

RACHEL

The competitor

WHO WAS THIS PERSON?

- The younger daughter of Laban and the wife of Jacob.
- When Jacob goes to Mesopotamia to find a wife from his mother's family (the line of Terah), he meets the shepherd Rachel at a well.
- She spends much of her married life attempting to bear children for Jacob and eventually uses her maid Bilhah as a surrogate. In Genesis, she was one of the two wives of the patriarch Jacob. He was tricked into marrying her sister, Leah first then allowed to marry Rachel as well.
- Jacob worked 14 years for her father in order to marry her.
- She could not have children and was sad about it.
- Her sister Leah, also married to Jacob, had children and this made Rachel envious.
- God finally gave her two sons: Joseph and Benjamin (Genesis 35:24; 46:15-18). Soon after, Rachel dies giving birth to her second son; her early death makes her an image of tragic womanhood.

WHAT IS THIS PERSON KNOWN FOR?

- Rachel is recognized as a beautiful young woman...*Rachel was lovely in form, and beautiful. Jacob was in love with Rachel* (Genesis 29:17-18). Her blessing of a lovely body did not prevent her from having other problems. She was "barren" while she watched her sister-bride Leah bear four sons for Jacob. Rachel blames Jacob for her barrenness: "*Give me children, or I'll die!*" Jacob replies that God is in charge of blessing a marriage with children (Genesis 30:1-2).
- Rachel is also a cunning woman. In desperation to produce a child, she gets a mandrake plant from Leah's oldest son to boost her fertility. In exchange for the mandrake, Rachel gives Leah permission to sleep with Jacob again. After Leah bears her sixth son and a daughter, Rachel gives birth to Joseph. Rachel says, *God has taken away my disgrace*" (Genesis 31:23). A Hebrew woman's value was at that time was connected to her ability to produce offspring.
- Meanwhile, Jacob falls out of favour with Laban after culling goats from Laban's flocks with breeding techniques beyond what Laban allowed.

Making The Bible Come Alive





- Before leaving, Rachel loots her father Laban's home, taking his "household gods." Rachel and Leah appear to have disdain for their father as they prepare to leave his home. Rachel says, "Do we still have any share in the inheritance of our father's estate? Does he not regard us as foreigners? Not only has he sold us, but he has used up what was paid for us" (Genesis 31:14). This declaration reveals the daughters' selfish, disloyal spirits. The comment and actions of Laban, however, reveal that women were property to their father and husband, much like livestock or grain.
- Rachel's envy of Leah as the first wife and fertile mother appears to make Rachel a miserable person. She occasionally lashes out with snide comments to Jacob, such as "Surely all the wealth that God took away from our father belongs to us and our children. So do whatever God has told you" (Genesis 31:15).
- Rachel's request for another son from God results in her second son Benjamin's birth. His birth is very difficult for Rachel, and she dies as her son is born. Jacob erects a pillar in her honour at her burial site on the side of a road leading to Bethlehem (Genesis 35:16-20).

WHY DO YOU THINK THIS PERSON HAS BEEN INCLUDED IN GOD'S STORY?

- **Early, blossoming love doesn't guarantee future happiness.** Though Rachel and Jacob are madly in love upon first meeting, their marriage is full of challenges from inside and outside the relationship.
- **Life is full of surprises, but God's plan goes on:** Laban tricks his son-in-law Jacob into marriages with both of his daughters by switching them on their wedding night. Jacob has to work twice as long to win the woman he desires. But that doesn't stop God's plan to accomplish His promise to Abraham, a great descendance.
- **Things go wrong in life, but God had promised.** Rachel has fertility problems for many years. This is particularly frustrating because God promised Jacob he would continue and prosper the nation of God's chosen people, begun with his grandfather Abraham and carried into the next generation with Jacob's father Isaac. Rachel would feel personal unhappiness and community grief over her inability to bear children early in her marriage. But God did give her two sons that were part of the twelve tribes of Israel.
- **Children are one of life's richest blessings and help accomplish God's plan:** I imagine households and fields full

of boys and a girl playing and working for their family. Leah, Rachel, and the maidservants would have enjoyed the children very much. Leah's fourth son is part of Jesus' ancestry, detailed in Matthew 1.

- **God looks out for those troubled and sorrowful:** Despite a troubled family situation, including a deceitful father-in-law and devious husband, Rachel does have her heart's desire for a time—a family with children and security.
- **God keeps his promises:** God works his way through Rachel's son Joseph, who is raised in the pharaoh's palace and changes the course of Jewish history. The circumstances of Rachel's life play a large part in God's plan for His people.

LIFE APPLICATION QUESTIONS:

Pose the following two questions to your children, one at a time. Allow for interaction and discussion, letting them share their thoughts while you guide the conversation.

- What life lessons can I learn from this Bible character about how I should and should not live?
- Based on what I have learned from this Bible character, how can I live in a way that is pleasing to God.

MORE IN GOD'S WORD

Challenge yourself to find five minutes each day for a week, to quiet your spirit, finding a spot where you are not distracted, and practice just listening to God and being in tune with Him. Take your Bible to that quiet place. Use some of that time to pray, and some time to just meditate on His Word. Keep your ears and your heart open to what God is wanting to say to you. It's not a matter if IF He wants to talk to you. He does want to speak. But, He also wants you to be ready and positioned for listening, so you can actually hear in your heart what He is saying. Then, respond in obedience with a heart that is open to what God would have you to do. God called Samuel three times. How many times is He calling you? The more you spend time in His presence, the less He will have to try calling you over and over again. Maybe you will hear His voice the very first time He calls!

