

Jacob Wrestles

Storyteller (*spreads out the Desert Bag*): This is the Desert Bag. So many wonderful and important things happen in the desert, we need to know what it is like. We can't get the whole

desert into our church, so here is just a little piece of the desert. *The Storyteller smooths the sand while s/he talks.* The desert is a dangerous place. There is little water, and almost nothing grows there. It is hot in the daytime and cold at night.

If any of the children reach out to touch the sand, smile at them but say "You may work with the desert bag later in the Story Room. Right now we all need to be ready to listen to the story. This is how you get ready. *Demonstrate folding your hands in your lap. Then smooth the sand in one smooth motion around the edges of the desert bag, reinforcing the limits imposed by the edge of the bag.*

At the edges of the desert are two great rivers: the Nile -- *place a strip of blue felt down the right side of the desert, slanting in toward your knees* – flowing in to the Mediterranean Sea, -- *put the blue sea down next to your knees touching the mouth of the Nile* -- and the Euphrates flowing from the mountains east of the sea down toward the Indian Ocean. *Leaving a small space between the Mediterranean and its headwaters, put the Euphrates down from near your left knee, slanting toward the far corner of the desert bag on your left. You are North. From your perspective the two rivers slant away from each other making a blunted "V" with a small gap near its base.*) People can live beside the rivers, and if they travel they can travel along the rivers, where there is water and food can grow. *Place a wooden block about halfway along the Euphrates (the river to your left)* This is the city Haran. Jacob had stayed in Haran for

Jacob Gets Ready To Meet Esau

32 As Jacob was on his way back home, some of God's angels came and met him. 2 When Jacob saw them, he said, "This is God's camp." So he named the place Mahanaim.[a]

3 Jacob sent messengers on ahead to Esau, who lived in the land of Seir, also known as Edom. 4 Jacob told them to say to Esau, "Master, I am your servant! I have lived with Laban all this time, 5 and now I own cattle, donkeys, and sheep, as well as many slaves. Master, I am sending these messengers in the hope that you will be kind to me."

6 When the messengers returned, they told Jacob, "We went to your brother Esau, and now he is heading this way with four hundred men."

7 Jacob was so frightened that he divided his people, sheep, cattle, and camels into two groups. 8 He thought, "If Esau attacks one group, perhaps the other can escape."

9 Then Jacob prayed:

You, Lord, are the God who was worshiped by my grandfather Abraham and by my father Isaac. You told me to return home to my family, and you promised to be with me and make me successful. 10 I don't deserve all the good things you have done for me, your servant. When I first crossed the Jordan, I had only my walking stick, but now I have two large groups of people and animals. 11 Please rescue me from my brother. I am afraid he will come and attack not only me, but my wives and children as well. 12 But you have promised that I would be a success and that someday it will be as hard to count my descendants as it is to count the stars in the sky.

13 After Jacob had spent the night there,

Story Materials

- Desert Bag
- Jacob
- Leah
- Rachel
- Esau
- wooden block representing Haran
- blue felt:
 - two large rivers
 - the sea
 - one small river

Tray, basket or shallow open box to hold the story

twenty-one years, – *place Jacob (the figure with the*

he chose some animals as gifts for Esau: 14-15 two hundred female goats and twenty males, two hundred female sheep and twenty males, thirty female camels with their young, forty cows and ten bulls, and twenty female donkeys and ten males.

16 Jacob put servants in charge of each herd and told them, “Go ahead of me and keep a space between each herd.” 17 Then he said to the servant in charge of the first herd, “When Esau meets you, he will ask whose servant you are. He will want to know where you are going and who owns those animals in front of you. 18 So tell him, ‘They belong to your servant Jacob, who is coming this way. He is sending them as a gift to his master Esau.’”

19 Jacob also told the men in charge of the second and third herds and those who followed to say the same thing when they met Esau. 20 And Jacob told them to be sure to say that he was right behind them. Jacob hoped the gifts would make Esau friendly, so Esau would be glad to see him when they met. 21 Jacob’s men took the gifts on ahead of him, but he spent the night in camp.

22-23 Jacob got up in the middle of the night and took his wives, his eleven children, and everything he owned across to the other side of the Jabbok River for safety. 24 Afterwards, Jacob went back and spent the rest of the night alone.

A man came and fought with Jacob until just before daybreak. 25 When the man saw that he could not win, he struck Jacob on the hip and threw it out of joint. 26 They kept on wrestling until the man said, “Let go of me! It’s almost daylight.”

“You can’t go until you bless me,” Jacob replied.

27 Then the man asked, “What is your name?”

“Jacob,” he answered.

28 The man said, “Your name will no longer be Jacob. You have

blue cloak and black hair) in the sand next to Haran – and had married two sisters, Leah – place Leah (the figure with the blue dress) in the sand next to Jacob – and Rachel – place Rachel (the figure with the pink dress) in the sand next to Leah – and their two servants. When Jacob and his wives left Haran to travel home to Canaan, they travelled along the river. Move the figures toward you along the river, until they are about halfway between Haran and the sea.

Jacob had left Canaan because he was afraid his brother Esau would try to kill him. *Put Esau (the figure with the red hair and red cloak) in the sand next to the sea.* Now Jacob sent messengers on ahead to ask Esau to be kind to him. *Use your finger to draw a line in the sand between Jacob and Esau, and then to draw the line back to Jacob. It will be as though your finger is the messengers.* When the messengers returned, they told Jacob, “Your brother Esau is heading this way with four hundred men.” *Move Esau a couple of steps toward Jacob.* Jacob was so frightened that he divided his people, sheep, cattle, and camels into two groups. He thought, “If Esau attacks one group, perhaps the other can escape.”

Then Jacob prayed: – *Touch Jacob to redirect the children's attention to him, and then fold your hands in prayer – You, LORD, are the God who was worshiped by my grandfather Abraham and by my father Isaac. Please rescue me from my brother. I am afraid he will come and attack not only me, but my wives and children as well. But you have promised that someday it will be as hard to count my descendants as it is to count the stars in the sky.*

When they came to where they had to cross a river, – *put the narrow blue strip down so that it flows into the Euphrates, between Esau and Jacob –* Jacob chose some herds of goats, sheep, camels, cows and donkeys as gifts for Esau. He told the servants in charge of each herd and told them, “When Esau meets you, he will ask whose servant you are. So tell him, ‘They belong to your servant Jacob, who is coming this way. He is sending them as a gift to his master Esau.’” Jacob hoped the gifts would make Esau friendly, so Esau would be glad to see him when they met. Jacob’s men took the gifts on ahead of him and Jacob took his wives and children and everything he owned across to the other side of the

river. – *Move Jacob, Leah and Rachel across the small river –*

wrestled with God and with men, and you have won. That's why your name will be Israel."

29 Jacob said, "Now tell me your name."

"Don't you know who I am?" he asked. And he blessed Jacob.

30 Jacob said, "I have seen God face to face, and I am still alive."

Afterwards, Jacob went back and spent the rest of the night alone. – *Move Jacob back across to the far side of the little river, and lie him down to sleep–*

A man came and fought with Jacob until just before daybreak.– *Put your hand down next to Jacob, fingers pointing straight up, as we do when we make the "pillar of cloud" and "pillar of fire" for the Exodus stories. There is no doll to represent this figure, because it is the presence of God, so a doll would be idolatrous. Move your hand and Jacob back and forth a short distance as*

though they are fighting. – When the man saw that he could not win, he struck Jacob on the hip and threw it out of joint. – *Use your finger (from the hand you are using to represent God's presence) to strike the Jacob figure.*

They kept on wrestling until the man said, "Let go of me! It's almost daylight."

"You can't go until you bless me," Jacob replied.

Hold your hand – the one you are using to represent God's presence – over Jacob's head. The man asked, "What is your name?"

"Jacob," he answered.

The man said, "Your name will no longer be Jacob. You have wrestled with God and with men, and you have won. That's why your name will be Israel."

Jacob said, "I have seen God face to face, and I am still alive."

The sun was coming up as Jacob crossed the river. *Move Jacob back across the small river.* Later that day Jacob met Esau coming with his four hundred men. *Move Esau a few more steps toward Jacob.* So Jacob had his children walk with their mothers: Jacob walked in front of them – *move Jacob a few steps toward Esau* – followed by Zilpah and Bilhah and their children, followed by Leah and her children – *move Leah a few steps after Jacob* – then by Rachel and Joseph – *move Rachel a few steps after Leah.* Jacob bowed to the ground seven times as he came near his brother. – *bow Jacob down.*

But Esau ran toward Jacob and hugged and kissed him. – *Move Esau up to Jacob and let the brothers hug.* – Jacob answered, "I am happy, simply knowing that you are my friend.