket and place it next to the goat standing alone.

Starting with hands together in front of you, move them farther and farther apart to indicate growth.

Touch the Laban figure again.

Touch the Jacob figure and nod.

Place the Leah and Rachel figures next to Jacob on the right.

Jacob said he would go through the flocks and take out any of the spotted and speckled goats and all the black lambs. Then when it was time for him to go he would have only spotted and speckled goats and black lambs, for they would give birth to the same kind they were.

He told Laban if there were any plain animals with him, Laban could say he had stolen them.

Laban agreed that this was a very good idea.

But later that day Laban took all the speckled, striped and spotted goats and all the black lambs and sent them away with his sons so Jacob would not have any flocks of his own.

Jacob took branches that he peeled the bark from. He placed those peeled branches by the places where the plain animals drank water.

When the plain animals came to drink they chose mates. Then when they had baby animals they were striped or speckled, like the sticks.

Jacob became richer and richer because his flocks were the largest and the strongest.

Both Laban and his sons did not like Jacob as much as they had before.

Jacob decided to take his family and leave for Jacob's homeland.

Jacob thought about how God had taken care of him and he talked with Rachel and Leah.

Nod as you speak and touch each woman figure.

Move Laban and the one sheep even farther to the right. Move Jacob, Leah, Rachel and the three goats to the left.

Touch Rachel and smile as you speak.

Move each of the figures in Jacob's group a little farther along to the left.

Touch the Jacob figure as you speak.

Carefully place all the figures back in the basket.

After speaking, stand and return the story to its place on the shelf. Return to the circle and sit down.

Both women said they would leave with Jacob.

So when Laban went away to shear the sheep Jacob and his family left Laban's land.

And Rachel took the good luck charms from her father's house when they left.

So Jacob tricked Laban, and did not tell Laban they were leaving.

Jacob and his family left to go back to the land Jacob had known as a child.

### WONDERING QUESTIONS:

I wonder if Laban was angry or sad that Jacob wanted to leave?

I wonder if Jacob had missed his home all those years?

I wonder how the animals were born spotted just because the parent animals looked at spotted sticks?

I wonder if Rachel and Leah were sad they didn't get to say good-bye?

Watch carefully how I put these materials away so you will know how to use them if you choose to make this story your work today or another day.

Watch carefully where I return this story so you will know where to find it if you choose to make this your work today or another day.

Be sure to give all children an opportunity to choose their work before dismissing the circle.

I wonder what you will choose to make your work today? Let's go around the circle and decide what each of us will do.

## **JACOB TRICKS LABAN .... TEACHER HELPS**

This story has some wonderful twists in it. We see Jacob in a new light. Earlier, Jacob came to Laban as a poor exile. He had to take handouts from Laban to get started. He even had to work for Laban for his wives. Now Jacob is the man of wealth and even Laban says that he understands that he has done so well because Jacob has been with him. First Laban offers Jacob wages to stay (Genesis 30:28) and then finally an outright bribe (Genesis 30:31). Jacob refuses the bribe choosing not to be beholden to Laban for anything. Instead he chooses to trust his uncanny good fortune. Both Jacob and Laban know that God is the one who has blessed Jacob, and that perhaps, is what gave Jacob his assurance to keep going. He now has wives, children, and some animals. Yet he's worked for Laban all these years and has helped provide for Laban, but has not provided for his own family. Laban had agreed to a wage for Jacob. When Jacob said he would take only the spotted, speckled, or striped goats and only the black lambs it seemed like a good idea to Laban. But to hedge his bets he took some of the animals away, making it virtually impossible for Jacob, through natural means, to breed the animals he'd selected. Through a strange selective breeding process Jacob manages to trick Laban again.

The temptation with this part of the story is to try to explain it away. There is no explanation. It's a wonderful and amazing story that defies a rational explanation -- and that's how it must be presented. When we touch on it in the wondering questions our only possible response is that God had a hand in what happened. So there is an inversion. Poor Jacob becomes wealthy Jacob. Laban who had loyal daughters loses them as they become loyal to Jacob, choosing to join in with tricking their father by sneaking off when he is gone. In addition Rachel takes with her the household "gods" or good luck symbols. They, unlike Yahweh, have no power and in the end Jacob's people are protected from Laban by a menstruating woman (Genesis 31 :34-35). According to Jewish law a menstruating woman was considered "unclean". Touching an "unclean" person meant a long procedure of ritual cleansing must follow. (Genesis, Walter Brueggemann, Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1982, p.259) Laban did not want to break the Jewish law or was unwilling to take the time for the cleansing procedure -- so he did not search for the "gods" near Rachel. The theological message to all who read this story is that Yahweh is the one who has power. Only by Yahweh has Laban been blessed and that blessing came through Jacob. These other "gods" are nothing. It is Yahweh who has had a hand in all that has happened thus far and who will continue to have a hand in the lives of the people of God.

The wondering questions open the possibilities for those who have moved and are homesick to identify with Jacob wanting to return. They also are good openings for children who return once or twice a year to homes of grandparents. Jacob wanted to go home and Laban didn't want him to do so. The first question wonders about what Laban was feeling. Some

children will believe Laban was sad, others will say he was angry because he didn't want to lose the wealth Jacob's presence brought.

The second question talks about the time Jacob had been homesick. Did he yearn for his homeland all that time, or only when he got older and had a family? Some children will think about missing their home when they spend the night at a friend's house. Others will think of camp or extended visits to separated parents or to grandparents and say that maybe he missed it more toward the end than at the beginning -- or maybe the other way around. Let them lead you as you wonder, too.

The third question is amazing and can't be answered. No scholar anywhere can help us with this one. It's simply and amazingly God's intervention in the life of the trickster with uncommon grace and abundant reward. Don't be surprised if the children try to explain this away. They are products of a western culture that has a scientific answer for nearly everything and they may need to tell WHY this happened. Assure them that it's OK not to have an answer all the time.

The final question addresses the women. They left without seeing their father or brothers. How did they feel? Again we can't really know, but the children will respond from their own experience of leaving people they love and how hard it is not to get to say goodbye to friends and family. Some children may understand that the women were upset with their father and didn't care if they saw him. That, too, is possible and must be taken seriously.

## SUGGESTED DISCUSSION QUESTIONS FOR OLDER CHILDREN

In this story we are told that the animals Jacob had become spotted when they mated after seeing spotted sticks laying in the field. We know that was not possible, but the early people of God believed that God could and did change events to bless God's people. How do you feel about that? Do you think God ever did something unexplainable to help you or someone you know?

Both Jacob and Laban had tricked people in their day; neither of them was completely honest. Why would God have been with Jacob during this time?

Neither Jacob nor Laban were Model citizens. Think of someone that God has used to help others that you would never have expected God to choose. How do you feel about God using people who are sometimes dishonest or unkind to help other people?