

Who was Asher in the Bible?

Asher was the eighth son of Jacob, and his name means “Blessed” or “Happy.” Asher’s mother was Leah’s servant, Zilpah. According to the laws at the time regarding children born of servants, Asher would have been seen as Leah’s son rather than Zilpah’s. Asher had a total of eleven brothers, including a full brother by Zilpah; two half-brothers from Jacob’s other wife, Rachel; two half-brothers from Rachel’s servant, Bilhah; and six half-brothers from Leah. He also had a sister named Dina. Each of Jacob’s sons, including Asher, would become the head of one of the twelve tribes of Israel. As God had promised to Asher’s great-grandfather, Abraham, He was making Abraham’s descendants into a great nation (Genesis 12:2).

The Bible does not say much about Asher as an individual. It does, however, describe the jealousy and anger Asher and his brothers had toward their brother Joseph due to Jacob’s preferential treatment of him (Genesis 37:3-4). This favoritism, coupled Joseph’s description of the dreams he had in which his brothers were bowing down to him, caused the brothers to develop an extreme hatred of him (verses 5-11). Asher and his brothers ended up selling Joseph to some merchants, who in turn sold him as a slave in Egypt (verse 28). Joseph served there for several years, but God raised him to second-in-command of all Egypt (Genesis 41:39-41). As Joseph had interpreted a dream had by the king that warned of seven years of plenty followed by seven years of great famine, Pharaoh put Joseph in charge of collecting food during the seven good years and storing it for the seven bad years (verses 48-49). When the famine began, Joseph’s brothers came to buy food from Egypt, eventually discovering that the man they were dealing with was their brother. They were grieved over what they had done to Joseph, and soon after the reunion Jacob and the rest of his family were brought to live in Egypt.

Just before Jacob died, he blessed each of his sons. The blessing for Asher was as follows: "Asher's food will be rich; / he will provide delicacies fit for a king" (Genesis 49:20). In essence, Jacob was blessing Asher and his descendants with a promise that they would gain good food and riches. Later, Moses also blessed Asher's descendants: "Most blessed of sons is Asher; / let him be favored by his brothers, / and let him bathe his feet in oil. / The bolts of your gates will be iron and bronze, / and your strength will equal your days" (Deuteronomy 33:24-25).

Genesis 46:17 notes that Asher had four sons (Imnah, Ishvah, Ishvi, and Beriah) and one daughter (Serah). His tribe would eventually grow into six clans and, after the exodus from Egypt, was quite large. The Bible says that, at one point during the Israelites' journey to Canaan, Asher's tribe had 41,500 fighting men (Numbers 1:41).

Asher's tribe inherited land in Canaan along the coast, from the city of Sidon in the north to Mt. Carmel in the south. True to the blessings that Asher had received, the tribe possessed territory containing some of the richest soil in all of Canaan. Asher produced much grain, wine, oil, and minerals.

Asher's descendants endured as God had promised Abraham, and his tribe is mentioned often throughout the Bible. One of Asher's descendants, a prophetess named Anna, was blessed to meet the baby Jesus just days after His birth (Luke 2:36). And one day, during the tribulation that will occur after Jesus returns for believers, a remnant of the nation of Israel will come to a saving knowledge of Jesus Christ, including 12,000 sealed from the tribe of Asher (Revelation 7:6).