

Who was Issachar in the Bible?

Issachar was Jacob's ninth son and ancestor of one of the twelve tribes of Israel. In Hebrew, Issachar means either "man of reward" or "hired man." His name is associated with the circumstances of his birth.

Issachar's mother was Leah. After she gave birth to her fourth son, Judah, Leah stopped having children and was presumed to be barren (Genesis 29:35). One day her oldest son, Reuben, came across mandrakes in the field. In folk medicine, these flowering herbs were thought to enhance a woman's fertility. Reuben picked the mandrakes and brought them to his mother. Leah and her younger sister, Rachel, argued over the mandrakes, but finally came to an agreement. Leah would give Rachel some of the mandrakes as a reward or payment for allowing Leah to sleep with their husband, Jacob. That night, Leah became pregnant and later gave Jacob her fifth (and his ninth) son, Issachar (Genesis 30:14-18).

As a Bible character, Issachar plays almost no role in the family story. We know he fathered four sons: Tola, Puah, Jashub, and Shimron (Genesis 46:13). To escape the famine, Issachar joined Jacob in relocating his family to Egypt, where Issachar eventually died and was buried. Later his body was moved to Shechem with the rest of the patriarchs (Acts 7:16).

Like his brothers, Issachar received a blessing from his father before Jacob's death: "Issachar is a rawboned donkey lying down among the sheep pens. When he sees how good is his resting place and how pleasant is his land, he will bend his shoulder to the burden and submit to forced labor" (Genesis 49:14-15). The blessing seems more like a curse, possibly indicating that the tribe of Issachar was forced to work for a Canaanite king

at some point.

The territory of the tribe of Issachar, described in Joshua 19:17-23, incorporated the fertile eastern section of the valley of the Jezreel River, a western tributary of the Jordan, with Mount Tabor to the north and the Jordan River to the east.

Issachar shared a border and close connection with the tribe of Zebulon. This link is evident in the common blessing given by Moses before his death: "About Zebulon he said: 'Rejoice, Zebulon, in your going out, and you, Issachar, in your tents. They will summon peoples to the mountain and there offer the sacrifices of the righteous; they will feast on the abundance of the seas, on the treasures hidden in the sand'" (Deuteronomy 33:18-19).

Issachar was a large tribe. Its battle-ready men numbered 54,400 in the first census (Numbers 1:29). By the time of the second census, it had increased to 64,400 (Numbers 26:25). During the reign of King David, Issachar's mighty men numbered 87,000 (1 Chronicles 7:5).

In the time of the judges, Issachar's tribe joined with Deborah and Barak to defeat Jabin, the king of Hazor (Judges 5:15). From Issachar's tribe came a later judge, Tola (Judges 10:1-2), as well as two kings of Israel, Baasha and his son Elah (1 Kings 15:27 - 16:14). As one of the northern tribes in the divided kingdom, Issachar was taken into captivity when the northern kingdom fell.

There is a brief mention in the Bible of another man named Issachar: a Levite and descendant of Korah. This Issachar was one of the door-keepers of the temple. He is

listed as the seventh son of Obed-edom and was one of the “capable men with the strength to do the work” (1 Chronicles 26:8).