

Rachel and Leah

Memory Verse: *Sons are a heritage from the LORD, children a reward from him* (Ps. 127:3 NIV).

Background Helps:

We continue our study of the wives of the patriarchs, this week considering the two wives of Jacob, Leah and Rachel. God had promised Abraham that he would have offspring as numerous as the dust of the earth (Gen. 13:16) and the stars of the sky (Gen. 15:5). It was through these two women and their maidservants, Zilpah and Bilhah, that God began to fulfill these promises. The twelve sons of Jacob, born to these women, became the ancestors of the twelve tribes of Israel (Gen. 35:23-26; 46:8-27); and, according to Ruth 4:11, “Rachel and Leah . . . together built up the house of Israel.”

One issue that you may want to deal with in class is that of polygamy: Jacob took two wives and two concubines (secondary wives). This practice, though common in that culture, was contrary to the ideal of monogamous marriage (one man, one woman “till death do us part”), which was God’s will from the beginning (see Gen. 2:24; 1 Tim. 3:2, 12; 5:9; Tit. 1:6). Notice how Jacob’s polygamy bred the cancer of jealous and rivalry in the life of his family (Gen. 29:16–30:24).

Leah was the mother of Judah and, therefore, the ancestress of Christ. Rachel is mentioned in connection with an Old Testament prophecy fulfilled at the time of Jesus’ birth (cf. Jer. 31:15 with Matt. 2:18).

Lesson Helps:

Three lesson alternatives:

1. My aim is to teach my students how God built the house of Israel through Rachel and Leah, so that they will trust God to fulfill his promises to them. Review the promises in Genesis that God made to the patriarchs, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, that he would make of them a great nation. Show how these promises began to be fulfilled through the many sons of Jacob’s wives, Leah and Rachel (and Zilpah and Bilhah). God overruled the sinful actions of Jacob (as God does so often in Scripture) in taking multiple wives, and through these wives God built the twelve tribes of Israel. Also, from one of the sons of Leah (Judah) the Messiah ultimately came (see Matt. 1). Ask your class to share some significant Bible promises that God has made to *us*, and claim these promises in a time of prayer. (In the younger grades, the teacher may want to select some promises ahead of time.)
2. My aim is to teach my students about the rivalry between Rachel and Leah, so that they will be faithful to their one spouse “till death do us part”. Compare and contrast the characters of Rachel and Leah by looking at selected verses in the story (Gen. 29–35). Evaluate their relationship to God and their relationship to each other. Focus on the rivalry and jealousy that developed between the two

women. Do you see any positive growth in either of these relationships? How did Jacob contribute to their rivalry? Show how this story provides a real life example of why God ordained *monogamous* marriage (Genesis 2:24). Urge your students to maintain absolute fidelity in their marriage (or in their future marriage if they are still single).

3. My aim is to teach my students about God's gift of children to Leah and Rachel, so that they will trust God to give them children and receive these children as gifts from him. Notice the emphasis given in the story of God's role in the conception of Leah and Rachel's children (Gen. 29:31–30:24). (Consider also the many promises of numerous offspring that God gave to the patriarchs, which he began to fulfill through Leah and Rachel.) Study Psalm 127:3-5 (which includes the memory verse) and compare the positive attitude in these verses toward having multiple children with the attitude that is prevalent in our society today. Take time in prayer to give thanks for the children he has already given us. Pray also for wives who desire to have (more) children and for expectant mothers.

Assignment:

-  Read about women in the period of the Exodus (Prominent Women of the Bible).
-  Memorize Hebrews 11:6.