



Leah

HER NAME MAY MEAN

“Impatient” or “Wild Cow”

HER CHARACTER: Capable of both strong and enduring love, she was a faithful mother and wife. Manipulated by her father, she became jealous of her sister, with whom, it seems, she never reconciled.

HER SORROW: That she lacked her sister’s beauty, and that her love for her husband was one-sided.

HER JOY: That she bore Jacob six sons and one daughter.

KEY SCRIPTURES: Genesis 29–35; Ruth 4:11

Monday

HER STORY

*W*e buried my sister Rachel today. But she is still alive. I catch glimpses of her in Jacob’s broken heart, in dark-eyed Joseph and squalling little Benjamin, his favorite sons. Rachel’s sons. I can hear my beautiful, determined sister weeping loudly for the children she might have had, stubbornly refusing to be comforted. Yet who takes note of my tears? Should they flood the desert, no one would notice.

Reuben, Simeon, Levi, Judah, Issachar, Zebulun, Dinah, and then Gad and Asher by my maid—these are the children God has given me and I have given my beloved Jacob. And still he loves her best. Should my husband and I live another hundred years, I will never be his only wife.

Contrary to what Leah may have felt, God *had* taken note of her sorrow. Knowing well that Jacob's heart was too cramped a space to harbor both Rachel and Leah, he made Leah a mother, not once, but seven times, extending her influence in Jacob's household.

With the birth of each child the unhappy Leah hoped to secure her husband's affection. But each time her disappointment grew. She felt the old curse asserting itself: "Your desire will be for your husband and he will rule over you" (Genesis 3:16).

Perhaps Jacob still resented Leah for tricking him on their wedding night, disguising herself as his beloved Rachel. Surely Leah's love had been passionate enough to deceive him until morning. She felt both glad and guilty for her part; though, truth to tell, she had little choice but to obey her father, Laban, in the matter. And she thanked God each day for enabling her to bear Jacob's children. Still, children often caused a mother untold sorrow.

Dinah, her only daughter, had been raped by a local prince on their return to Jacob's homeland. Leah hardly knew how to comfort her. To make matters worse, her sons Levi and Simeon avenged their sister by savagely murdering a town-full of people. Then Reuben disgraced himself by sleeping with his father's concubine Bilhah.

Hadn't God promised to protect us if we returned to this land of promise? How, then, could such things happen? Leah wondered. True, God had watched over them as they faced Esau and his four hundred men. But Leah's joy at the brothers' friendly reunion was eclipsed by her sorrow at once again being proved the lesser-loved wife. Jacob had made it plain enough by placing Rachel and her children last in their long caravan, giving them the best chance of escape should Esau prove violent.

But Jacob's love could not prevent Rachel from dying in childbirth. Leah, not Rachel, was destined to be his first and last wife. Alongside her husband, the father of Israel, she would be revered as a mother of Israel. In fact, the promise of a Savior was carried not through Rachel's Joseph but through Leah's Judah, whose descendants would include David, Israel's great king, and Jesus, the long-awaited Messiah. In the end, Jacob was laid to rest in the cave of Machpelah, next to his first wife, Leah, rather than his favorite wife, Rachel, who was buried somewhere near Ephrath.

The two sisters, Rachel and Leah, remind us that life is fraught with sorrow and peril, much of it caused by sin and selfishness. Both women suffered—each in her own way—the curse of Eve after she was expelled from her garden paradise. While Rachel experienced great pain in giving birth to children, Leah experienced the anguish of loving a man who seemed indifferent to her. Yet both women became mothers in Israel, leaving their homeland to play essential roles in the story of God’s great plan for his people.

MARRIAGE CUSTOMS

*T*he customs of marriage were far different in ancient biblical times from our own modern customs. Seldom did a man or woman marry for love. Jacob is a notable exception by expressing his love for Rachel and his desire to marry her. Jacob married both Rachel and her sister, Leah, a practice that was later forbidden by law (Leviticus 18:18).

Usually the bride and groom were very young when they married. The bride was often only around twelve and the groom around thirteen. Their marriage was arranged by parents, and their consent was neither requested nor required. Even so, such marriages could prove to be love matches, like that between Isaac and Rebekah (Genesis 24:67).

By New Testament times, the marriage ceremony itself was usually very short, but the festivities connected with it could go on for many days. The groom dressed in colorful clothing and set out just before sunset, with his friends and attendants and musicians, for the home of the bride's parents. There the bride would be waiting, washed and perfumed and bedecked in an elaborate dress and jewels. The bride and groom then led the marriage procession through the village streets, accompanied by music and torchbearers, to the groom's parents' home. The feasting and celebration began that night and often continued for seven days.

God's design for marriage to be between one husband and one wife was often not practiced in early biblical times. Leah shared her husband, Jacob, with not only her sister, Rachel, but their maids, Zilpah and Bilhah. Although polygamy was less common after the exodus from Egypt, Gideon had a number of wives (Judges 8:30), and, of course, Solomon had many (1 Kings 11:3). But, as the New Testament indicates, a union between one husband and one wife continues to be God's design and desire (1 Timothy 3:2, 12; Titus 1:6).

HER LEGACY IN SCRIPTURE

Read Genesis 29:20-35

1. What do you think Leah might have felt during her wedding night, when Jacob was deceived? _____

2. How do you think Leah felt and acted toward Jacob as the years passed? What do you think his reaction was? _____

3. Many women today have husbands who love something more than their wives; their job, their position, their money, sports. Others have felt the lack of love from someone else, such as parents. Have you ever felt unloved by someone? If so, how did you feel and act? _____

4. God saw Leah's suffering and had compassion for her (Genesis 29:31). How aware are you of God's compassion for you? Where do you see his compassion active in your life? _____

5. What helps or hinders you from receiving love from God? _____

6. Pick one word you think best describes how Leah felt about this marriage to Jacob? And Why _____

Read Genesis 29:31

7. Leah is an unparalleled example of God's willingness to give "beauty" for "ashes" (see Isaiah 61:1-3). How has God worked this way in your life? How has he worked this way in the lives of your friends or relatives? _____

Read Genesis 29:32-34

8. In each of these verses, Leah expressed her desire for Jacob's affection, an affection she knew she didn't have. In your own words, describe how Leah probably felt and acted toward Jacob. What do you think Jacob's reaction was? _____

9. Have you ever felt unloved by your husband, your parents, or someone else? How did you feel and act? What was your only possible source of comfort when you desperately wanted a love you didn't have? _____

Read Genesis 49:29-31

10. Jacob was buried next to the wife he loved less rather than the wife he loved more. What does this say not only about Leah's position as a wife, but also as a mother of the Israelites? _____

11. Although Leah was, of course, unaware of the position she was awarded in death, what do these verses continue to reveal about God's involvement in her life? _____

12. Leah had a full life with many sons and wealth. However, she is best known for what she didn't have: the love of her husband. God noticed what she did have but also what she lacked. What one thing do you want to learn from Leah and from God? _____

HER LEGACY OF PRAYER

When the LORD saw that Leah was not loved, he opened her womb, but Rachel was barren. Leah became pregnant and gave birth to a son. She named him Reuben, for she said, "It is because the LORD has seen my misery. Surely my husband will love me now."

—GENESIS 29:31–32

- REFLECT ON: Genesis 29:16–31.
- PRAISE GOD: That though human beings often judge by outward appearances, God always sees the heart and judges accordingly.
- OFFER THANKS: That God is moved by our sorrow.
- CONFESS: Your tendency to compare yourself with other women, judging them and yourself merely by appearances.
- ASK GOD: To enable you to base your identity on your relationship with him rather than on what you see in the mirror.

Lift Your Heart

Take five minutes a day this week to pay yourself a compliment by thanking God for making you the woman you are. Call to mind everything you like about yourself—your quirky sense of humor, your love of great literature, your compassion for other people, your curly hair, even the shape of your toes. Resist the temptation to think about what you don't like. (Imagine for a moment how God must feel when he hears us complaining about how he has made us!) Instead, decide now to honor him by your gratitude. At the end of the week, treat yourself to lunch with a friend or a leisurely latte at your favorite café in celebration of all the natural gifts with which God has blessed you.

Lord, I don't want to be critical of how you've put me together, relying on what others think of me for my sense of well-being. Make me a woman who is confident that I am lovable, not because of any outward beauty but because you have loved me from the moment you called me into being. In Jesus' name I pray. Amen.