

# Sleeping on God's Doorstep

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*After Jacob had cheated his brother Esau out of his birthright and stolen his blessing, he had to escape before Esau killed him. His mother and father agreed; they suggested he go stay with his uncle Laban. In fact, they suggested that he marry one of his uncle's daughters and settle down there! It wasn't safe to stay home anymore, so Jacob had to leave quickly. He traveled as far as he could before nightfall, found a place to make camp and tried to go to sleep.*

*But as it turned out, Jacob didn't get much sleep—God was making too much noise! You can read the full story in Genesis 27:41-28:22.*

If Jacob thought Esau would forgive him for stealing his father's blessing,  
he would soon learn how wrong he was.

For Esau was a hunter; he was used to stalking his prey,  
waiting for the best possible moment to launch his attack...  
and then BOOM! His prey never escaped.

So Esau did what he knew best—*he waited*.

He knew that it was only a matter of time until his father Isaac died.  
And once old Isaac was gone, *Esau would deal with that thief his way*.

But Esau's desire for revenge was so strong that he couldn't keep it to himself.  
In an unguarded moment—perhaps while drinking and celebrating with friends—  
he let his plans slip. And one of those friends,  
unwilling to be part of a murder,  
sent word of Esau's plans to their mother Rebekah.  
And once she got the word, she sent for Jacob.

"Esau plans to kill you," she said,  
"so we need to act quickly. Here's what you have to do:  
Go to your uncle Laban and stay with him.  
His home is far enough from here that Esau probably won't follow you.  
Your brother already hates me for helping you steal his blessing,  
but I see no reason I should lose both of you.

"Go pack your things so you're ready to leave when I tell you.  
Meanwhile, I'll go talk to your father and convince him to let you go.  
And then, after your brother's temper has time to cool off,  
I'll send for you to come home."

Of course, they both knew he'd probably *never* be able to come home.

Rebekah didn't dare tell her husband Isaac about Esau's plans  
because Esau was his favorite son and he probably wouldn't believe her.  
Instead, she told Isaac, "I hate the Hittite women who live around here.  
I'd rather die than see Jacob marry one of them, the way Esau did!"

Isaac agreed with her. So he called Jacob to his tent, blessed him again, and said,  
"Son, I don't want you to marry any of the women who live around us.  
I want you to go to the house of your grandfather Bethuel  
and marry one of your uncle Laban's daughters.

May God bless you and give you many children,  
so many that they become many nations!  
I will ask God to bless you and your descendents  
with the same blessings he promised to my father Abraham  
and to give you this land, which he also promised him."

Then Jacob hurried off before Esau could find out what had happened.  
He grabbed his belongings, kissed his mother goodbye,  
and started the long journey to his uncle Laban's house.

He put as much distance between him and Esau as he could that first day.  
By sundown he was drained—not only by the physical distance he had traveled,  
but by the emotional distance he had put between himself and his family.  
Jacob found a place to make camp for the night,  
but he was so tired he laid down with a stone for his pillow  
and fell fast asleep.

And as he slept, he dreamt a dream such as he had never dreamt before.

In his dream he saw a giant stairway that stretched up  
from the ground where he slept all the way up into the clouds of heaven,  
and he saw angels traveling up and down that stairway  
from heaven to earth and back again.

And the Lord stood at the top of that stairway. He gazed down at Jacob and said,  
"I am the Lord, the God of your grandfather Abraham  
and of your father Isaac. Listen to me, Jacob:  
I am making you the same promises I gave to your ancestors.

"The ground on which you now lay belongs to you,  
both to you and to your descendents. You don't know it yet,  
but your descendents will multiply until they cover the earth like dust!  
And all of the people on Earth will be blessed  
because of you and your descendents.

"What's more, I will be with you,  
and I personally will protect you wherever you go.  
Although you are leaving this land for now,  
I promise that one day I will bring you back to this land.  
I will be with you constantly from now on  
until you receive every promise which I have made to you tonight."

Then Jacob woke up and he was terrified.

"Surely God is here, in this very place,  
and I wasn't even aware of it when I lay down to sleep.

This must be the home of God, the gateway to heaven!"  
Still, with all the other events of the day, he was so tired he fell back asleep.

But he didn't sleep for long. It was early the next morning when he woke up,  
and the first thing he did was take the stone he had used for a pillow  
and set it up as a small monument,  
a small memorial of the things that had happened that night.

Then he took some olive oil and poured it over the stone—  
for it was a common practice in those days, to anoint a holy object with oil—  
and he named the place Bethel, which means "house of God."

And Jacob made this vow to God:

"If You will truly be with me and protect me on this journey,  
and if You will give me food and clothing,  
and if You will bring me back safely to my father,  
then I will make You my God.

This memorial stone will become a place for worshipping You,  
and I will give You a tenth of everything You give me."

Then Jacob gathered his things and hurried on to his uncle Laban's house.

Jacob ended up spending a long time away from his home,  
far more time than he had ever imagined he would.

It would be many, *many* years before he returned to his family.  
But it was during this time that God renamed him Israel,  
the name by which we now call his children's descendants.

That doesn't mean Jacob's life was easy.

In fact, the name Israel means "one who has wrestled with God and won."

*But THAT is another story.*