

Who was Leah in the Bible?

Leah was the daughter of Laban, the sister of Rachel, a wife of Jacob, and the mother of seven of Jacob's children.

Leah's first mention in the Bible comes in the story of Jacob. After Jacob tricked his father and stole his brother's birthright (Genesis 27:1-29), he was forced to flee to the home of his uncle Laban in Harran. There Jacob fell in love with Laban's younger daughter, Rachel. Leah, being the older daughter, should have been the first to marry, but, unfortunately, she was homely, whereas Rachel was beautiful (Genesis 29:17). Because of his love for Rachel, Jacob made a deal with Laban to work seven years for Rachel's hand in marriage.

When Jacob completed the seven years, he demanded Rachel as his wife (Genesis 29:21). Laban threw a feast, but, instead of giving Rachel to Jacob that night, he gave him Leah. The Bible does not say how the switch was accomplished, but, in any case, Jacob slept with Leah and was shocked the next morning to find Leah in bed with him (verses 23-25). Outraged, Jacob demanded to know why Laban had given him Leah in spite of the fact that he had worked seven years for Rachel's hand. Laban, unapologetic for his trickery, simply told Jacob that it was tradition that the older daughter be married first (verse 26). He did, however, tell Jacob that he could still have Rachel—if he worked another seven years. After the bridal week with Leah was over (verse 27), Rachel was also wed to Jacob. Leah thus had to share her new husband with her sister after only one week alone with him.

Sadly, Jacob was obvious in loving Rachel over Leah. But the Lord had compassion on Leah and allowed her to conceive (Genesis 29:31). Leah bore a son, whom she named Reuben. The

name, meaning “see, a son,” sounds similar to the Hebrew word that means “he has seen my misery.” Leah had three more sons by Jacob, and she named them Simeon, Levi, and Judah (verses 33-35). Meanwhile, Rachel became jealous of her sister’s fertility, as she herself was barren. So Rachel followed the cultural standard of the day and gave her maid, Bilhah, to Jacob as a wife so the two would produce children for her (Genesis 30:3). Jacob had two sons by Bilhah, Dan and Naphtali. Leah herself had stopped having children, and, seeing her sister’s success, she also gave her maid to Jacob (verse 9). Leah’s maid, Zilpah, had two sons, Gad and Asher, and, since the boys were legally Leah’s, Leah rejoiced at having given Jacob more offspring.

Leah and Rachel’s rivalry continued, mainly on Rachel’s part, as she still had no sons from her own body. One day, Leah’s son Reuben brought her some mandrakes from the field. In ancient times, mandrake roots were eaten as an aphrodisiac and as a supposed cure for barrenness. Rachel desired the mandrakes as a cure for her infertility, and she asked Leah for them. Leah responded, “Wasn’t it enough that you took away my husband? Will you take my son’s mandrakes too?” (Genesis 30:15). So Rachel traded the one thing that was in her power to give: a night with Jacob. In exchange for the mandrake roots, Rachel allowed Leah to sleep with Jacob. Leah held her to the bargain, and that night God allowed her to conceive another son, whom she named Issachar. After Issachar, Leah had two more children: Zebulun and Dinah. Dinah is the only daughter of Jacob the Bible mentions, so it is possible she was the only one.

In spite of how Leah was treated by her husband and sister, God blessed her richly in the form of motherhood. But there was more. Her third son, Levi, became the father of the tribe of Israel that was chosen to serve the Lord in the tabernacle and later the temple. And her fourth son, Judah, became the father of the line through which God

carried out His covenant with Jacob's grandfather Abraham. God had promised that one day all people would be blessed through Abraham's seed (Genesis 12:1-3; 22:17-18). This blessing came in the form of Jesus Christ, who came as the sacrifice for the sin of the world (John 3:16). Jesus was of the tribe of Judah and therefore a descendant of Leah.