The Story of Jacob

Background
Focus: the person who became Israel (Genesis 25:19-33:20, 35:16-29)

The story of Jacob adds to the core narrative of the journey of the people of God from the beginning of “The Great Family” to the Exodus. Isaac and Rebecca had twins, Esau and Jacob. Much of Jacob’s story is in his two names. “Jacob” refers to how he was born second and grabbed his brother’s heel, but it also means he took his brother’s place by trickery (Genesis 25:26). He also wrestled all night with an angel by the Jabok River. The angel named him “Israel” (Genesis 32:28), saying, “for you have striven with God and with man and have prevailed.” “Israel” means “one who struggles with God.” This is the story about the origin of the twelve tribes of Israel.

Material
The basket for The Story of Jacob is on one of the Old Testament shelves.

It contains:
- a tan felt strip underlay
- Jacob figure
- Esau figure
- 12 son figures in box
- soup bowl
- fake animal skin
- ladder
- rock with the name “Bethel” on one side
- 2 wedding veils
- sign saying “Peniel”

Movements Words

Move with deliberation to the shelf where the material waits.
Watch. Watch where I go.

Pick up the basket containing the material and return to the circle. You may need to say:
Everyone needs to be ready.
God promised Abraham that he would be the father of a great family. But Abraham and Sarah had only one son, Isaac.

Isaac married Rebekah. For a long time, they had no children, until with God’s help they had two boys, Esau and Jacob.

Esau and Jacob were twins, but they were not like each other. Esau was big and Jacob was small. Esau had red hair and Jacob had dark hair. Esau was hairy and Jacob had smooth skin. Esau liked to hunt and Jacob stayed by the tent to watch the sheep. Esau was born first, so he was the one who was supposed to have his father’s things when he died. Isaac loved Esau best, but Rebekah loved Jacob best.

Jacob thought it was not fair that Esau was treated special because he was the oldest. They had been born on the same day! Once Esau came home from hunting and he was very hungry. Jacob had made some soup. Esau asked his brother for some. “I will give it to you,” said Jacob, “if you will agree that I can have father’s things when he dies.” Esau did not even think about it. “What use are father’s things when I am so hungry?” He took the soup. Now there was an agreement between the brothers that Jacob would be like the oldest son.

Isaac was old. He could not see. He asked Esau to go hunting and make the stew he liked best. Then Isaac would bless him.

Rebekah overheard this. She thought Jacob should get the blessing. So she and Jacob made Isaac’s special stew from a lamb instead of a wild animal. They put animal skins on Jacob’s arms so he would seem hairy and dressed him up like Esau. Jacob went to his father with the stew. Isaac believed that Jacob was Esau and he laid his hands on him and blessed him.

When Esau returned with the stew for his father, he discovered that Isaac had been tricked into giving away the blessing that should have been his. He was angry and threatened to kill Jacob. Rebekah asked Isaac to send Jacob away to her family to find a wife. Isaac agreed.
Place the rock and ladder on the underlay as you mention them. Put the rock down with the blank side up; you will turn it over when you speak of naming this place.

Jacob set off quickly through the desert toward Haran, where his mother’s family lived. One night, he found a rock and made it his pillow. While he slept, he dreamed of a great ladder stretching all the way into heaven. There were angels climbing up and down the ladder, and God seemed to be above and around and beside the place. A voice said:

“I am the God of Abraham and Isaac. I will give this land on which you lie to you and to your descendants. Through them all the world will be blessed. I am with you, and I will bring you back to this land.”

Make a pouring motion with your hand to show the pouring of oil. Turn the rock over to reveal the word “Bethel.”

When Jacob awoke, he knew that he had heard God in his dream! He poured oil on the stone so that he would always remember what God had said, and he named the place “Bethel” - the house of God.

Place the two wedding veils on the underlay as you mention each wedding.

Jacob traveled on and came to a well where the shepherds watered their flocks. There was a beautiful young woman there with her father’s sheep. She was Rachel, the daughter of his mother’s brother. Jacob wanted to make her his wife, so he offered to work for her father Laban for seven years in exchange for his permission to marry Rachel.

After seven years, the wedding took place. When Jacob saw his wife’s face, he discovered that he had been tricked, and that he was married to Leah, Rachel’s sister. Laban told Jacob that he could marry Rachel too if he worked another seven years. Finally Jacob and Rachel were married. Then Jacob worked seven more years for his uncle Laban. All this time, God blessed Jacob and his work, and Laban’s flocks grew.

Jacob worked for his uncle for twenty-one years. Then God came close to him and told him it was time to return home. Jacob packed up all that he had and began the journey home with his family.

Jacob was afraid to meet his brother again. Esau had threatened to kill him and was coming to meet him with 400 men! Jacob prayed to God and sent presents to Esau.
Place the wooden sign reading “Peniel” on the underlay. Take Jacob from the beginning of the story and place him on the sign. Cover him with your hand when you speak of the man wrestling with him all through the night. After you say, “and he blessed him,” remove your hand.

That night he went apart from his family to pray. A strange thing happened. Someone struggled with him all night.

The stranger touched Jacob’s thigh and his hip came out of joint. But Jacob held on until morning. The stranger said, “Let me go.” But Jacob knew this was no ordinary person. He refused to let go until the stranger had given him a blessing. The stranger said: “Your name will no longer be Jacob. You will be called Israel - for you have struggled with God and with people and have prevailed.” And he blessed him. So Jacob called the place “Peniel,” which means “the face of God,” because he knew he had been struggling with God.

Jacob caught up with his family, limping because of his injury. Then he went in front of them to meet Esau. He bowed down to the ground as Esau came near. Then his brother ran to him and put his arms around him.

Finally old Isaac died, and his sons Esau and Jacob buried him.

Open the box and place the twelve figures for Jacob’s sons on the underlay as you mention each son. Jacob, or Israel as he was now called, had twelve sons. Each of these sons became the head of a tribe. Now there were twelve tribes in the Great Family, and it was called Israel.
Sit for a moment and look at the story from beginning to end to let the story rest. Then begin the wondering.

- I wonder what part of the story you liked best?
- I wonder what part of the story was the most important?
- I wonder what part was about you or what part you were in?
- I wonder if we could leave any of the story out and still have all that we need?

After the wondering is over, put the story away carefully. Pick up each object in reverse order and remind children what the object is, saying, for example, “Here are the twelve sons of Jacob.” After all of the story is back in the basket, carefully model how to roll the underlay back up and place it in the basket as well. Return the lesson to its spot on the shelf. Then return to your spot in the circle and dismiss the children one by one to do their work.