

Who was Levi in the Bible?

The name Levi is attached to four different characters in the Bible. There are two men named Levi found in Jesus' genealogy in the book of Luke, each of them a father of a man named Matthat (Luke 3:24, 29). The third Levi is more commonly known as the disciple Matthew. He is referred to as Levi twice, in Mark 2:14 and Luke 5:27-29. Both occurrences coincide with Jesus' calling of Levi/Matthew, so it is likely Jesus changed Levi's name once he became Jesus' disciple, just as He did for Simon Peter.

The fourth Levi was a son of Jacob. He was the third-born, and his mother was Jacob's wife Leah. Levi and each of his eleven brothers became the heads of the twelve tribes of Israel. The Bible does not give many details of Levi's life; however, in Genesis 34, Levi and his brother Simeon defend the honor of their sister, Dinah, although the manner in which they went about it was appalling. This is what happened: when Dinah was away from her father's house one day, she was raped by Shechem, the son of the Hivite ruler of that territory (verse 2). When Dinah's brothers heard about the rape, they were furious. Shechem, who desired Dinah as his wife, asked for Dinah's hand, so Dinah's brothers tricked him and said that first he, his father, and the other men of the city must be circumcised (verse 15). Shechem and his father agreed, and all the males went through the rite of circumcision. But three days later, when the men of Shechem were still in pain, Levi and Simeon strapped on their swords and attacked the city, killing every man (verse 25) and plundering the city (verses 27-29). Jacob was angry at Levi and Simeon because of their murderous attack (verse 30), but Levi and Simeon were unapologetic (verse 31).

Levi was also involved in selling his brother Joseph to merchants who sold Joseph as a slave in Egypt. Joseph's brothers were jealous of him, for their father showed him much

favoritism (Genesis 37:3). Joseph went through several hard years in Egypt but eventually became second-in-command to Pharaoh due to his faithfulness and the Lord's blessing (Genesis 41:39-41). Later, Joseph's brothers, including Levi, were forced to come buy food from Egypt, and it was during one of their trips there that they discovered the man they'd been dealing with for food was their brother Joseph. The brothers begged forgiveness from Joseph with true repentance, and Joseph forgave them. Eventually, Joseph brought his whole family to live in Egypt.

Before Jacob died in Egypt, he called his sons to him and spoke words of prophecy over each of them. He said this of Levi: "Simeon and Levi are brothers—their swords are weapons of violence. Let me not enter their council, let me not join their assembly, for they have killed men in their anger and hamstringed oxen as they pleased. Cursed be their anger, so fierce, and their fury, so cruel! I will scatter them in Jacob and disperse them in Israel" (Genesis 49:5-7). Jacob's harsh words showed that Levi and Simeon's bloody vengeance for their sister's rape had lasting consequences.

The descendants of Levi became numerous, but they were indeed scattered throughout the Promised Land. Moses was a descendant of Levi (Exodus 2:1). Other notable men of Levi's family line were Eli, Ezra, and John the Baptist.