

# Jimmy Goes to Sunday School

By Ward Ricker

## Episode 6 – Jacob’s Family

Jimmy was back in Sunday School the next week, with his buddy Aaron beside him, sitting in their usual spot. Both girls were in the back, and Larry, the other boy who sat in the back, had a friend with him, who Jimmy recognized from school.

“Everybody say ‘Hi’ to Morris,” said Mrs. Peabody as she started the class.

Everybody said “Hi” to Morris.

Jimmy wondered why he was being so formal, since he had heard Morris’s friends refer to him as ‘Moe’. He then thought, “Larry and Moe. Maybe next week Curly will be here.”

“So, children,” Mrs. Peabody then started in, “last Sunday we learned about Abraham’s two grandchildren, Jacob and Esau, and how god chose Jacob, through whose descendants to create his great nation of Israel.”

“Yeah, the cheater and blackmailer,” Jimmy was going to say, but thought that that would get the class started off on a bad footing, so he kept quiet.

“Well, Jacob had married Rachel and Leah, as you recall...”

“Yeah,” Jimmy thought again, “a polygamist!” His father had taught him that word after he told his dad the story from last week’s Sunday School class.

“...but,” Mrs. Peabody continued, “Rachel, the wife he loved the most, wasn’t able to have any children. Meanwhile, Leah had four sons, named Reuben, Simeon, Levi and Judah.

“Rachel wanted to have children, too, and when she found that she was unable to have any, she gave one of her servants, named Bilhah, to Jacob so that she could have children for Rachel to raise. So Bilhah had two children, named ‘Dan’ and ‘Naphtali’, and Rachel raised them for Jacob.”

“Another slave for Jacob to have sex with,” Jimmy thought. “Wow! This is real soap opera material!”

“Well, when Leah saw that Bilhah was having children for Rachel, she began to worry that Rachel might get ahead of her, and since she herself wasn’t having children any more, she gave her servant, Zilpah, to Jacob, and he had two more sons, named ‘Gad’ and ‘Asher’, for Leah to raise.”

“Wow! That Jacob had quite a harem!” Jimmy finally blurted out.

“Now Jimmy,” Mrs. Peabody chastised him, “that is not an appropriate way to talk in god’s house! Jacob did not have a harem. He was a man of god, but you remember how Laban tricked him so that he ended up with two wives?” Without waiting for an answer she continued, “And then, when Rachel saw she wasn’t having children, instead of trusting god, she gave Bilhah to Jacob so she could have children by her. It was the way they did things back then.”

Rather than point out that Jacob must not have been trusting god, either, he let her continue. “The when Leah saw what was happening, she did the same thing. It is sad when people don’t trust god, but sometimes that is what happens.”

“Well, why was it so important to have children?” Jimmy asked.

“Every woman wants to have children, Jimmy,” Mrs. Peabody explained. “Besides, it made her feel important and valuable. Having children is a woman’s calling.”

“So women are valued for their ability to have children,” Jimmy responded. “How many children do you have, Mrs. Peabody?”

Mrs. Peabody didn’t answer, but continued her lesson. “So, one day, Leah’s oldest son, Reuben, went out to play and brought back some mandrake’s for his mother to eat. Mandrakes are plants which have a root which some people find quite delicious.” She avoided mentioning that are hallucinogenic. “When Rachel saw the mandrakes, she asked Leah if she could have some. Leah made a deal with her

that if Rachel let Leah sleep with Jacob, she would give her some. So Leah and Jacob slept together and Leah had two more sons, 'Issachar' and 'Zebulun', and a daughter named 'Dinah'." Mrs. Peabody thought she heard a slight chuckle from the girls when she said these boy's names, but she ignored it.

Jimmy, however, remarked, "So she paid for the right to sleep with him? Kind of like a woman going to a hooker!"

"Jimmy," Mrs. Peabody chided him, "I told you before, we don't talk like that in Sunday School!"

"I'm sorry," Jimmy replied, "I meant it's like a woman who is hard up and pays to go to a man who provides those special services."

Mrs. Peabody seemed no less upset, but continued her story. "Well, when Rachel saw that Leah was having more children she finally prayed to god, and god opened her womb, and she gave birth to a boy, who she named 'Joseph'."

Jimmy wondered whether her womb had been sewn shut before, but he didn't ask.

"Well," Mrs. Peabody continued, "Jacob had been working all this time for Laban, and he decided he wanted to go off and find a place of his own, so he told Laban that he wanted to leave. Laban, though, didn't want him to go, because god had been good to him while Jacob was there."

"Wow, that cheating, blackmailing polygamist Jacob really had it in good with god," Jimmy thought.

"Please stay,' Laban begged him," Mrs. Peabody continued. "'God has been so good to me while you are here. I will pay whatever you ask if you will stay and work for me. So Jacob said, 'I will stay if I can keep all of the speckled, spotted and striped cattle and goats and all the brown sheep as my pay, and you will keep all the rest.'"

"Laban agreed to what Jacob said. Then Jacob took some poles of wood and stripped the bark partially off from them so that they had stripes of wood showing from under the bark. Whenever the stronger cattle came to drink from the watering troughs, he put the poles in the ground in front of them, and whenever the weaker cattle came to drink he took the poles away. Then when the cattle had babies, the stronger cattle had stiped babies and the weaker ones didn't, so after a while all the stronger cattle were Jacob's and all the weaker ones were Laban's."

"I will have to remember that trick if I get to be a cattleman," Jimmy thought.

Mrs. Peabody continued, "After Jacob lived there a while longer he had become very rich in cattle, camels, donkeys and servants."

"More of those servants who weren't allowed to be anything else," Jimmy surmised, but let her continue.

"But ..." Mrs. Peabody's voice started getting that ominous tone again, "...Laban was not very happy with Jacob anymore." Mrs. Peabody didn't explain why, but Jimmy surmised that it was probably because Jacob had taken all his strong cattle away.

"So Jacob told his family to pack everything up, and they took their cattle and everything else and snuck away in the middle of the night to go back to Canaan to be with his father, Isaac. When they were packing, though, Rachel took some of her dad's idols and packed them with her things. The idols were the statues of the false gods that Laban worshipped. When Laban got up the next morning and found that Jacob was gone, he chased after him but was warned in a dream by god not to do anything to Jacob."

"Wow!" Jimmy thought again, "God was really protecting that cheating, blackmailing, polygamous trickster!"

"When Laban caught up to Jacob he asked him why he had snuck away in the middle of the night without giving him a chance to say goodbye to his daughters and grandchildren. Jacob told him that he knew he was mad at him and thought that he would try to take his daughters back away from Jacob forcefully. Then Laban told him that his idols were missing. Jacob, not knowing that Rachel had stolen them, said to go through all his belongings, and if Laban found anything that belonged to him the

thief would be put to death. Laban then searched through all of Jacob's stuff, but when he came to the tent that Rachel was staying in, she was sitting on top of the pack that the idols were in. 'Forgive me, father, but it is the time of month when I have my period, and I am feeling very ill and can't get up,' she said, and Laban didn't search the pack she was on.

"Jacob was mad at Laban then," Mrs. Peabody continued, "and shouted at Laban, 'What have I done wrong that you had to chase me out here? I served you for twenty years and have never taken anything from you except the animals that we agreed on, and now you haven't found any of your stuff among my stuff.' Laban admitted that he couldn't find anything of his that Jacob had taken, so the next morning he got up, kissed his sons and daughters, and went home."

"What sons?" Jimmy asked. "Did Jacob marry his sons, too?"

"I don't know, Jimmy," Mrs. Peabody admitted, "but that's what the Bible tells us."

"Jacob continued on his way," Mrs. Peabody said, "but he sent messengers ahead to his brother Esau who was living in a place called Seir. When the messengers came back and said that Esau had sent out men to come to meet him, he got nervous and thought that Esau was still mad at him and intended to fight, so he divided everyone in his household into two groups, and then he gathered some of his flocks and herds and sent them ahead to his brother as a gift, in hopes that that would pacify his anger.

"Then, as he followed after, he camped for the night, and he wrestled with a man sent from god. As daylight approached, the man tried to get away, but Jacob grabbed him and wouldn't let him go until the man gave him a blessing from god. The man said, 'You are a prince and have power with god and men, and you have prevailed, and your name from now on will be called "Israel".'

"Jacob then got up and continued on to meet his brother Esau. When he saw him he bowed down, and, instead of being mad or fighting, Esau came and hugged and kissed him. Jacob introduced his wives and children. Esau then went back to Seir, and Jacob continued on to a city called Shechem in a country called Shechem, and bought a piece of land from the sons of Hamor, the founder of the city. However, one day Hamor's son, who was also named Shechem, met up with Dinah, Jacob's daughter, and had sex with her and defiled her."

Jimmy noted that Mrs. Peabody seemed to be getting more comfortable with the word 'sex', but he didn't understand the word 'defiled'. "What do you mean by 'defiled'?" he asked her.

"Well," Mrs. Peabody answered, "women were pure before they had sex with a man, but after they did so they were not considered pure anymore. They were then defiled. It's sort of like after you wear a shirt, you don't call it clean anymore."

"So was a man defiled after he had sex?" Jimmy asked.

"Well, no, Jimmy," Mrs. Peabody responded. "It doesn't work that way."

"Why not?" Jimmy asked.

"Well, it just doesn't. That's not the way god does things," Mrs. Peabody replied

Jimmy thought it strange that it worked differently for men than for women but let her continue.

Continuing, Mrs. Peabody explained, "Shechem went to his father and told him that he loved Dinah and asked if he would get her for him for his wife. So Hamor went to Jacob and asked if Jacob would give his daughter to Shechem to marry."

Jimmy still didn't understand why the men were able to pass women around like they were property, but he let her continue.

"Well, later, when Dinah's brothers came home and heard about this, they were mad. Hamor kept asking for Dinah and saying that all of Jacob's people could marry with the people of their city, but Jacob's sons said, 'Our god only allows us to marry with people who have circumcised their males.' The men of the city agreed to do this so that Shechem could marry Dinah. But, Jacob's sons had set up a trick on the people of the city, because as soon as the men had cut the skin off to become circumcised and were too sore to be able to fight, Jacob's sons broke in and killed off all the men in the city to

avenge for what Shechem had done to their sister. When Jacob found out that they had done this, he was upset and said, 'Now the people of this country will hate us and will come and kill us,' but his sons responded, 'Should we get let him get away with treating our sister like a prostitute?'

"After this, Jacob travelled back to Bethel, where god had promised to give the land of Canaan to his descendants, and god once again told him that his name would be called 'Israel'. Continuing on, they came to a place called Ephrath. Now Rachel was pregnant again, and when they came to Ephrath, she went into a very hard labor and died as she gave birth to another son. The son survived, though, and was named Benjamin, so that Jacob now had twelve sons."

Mrs. Peabody skipped the story of how Jacob's son, Reuben, had sex with Jacob's concubine, Bilhah, but she figured that that wasn't something that children really needed to know about.

Finishing her lesson, she asked the class, "So do you children want to live your life for god so that god will be with you like he was with Jacob?"

The rest of the children all smiled and nodded, but Jimmy thought and asked, "When I grow up can I be like Jacob and have a harem?"

"I told you not to use that word!" Mrs. Peabody scolded him angrily.

"Well can I just have two wives and two other women to have sex with like Jacob did?" he rephrased his question.

Mrs. Peabody still glowered at him, and Jimmy thought she looked cute when her face got red.

"Boy, Mrs. Peabody sure was mad at you today," Aaron said as they left the building. "Why do you ask so many questions and make her so upset?"

Without giving him an answer, Jimmy said, "You know, I think I like Sunday School. I think I'll come back next week."